

CITY of LA GRANDE
City Council Regular Session
April 7, 2021

The meeting was available for viewing via the City's scheduled Charter Communications channel 180, on the La Grande Alive website at <https://lagrandealive.tv/city-events/> and on the Eastern Oregon Alive.TV Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/EOAliveTV>.

MINUTES

COUNCILORS PRESENT:

Stephen E. Clements, *Mayor*
Gary Lillard, *Mayor Pro Tem*
John Bozarth, *Councilor*
David Glabe, *Councilor*
Nicole Howard, *Councilor*
Mary Ann Miesner, *Councilor*
Justin Rock, *Councilor*

COUNCILORS ABSENT EXCUSED:

STAFF PRESENT

Robert Strobe, *City Manager*
Kayla Rock, *City Recorder*
Stacey Stockhoff, *Assistant to the City Manager*
Gary Bell, *Police Chief*
Mike Boquist, *Community Development Director*
Kyle Carpenter, *Public Works Director*
Teresa Gustafson, *Urban Forester*
Christine Jarski, *Economic Development Director*
Heather Rajkovich, *Finance Director*
Kip Roberson, *Library Director*
Stu Spence, *Parks and Recreation Director*

Per ORS 192.670(1), Councilors and Staff participated in this Regular Session by electronic communication.

CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL
AGENDA APPROVAL

Mayor CLEMENTS called to order this Regular Session of the Council at 6:00 p.m. Roll Call was taken and a quorum was determined to be present.

CONSENT AGENDA

- a. Consider: Approval of Regular Session Minutes;
March 3, 2021

The following Motion was introduced by BOZARTH; MIESNER providing the Second:

MOTION

MOTION: I move that we accept the Consent Agenda as presented.

VOTE

MSC. (unanimous)

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Teresa GUSTAFSON, City of La Grande's Urban Forester, gave a PowerPoint presentation on the City of La Grande's Community Forestry Report. She also stated that City of La Grande received their 31st Tree City USA Certification for Year 2020, as well as their 29th Tree City USA Growth Award.

GUSTAFSON stated that Governor Brown proclaimed April as *Oregon Arbor Month*, to recognize the value of trees in our communities. She also noted that 'Grow La Grande – Planting Day' would be Saturday, April 24, 2021, from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m.

PUBLIC HEARINGS

- a.** **Consider:** Ordinance, First Reading; *Accepting Final Sidewalk LID, 2019*

RULES OF ORDER

Mayor CLEMENTS announced that the Public Hearing was open at 6:19 p.m. and upon Mayor CLEMENTS' request, the City Recorder read the Rules of Order in their entirety.

STAFF REPORT

Mayor CLEMENTS requested the Staff Report.

Kyle CARPENTER, *Public Works Director*

CARPENTER stated that the Council established a City-Wide Voluntary Sidewalk Local Improvement District (LID) for the year 2019 during the May 1, 2019, Regular Session. A Local Improvement District offers property owners a way to improve their property and maintain existing sidewalks within the right-of-way. This process assists in facilitating sidewalk repair work upon property owner request and approval. With limited interest in 2019, the Sidewalk LID was held open for an additional calendar year (2020) to allow for a higher amount of work to be included in the District.

CARPENTER noted that the 2019 Voluntary Sidewalk Local Improvement District Number 19-064 ended December 31, 2020, with the total cost of projects repaired under the LID being \$14,000.75. Staff monitored approximately 1,200 square feet of sidewalk repairs throughout La Grande during 2019 and 2020, with many property owners hiring contractors or completing the repairs themselves.

CARPENTER stated that the Council accepted the Final Study and Report during the March 3, 2021, Regular Session.

PUBLIC TESTIMONY

None

COUNCIL DISCUSSION

None

Mayor CLEMENTS announced that the Public Hearing would be continued to May 5, 2021, at which time the Proposed Ordinance was scheduled to be read a Second Time by Title Only and considered for Adoption.

COUNCIL DISCUSSION

None

Upon Mayor CLEMENTS' request, the City Recorder read the Proposed Ordinance for the First Time by Title Only.

AN ORDINANCE OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF LA GRANDE, UNION COUNTY, OREGON, ESTABLISHING THE FINAL ASSESSMENTS TO THE PROPERTY DETERMINED TO BE SPECIFICALLY BENEFITED BY THE 2019 CITY WIDE VOLUNTARY SIDEWALK LOCAL IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT NUMBER 19-064; AND DECLARING AN EFFECTIVE DATE

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None

NEW BUSINESS

- a. Consider: Resolution: Initiating Vacation Proceedings, Establishing a Public Hearing Date

STAFF REPORT

Mayor CLEMENTS requested the Staff Report.

Michael BOQUIST, *Community Development Director*

BOQUIST stated that this request was to vacate the west ten (10) feet of the Walnut Street right-of-way, lying adjacent to 2906 Walnut Street (Tax Lot 1900) and 313 Lane Avenue (Tax Lot 2202). This right-of-way was currently eighty (80) feet wide and this vacation would result in reducing this right-of-way to seventy (70) feet wide, which would exceed the City's sixty (60) feet right-of-way design standard. This vacation was consistent with a similar ten (10) foot vacation previously approved South of Lane Avenue.

BOQUIST noted that for the right-of-way vacation, State Law requires signatures of consent from a minimum of two thirds (2/3) or 66.6% of the affected property owners and 100% of the adjacent owners. The Applicant received signatures of consent from 75% of the affected property owners and 100% of the adjacent owners. The request met State Law requirements.

BOQUIST stated that if the City Council finds this request to be valid and accepts the Vacation Petition, the request would be referred to the Planning Commission for a Public Hearing and a recommendation during its May 5, 2021, Regular Session. The request would then be scheduled for the City Council's consideration, and a first reading of the Ordinance during the June 2, 2021, Regular Session, with a

final decision anticipated during the July 7, 2021, Regular Session.

In response to HOWARD's question regarding the old street names listed on the Plat maps, BOQUIST answered that the County most likely kept the old names on the Plat maps to preserve the historical record.

In response to MIESNER's question regarding the property south of Lane Avenue and whether it also had a vacation of the right-of-way, BOQUIST stated that this property had previously been vacated by ten (10) feet. He added that this request was consistent with what the City approved previously with this block.

MIESNER asked if he anticipated more vacation requests to be turned in, to which BOQUIST answered no and explained that the cost for moving the water meters located in the right-a-way could be costly for homeowners and that was an expense most homeowners were not interested in paying at this time.

PUBLIC TESTIMONY

None

COUNCIL DISCUSSION

None

MOTION

The following Motion was introduced by HOWARD; MIESNER providing the Second:

MOTION: I move that the proposed Resolution initiating Vacation proceedings and establishing a Public Hearing Date be Read by Title Only, Put to a Vote and Passed.

COUNCIL DISCUSSION

None

Upon Mayor CLEMENTS' request, the City Recorder read the Proposed Resolution by Title Only:

A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF LA GRANDE, UNION COUNTY, OREGON, ACCEPTING A PETITION FOR THE VACATION OF THE WEST TEN FEET (10') OF THE WALNUT STREET RIGHT-OF-WAY BETWEEN BENTON AVENUE AND LANE AVENUE; AND, ESTABLISHING A PUBLIC HEARING DATE [4804]

VOTE

MSC. (unanimous)

b. Consider: Resolution: Establishing Fees for Ambulance Services

STAFF REPORT

Mayor CLEMENTS requested the Staff Report.

Robert STROPE, *City Manager*

STROPE stated that the current Fee Schedule used by the Fire Department was established by City Council Resolution on April 8, 2009. On March 8, 2021, the City Council conducted a Work Session to discuss potential increases to the current fees being applied by the Fire Department, as well as the addition of a new non-resident rate. The non-resident rate would apply to patients that do not have a primary residence within the City limits of La Grande. At that Work Session, the Fire Department presented the proposal to raise ambulance service fees. As explained at the Work Session, the proposal to raise the fees charged to patients and entities that use or contract with the Fire Department for ambulance services was being recommended at this time to help offset rising costs associated with operating the service. Adding an additional fee structure for non-resident services would help offset the disparity in funding of the Fire Department given City residents pay property taxes, and therefore, subsidize the Fire Department ambulance services to non-residents. Patients on Medicare and Medicaid would not be charged for amounts in excess of the caps imposed under those programs, inclusive of any supplemental coverage the individual may have.

PUBLIC TESTIMONY

None

COUNCIL DISCUSSION

None

MOTION

The following Motion was introduced by MIESNER; HOWARD providing the Second:

MOTION: I move that the proposed Resolution establishing fees for the ambulance and fire services be Read by Title Only, Put to a Vote, and Passed.

COUNCIL DISCUSSION

None

Upon Mayor CLEMENTS' request, the City Recorder read the Proposed Resolution by Title Only:

A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF LA GRANDE, UNION COUNTY, OREGON, ESTABLISHING FEES FOR AMBULANCE AND FIRE SERVICES; AND REPEALING RESOLUTION NUMBER 4552, SERIES 2009; AND ALL OTHER RESOLUTIONS OR PARTS OF RESOLUTIONS IN CONFLICT HERewith [4805]

VOTE

MSC. (unanimous)

c. Consider: Approval of Hiring Incentive for Qualified Police Officer Candidates

STAFF REPORT

Mayor CLEMENTS requested the Staff Report.

Gary BELL, *Police Chief*

BELL noted that the Police Department was requesting approval to offer a hiring incentive of up to \$6,000 to certified, experienced police officers hired for the position of Police Officer with the La Grande Police Department.

BELL explained that the purpose of this incentive was to attract and hire experienced police officer candidates in an effort to replace some of the experience that the City has lost with the high number of retirements over the last several years. Any initial training of an experienced police officer was substantially shorter, allowing them to contribute to covering shifts much quicker than hiring officers with no experience. The time and related costs to train a new, inexperienced officer was substantially higher than the \$6,000 hiring incentive proposed.

BELL stated that originally the intent was to enter into a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the Police Association to formalize the program; however, the Police Association's attorney did not feel an MOA was required. The Police Association supports the proposed incentive. Based on the discussion with the City Council at the March 3, 2021, Regular Session, the City had started advertising for police officers with the proposed incentive included, with the understanding that if the City Council does not approve the incentive, the advertising would be revised. The specific requirements to qualify for the incentive and timing of payments was shown below:

Hiring Incentive: A maximum, one-time incentive of up to \$6,000 would be offered to certified, experienced police officers hired after April 7, 2021, for the position of Police Officer with the La Grande Police Department. Qualified applicants must be either currently DPSST police certified or possess the equivalent level of police certification from another state; must be in good standing with Oregon DPSST or another state police certification board, and also with their current employer.

The hiring incentive would be paid in three (3) two-thousand dollar (\$2,000) installments for applicants who commit, as follows:

- Upon successful completion of field training and designation by the City as qualified for assignment to solo officer status.
- Upon successful completion of probationary status and twelve (12) months of continuous service (whichever occurs last).
- Upon completion of thirty (30) months of continuous, satisfactory service as a police officer for the City of La Grande.

BELL stated that the proposed hiring incentive was included in the requested Fiscal Year 2021-2022, Police Department

Budget. Including the hiring incentive to fill future vacancies would be on a case-by-case basis as determined by the City Manager. Qualified officers would be required to enter into an agreement that outlines these requirements and would be binding upon the City and the individual employee.

LILLARD wanted to know the status of how the advertised bonus was working out, to which BELL stated that in the first round of advertising, they have yet to receive an application that would qualify for this incentive. The advertisement for the Police Officer position was still open and he was hopeful that the advertised incentive would encourage qualified applicants to apply.

MIESNER asked if he felt the incentive amount was too low, to which BELL answered that after comparing what other agencies in the state were offering for incentives, he thought they were comparable and the amount could always be revaluated, if needed.

In response to MIESNER's question regarding the pay and benefits package being offered and if it was comparable to what other cities were offering, BELL responded that not all communities were the same, so comparing a pay and benefits package as a whole, with other cities, would be difficult.

MIESNER asked how much time would it take before a new hire could work solo, to which BELL gave a brief description of the timeline it would take before a newly hired police officer could cover a shift solo, depending on their qualifications, experience, and whether or not they would need to complete training through the Police Academy.

Mayor CLEMENTS stated that he thought the incentive was a great idea and asked BELL to report back to the Council with an update after the next advertising cycle.

PUBLIC TESTIMONY

None

COUNCIL DISCUSSION

None

MOTION

The following Motion was introduced by BOZARTH; MIESNER providing the Second:

MOTION: I move that the City Manager's recommendation to offer a hiring incentive for qualified Police Officer candidates be approved as presented.

COUNCIL DISCUSSION

None

VOTE

MSC. (unanimous)

**d. Consider: Transfer of 2013 Ford Interceptor
Police Car; City of Nyssa**

STAFF REPORT

Mayor CLEMENTS requested the Staff Report.

Gary BELL, *Police Chief*

BELL stated that the La Grande Police Department was no longer in need of this police car, due to the recent purchase of a 2021 Dodge Durango police vehicle. The surplus vehicle had 111,960 miles. This vehicle was no longer reliable or cost effective to use, due to the extreme demands placed upon it when used Twenty-Four (24) hours per day.

BELL explained that the City of Nyssa Police Department previously identified they were interested in ownership of a surplus police vehicle as a donation to supplement the vehicles they currently have. When this vehicle became surplus property, the La Grande Police Department contacted Nyssa Police Department and confirmed they had a need.

In response to Mayor CLEMENTS' question regarding if the Nyssa Police Department was aware of the condition of the car, BELL answered that they were.

PUBLIC TESTIMONY

None

COUNCIL DISCUSSION

None

MOTION

The following Motion was introduced by HOWARD; LILLARD providing the Second:

MOTION: Pursuant to Section 9, of Ordinance Number 2962, Series 2000, I move that the 2013 Ford Interceptor police car be declared surplus and the ownership be transferred to the City of Nyssa.

COUNCIL DISCUSSION

None

VOTE

MSC. (unanimous)

**e. Consider: Allocating Current COVID-19 Loan
Program Funding to Community Connections
to Provide Grants for Utility Bills**

Mayor CLEMENTS stated that he asked STROPE to add this item to the Agenda so the Council could have a further understanding for how these funds would be used.

STAFF REPORT

Mayor CLEMENTS requested the Staff Report.

Robert STROPE, *City Manager*

STROPE noted that at a recent Senior Council meeting where Councilor LILLARD serves as a City Liaison, it was brought to his attention that community members have reported having difficulties paying for their utility bills and were facing shut-offs due to the unpaid bills. The vast majority was due to community members having issues previously paying for their utility bills due to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions and closures. Community Connections has been inundated with requests for help.

STROPE stated that Councilor LILLARD had suggested the City allocate funds to provide need-based grants to pay utility bills for the City of La Grande residents. STROPE recommended the source of such funding, if approved, be the existing COVID-19 Loan Program, which had over \$180,000 of unused funds available.

BOZARTH asked if anyone had reached out to either Avista Utilities or Oregon Trail Electric (OTEC) to see if they had any supplement programs to aid in assisting residents with past due accounts, to which STROPE stated that both Utility Companies provide some level of assistance, but he was unclear of the details. He suggested that he would reach out to both Avista and OTEC to find out the details and then he would report back to the Council.

MIESNER stated that STROPE mentioned federal money earlier and wanted to know if that money was coming from the County, to which STROPE answered no. The estimated \$2.7 million of federal funding, which the City would tentatively receive in two (2) installments, would be used for COVID-19 related purposes; for example, to back fill lost revenues. Once the City receives the defined regulations, the City could look further into the qualifying uses for what the funding could be used for. The \$20,000 proposed for this agenda item was money from the City's General Fund dollars that were allocated for COVID-19 support for La Grande City businesses and would be redirected to City residents.

MIESNER also asked for clarification regarding the money that the City would be receiving from the County, to which STROPE stated that County Commissioner SCARFO would further discuss this topic during his update overview.

LILLARD asked how the process for the water account shut offs went last month, to which RAJKOVICH stated that it went smoothly with approximately sixty (60) delinquent accounts turned off in total. All but two (2) accounts were turned back on by either paying their account in full or they were making payments each month to reduce their balance per agreement with the Finance Department.

PUBLIC TESTIMONY

None

COUNCIL DISCUSSION

In response to GLABE's question, STROPE stated that after talking with Margaret Davidson, Executive Director of Community Connections, they estimated that \$20,000 would last around two to three months in terms of providing assistance to residents of La Grande, and they could re-evaluate the situation again once funds have been depleted, if adjustments needed to be made.

MOTION

The following Motion was introduced by MIESNER; LILLARD providing the Second:

MOTION: I move that we direct the City Manager to allocate \$20,000 of current COVID-19 Loan Program funding to Community Connections to provide need-based grants to pay utility bills for City of La Grande residents and to authorize the City Manager to develop and sign all required documentation to implement the program.

COUNCIL DISCUSSION

None

VOTE

MSC. (unanimous)

UNION COUNTY COMMISSIONER'S UPDATE

SCARFO addressed MIESNER's earlier question regarding the federal funds that Union County would be receiving from the state. SCARFO gave a brief update on the state funding allocations that would be disbursed through the American Rescue Plan (ARP) Funding. He stated that county wide there would be a total of \$9.3 million dollars received. He also added that they were still waiting to hear on how the funding could be used.

SCARFO stated that as of the last COVID-19 case check within Union County, forty-two (42) new positive cases were reported, which kept Union County at the Moderate Risk level. He also reported that Governor Brown introduced a new statewide metric for determining the Extreme Risk level that would begin that week. He shared, for example, if a county was to move or stay below the Extreme Risk level, they must meet the county metrics for case rates and meet the statewide metric, which means that the state total had to be under three hundred (300) COVID-19 positive patients in hospitals and the state does not have a fifteen percent (15%) increase in hospitalizations within a seven (7) day period. He added that Union County would remain in the Moderate Risk level from April 9, 2021, to April 23, 2021.

SCARFO reported that Center for Human Development (CHD) still had two-hundred-fifty (250) openings for vaccinations between these two scheduled dates: Monday, April 12, 2021, and Monday, April 19, 2021. He encouraged those needing a vaccine to call CHD to schedule.

SCARFO mentioned that he emailed the calendar dates for the upcoming Commissioner meetings that were being held via ZOOM and invited City Councilors to attend.

SCARFO stated that the Rock Quarry application was withdrawn by the applicant, therefore there would be no action on this topic.

MIESNER asked if Governor Brown responded to the letter that the County submitted regarding Union County taking control of how to handle decisions during the pandemic, to which SCARFO answered that she acknowledged the letter and would need a couple of weeks to respond back with an answer.

GLABE stressed his concern over the number of people that were not interested in receiving a vaccination, adding they might be basing their decision on misinformation. GLABE asked if putting together an educational campaign based on medical science would be a benefit to those in our community who were seeking information on the vaccine. SCARFO followed up with stating that Public Health was doing the best they could with trying to educate our community and he agreed with GLABE's comments regarding vaccination decisions might be based on misinformation of rumors and fear of the vaccine. HOWARD suggested that any councilor and/or commissioner could advocate getting the vaccine on a local media platform to help encourage citizens to educate themselves and to get vaccinated, to which Mayor CLEMENTS agreed that getting a science-based message out to the public would be positive and he would also volunteer to go on camera if anyone wanted to organize such an event.

STAFF COMMENTS

SPENCE stated that the Parks and Recreation Department launched an online survey called the Parks Masterplan Survey. The survey would give citizens the opportunity to convey their opinion on the services and programs the department offered. He encouraged citizens to fill out the survey, either on their website or from their Facebook page.

JARSKI reported that LT Developments received their Certificate of Occupancy for the Putnum Building. She also shared that Dale Mammen would like to offer a tour of the building to the City Councilors.

JARSKI stated that they were moving forward with the Business Retention and Expansion Survey project with one-hundred-seventeen (117) surveys submitted. She was also working with Commissioner Beverage to help outreach and connect with certain individual businesses to collect more refined data.

CARPENTER stated that La Grande Public Works would begin work on the Second Street (Adams Avenue to Spring Avenue) reconstruction project starting on Monday, April 12, 2021, and provided a quick update on the plan, to which LILLARD replied that he was happy to hear about the reconstruction.

A discussion was held regarding other road improvements around N Avenue to K Avenue, Adams Avenue, and the ADA accessibility construction on the sidewalks on Adams Avenue, to which CARPENTER gave a quick overview of the projects that were on the list for future repair.

BELL stated that on December 29, 2020, Union County Emergency Services hosted a video that Grande Ronde Hospital Staff put together to help aid in answering questions regarding the COVID-19 vaccine, and encouraged those interested to go to the website to watch the video at <https://union-county.org/covid-19-vaccine-information/>.

CITY MANAGER COMMENTS

STROPE reminded the Council that Monday, April 12, 2021, a Work Session was scheduled regarding the Housing Production Strategy, and on Monday, April 19, 2021, there was a Work Session scheduled regarding the annual report on Tourism Promotion and Budget Proposal. He also stated that the Budget Meetings were scheduled for next month (editorial note: Monday, May 10, 2021, to Wednesday, May 12, 2021).

STROPE stated that City Staff was currently working on brainstorming website design ideas, and the first meeting was going to be held the following week to discuss as a group.

STROPE shared that the state was asking for input and suggestions on what to spend the state surplus dollars and other federal dollars that were available for allocation.

CITY COUNCIL COMMENTS

MIESNER requested a detailed report with all of the available money that the City had received or would receive (for example: CARES funding, COVID-19 loan program funding), to which STROPE said that he could provide a list for the Councilors.

GLABE stated he was currently gathering more information on the possibility of a STEM Center in the City of La Grande, and encouraged anyone interested in helping out to please reach out to him.

There being no further business to come before this Regular Session of the Council, Mayor CLEMENTS adjourned the meeting at 7:22 p.m. The Council is scheduled to meet again in Regular Session on Wednesday, May 5, 2021, at 6:00 p.m., via electronic communications due to COVID-19 pandemic.

Stacey M. Stockhoff
Assistant to the City Manager

Stephen E. Clements
Mayor

APPROVED: _____