

## Vernonia City Council tries and fails to fill open councilor position

On June 21, the mayor and three members of the Vernonia City Council met to interview candidates to fill the council position that opened when Kevin Hudson was recalled. Council voted for a shortened applicant process, accepting applications from June 14 until noon on June 20.

Five community members had applied for the open council seat; Brett Costley, Ilene Grady, Ed Johnson, Victoria Peters and Kim Tierney. Each applicant was allotted 15 minutes for the interview.

Brett Costley was on the city council for two terms, until he resigned in 2010, stating that he needed to spend more time with his family. His interview answers were heavy on his prior experience. Costley has lived in Vernonia about 10 years and is an engineer at Intel.

Ilene Grady has been a teacher, and is now a substitute teacher, at Vernonia schools. Grady has been a city resident for 45 years. Though she has no governmental experience, she stated she was a good listener and wanted to help the city run smoother.

Ed Johnson ran for city council last November, but was not selected. He said he, "gets involved when there's a problem," and had previously worked on the telephone exchange issue in the 1990s. He has not served on any city committees or commissions. He works at Electro Scientific

Industries and has lived in Vernonia for over 21 years.

Victoria Peters ran for Mayor last November, but lost to Josette Mitchell. She has lived in Vernonia five years. She cited her project management skills, from her job as Product Line Manager at Leupold Stevens, as a skill that could be helpful on the council.

Kim Tierney is a program supervisor at Multnomah County Health Dept. She stated her budget, grant experience, and 25 years in government agencies and management as useful to the council position. She's lived in Vernonia over 29 years. She also said that her job would keep her from being able to attend any meetings before 7:00 p.m.

The Mayor and council discussed each candidate and seemed pleased with the caliber of applicants. After discussion, they took a sample vote of each councilors No. 1 and No. 2 choices. The choices given:

- Willow Burch gave Peters as her #1 and Grady her #2 choice.

- Mayor Josette Mitchell chose Costley, with Peters in second position.

- Randy Parrow had the same choices, in the same order, as Mitchell.

- Marilyn Nicks put Peters in the No. 1 spot, followed by Costley.

After discussing whether any of the council was willing to change their mind, they deter-

mined they were deadlocked. Parrow appeared ready to walk out, but kept his seat, though he suggested, "Council should not even try to make any decisions," until after the next recall election. At the end of what was obviously a frustrating discussion for all members, the council agreed to interview Costley and Peters again on Friday, June 24, to see if further discussion with the candidates made a difference in their decisions.

On June 24, when council reconvened for interviews to fill the open council position, they asked Costley and Peters six additional questions. Each council member had the option of selecting two questions. Both candidates were asked if they could commit to the full 18 month term that will take the position up to the next election cycle. Costley answered, "Yes," while Peters said she expected to be able to although she has been considering buying property outside the city but doesn't think she would move out of the city during this time period.

After this round of questions, Parrow and Mitchell were still in favor of Costley, while Burch was still in favor of Peters. Nicks said she wanted to be able to review all her notes and consider her choice over the

weekend and asked that this be tabled until June 27 meeting.

At the June 27 meeting, Nicks asked the rest of council to consider re-opening the application process for the full two weeks, saying, "I don't want to deadlock as a council or leave this position empty." She stated

the hope that some additional applicant might be acceptable to all the council. When that motion did not get a majority of votes, the council appeared to give up on filling the open position as no plans were made to continue working on this item.

## Council interviews two for city administrator, but does not hire

The Vernonia City Council held interviews for the open city administrator position on June 23. There were two candidates, Bill Haack and Dennis Rhodes.

Each council member named one "community member" to be on a citizen panel to interview and give input to council. That panel was made up of Eric Larke, Marc Farmer, Marge Lowrance, all from Vernonia, and Kimberly Booker of Birkenfeld (chosen by Councilor Marilyn Nicks). Another panel was composed of city department heads. These panels were advisory only and were asked not to pick one candidate over the other, but to just give council information on each.

Haack had been the Interim City Administrator for almost a year, before Burch, Nicks and

the recalled councilor Kevin Hudson voted in May to end his contract.

Rhodes most recent position ended in January 2010, when he was laid off as Community Development Director in Fernald, Washington, due to budget cuts. His background is in development and planning. He holds a bachelor's degree in Urban and Regional Planning and served 22 years in the U.S. Navy.

After the interviews, council went into an executive session (closed to the public) to consider the employment of an officer, employee, staff member or agent. When they returned from that session, they made no announcement or decision, and simply adjourned the meeting without selecting a new city administrator.

## County jobless rate down a bit

Columbia County's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate was 10.2 percent in May, essentially unchanged from the previous month (10.3%) but lower than the year before (12.3%). The rate was above the statewide rate (9.3%) and the national rate (9.1%). Total

employment dipped by 11 to 22,110 but the number of unemployed people dropped by 35 to 2,490. Total employment this May was 580 more than one year before and there were 422 fewer people unemployed this year.

## Town hall scheduled in Vernonia

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tives and actions."

Town halls will be held in Clatskanie, Columbia City, Scappoose, Sauvie's Island, and Vernonia. All events will be held on Sunday, July 10. The Vernonia Town Hall will be held at the Scout Cabin in Hawkins Park, from 6:00 to 7:30 p.m.

"I can't think of a better way to spend a day than talking to my friends and neighbors about the issues that matter to our community. I encourage everyone to come out and share your feelings about the session that just ended and offer up good ideas for next year," said Witt.

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