

The Friday Update

January 31, 2003

CITY PREVAILS IN PUBLIC SAFETY / CHARTER LAW SUIT – Coos County Circuit Court Judge Michael Gillespie has ruled against local resident Susan Walberg and three Coos Bay police officers in their effort to secure an injunction and mandamus to prevent police and fire staffing reductions. In arguments Monday before Judge Gillespie, attorneys John Hoag and Tim Sercombe took sharp difference with the meaning of Coos Bay's city charter. Hoag – representing Mrs. Walberg and the three officers – contended the charter establishes minimum staffing levels for police and fire personnel, that the three officers could not be laid off and that two more must be hired immediately. Sercombe – representing Mayor Joe Benetti, Coos Bay's six City Councilors and City Manager Bill Grile – clearly asserted the City of Coos Bay's position that the plaintiffs were wrong.

At the center of the dispute was Section 9.11 of the City of Coos Bay Charter, which was enacted following an initiative petition; it provides:

Section 9.11 Funds for Police Officers and Firefighters. From the general fund budget, the city council shall appropriate to the Public Safety Department in each fiscal year the funds necessary to provide at least 1.85 sworn police officers per 1,000 population, and 1.2 firefighters per 1,000 population in the City of Coos Bay. [Section 9.11 added by election held May 17, 1988]

In his 14 page ruling, Judge Gillespie stated that the charter provision at issue "is void because it never could have been properly enacted under Article IV, section 1(5) of the Oregon Constitution. It was not municipal legislation, it was an administrative enactment. As such, it was never the proper subject of initiative." Judge Gillespie also awarded attorneys fees to the City.

"The real problem here is the city's budget," commented Grile from his office this morning. The City Council and I have never wanted to see service cuts in the police and fire budgets, but diminishing property tax and other resources that support the General Fund have caused us to make so many cuts in non-public safety services that we arrived at the unfortunate point of having to also cut police and fire staffing," he said.

PLEASE BE PATIENT WITH US! -- The police and fire cuts were the last to be considered. Other major staffing reductions are effective February 1st as a result of Coos Bay's reduction in forces plan that was approved last fall. In the Community Services Department, fewer personnel will be available to respond to streets and parks maintenance, and to offer quick responses to planning and community development questions. In the Finance Department, a supervisor position is being eliminated. And in the City Manager's office, the Assistant City Manager position is being eliminated. While the reduction in forces plan provides for a part time clerk position for the City Manager's office, City Manager Bill Grile told department heads this week he plans to rely on the part time services of a volunteer for at least the near-term rather than to fill the position.

The reduction in forces plan is based on one simple objective: to bring current year spending in line with current year revenue. But the consequences of accomplishing this are anything but simple, as bringing spending in line with new revenue requires cutting \$750,000 from this year's General Fund. Coos Bay is not alone with its budget challenges. On February 19th, League of Oregon Cities executive director Ken Strobeck will be the program speaker at the Chamber's noon forum at The Mill Casino. Strobeck will describe the fiscal challenges facing Oregon's cities, based on the League's *Diminishing Returns* report. For a short preview, visit: <http://www.orcities.org/members/dr.keypts.pdf>

"FOCUS" NEWMARK WIDENING PROJECT – The City's FOCUS program is once again airing on the Government-Education Channel [Ch 14 on cable]. It's been some time since this program has appeared on Channel 14 and it is now possible due to Councilor Miller agreeing to host the program. The first program is the Newmark Widening Project with Community Services Director Shanda Shribbs and Andy Nasburg as

guest speakers. The improvements to the section of Newmark beginning at Staples to the Y Intersection will greatly improve traffic flow and traffic/pedestrian safety. The program airs at various times – on Saturday and Sunday at 4 a.m., 4 p.m., 7 a.m., and 7 p.m. Check the schedule for times during the week. The Urban Renewal Agency and the City Council will be discussing the project at their meetings February 4th. The Urban Renewal Agency will meet at 7 p.m. in the council chambers at city hall, and the council will meet immediately following the agency.

BROWNFIELD UPDATE – Work on the Coos Bay Brownfield Project winds down as the final stage of site remediation and cleanup planning is undertaken by URS Corporation, the environmental consultant for the Front Street Historic Waterfront District. Eight properties have moved through Level I and Level II site assessments in which historic uses and soil sampling were used to develop possible contaminant levels. A public form will conclude the project next month at which time remaining questions will be answered by project staff and EPA related programs discussed.

TREE TRIMMING TO BEGIN – The second phase of the tree trimming project in downtown Coos Bay began this week by Patrick Meyers Tree Service and will proceed through next week until the project is complete. The project involves trimming approximately fifty trees along the streets and parking lots scattered throughout the downtown area. Trimming is necessary to remove limbs that are causing problems with buildings or other objects and promote a healthier tree. No trees will be removed during this project unless a tree is diseased and could create problems in the future.

CITY POISED TO PROCEED WITH NEWMARK AVENUE IMPROVEMENT PROJECT – With “dedicated funds” that can not be used to employ police or fire personnel, the City Council and Urban Renewal Agency are poised to take up the Newmark Avenue improvement project Tuesday night, likely directing City staff to proceed and call for bids. Funding for the project, which may include an overlay for the entire length of Ocean Boulevard, comes from interest earnings from the \$4.8 million the City received from the Oregon Department of Transportation as part of the so-called “Jurisdictional Exchange,” and also resources to be provided from the Empire Urban Renewal District.

“Community Services director Shanda Shribbs has done an incredible job pulling this project together,” said city manager Bill Grile. “We hope to be under construction this summer!” he added. Once completed, the project will benefit both Coos Bay and North Bend residents with major safety improvements. As designed, the project will expand Newmark to five lanes between Wal-Mart and LaClair, transitioning to three lanes west from LaClair to the intersection with Ocean Boulevard at “The Y.” Sidewalks are planned for both sides of the road. In addition to Coos Bay’s investment, small financial contributions are also being provided by Wal-Mart, Southwestern Oregon Community College (for sidewalks) and a private developer working with local Realtor Andy Nasburg. The project will also provide access to a major new commercial development at Newmark and LaClair, west of Wal-Mart.

To learn more about the Newmark Avenue project, be alert to the FOCUS program on Coos Bay’s television Channel 14. Hosted by veteran city councilor Cindi Miller, the program features Shanda Shribbs and Andy Nasburg in an informal conversation about Newmark Avenue.

The City Council and Urban Renewal Agency meetings begin at 7:00 PM Tuesday evening at City Hall. As always, the public is encouraged to attend.

SOUTH COAST DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL CONSIDERS SITE OPTIONS – Yesterday afternoon state and local officials met in North Bend to continue discussions about industrial sites capable of generating jobs for the community. SCDC president Melinda Anderson led the discussion, which focused on four general areas: (i) the former G-P mill site in Coquille, (ii) the North Bend Airport industrial park, (iii) the North Spit of Coos Bay, and (iv) Central Dock, north of Front Street along the Marshfield waterfront. Representing the Coquille Economic Development Corporation, general manager Brady Scott indicated interest by the federal Economic Development Administration in funding a study to determine the feasibility of establishing a business on tribal property south of Empire. Mr. Scott said that CEDCO’s telecommunications fiber ring in the Bay Area is now “constructed and lit” and soon to be connected to NOANET’s link to the Internet. Development of the CEDCO site could make use of this to the benefit of the entire community. Under SCDC’s direction, talks will continue

and turn now to an exploration of financing approaches.

CITY AND COUNTY MAY PARTNER TO DEVELOP CENTRAL DOCK PROPERTY – Two weeks ago the Coos Bay Urban Renewal Agency gave city staff the green light to meet with the Coos County Commissioners and explore the possibility of partnering to redevelop Central Dock, which the County acquired through tax foreclosure but lacks the financial resources to develop. The property, which is strategically located at the north end of Coos Bay's historic Front Street redevelopment area, could be the site of a project that could generate jobs and jump start revitalization of the old Marshfield waterfront. "It's hard to say at this point whether we can put something together here," said city manager Bill Grile, "but it sure seems the City and County have a wonderful opportunity to work together, create some jobs and improve the area since Coos Bay's Urban Renewal Agency has the financial resources to make it happen." Stay tuned.

QUILTS ON DISPLAY AT THE ART MUSEUM – The Coos Art Museum held an open house on January 17th for their current exhibit "Quilts". The quilts are from all over the United States. It is truly an exhibit that you do not want to miss. The exhibit of quilts is scheduled through February 22nd. The Second Annual Quilt Run 101 begins January 31st and ends February 8th and is held from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily. Quilts can be viewed from Astoria to Port Orford in 12 different shops. Local shops that are participating in extending their hours for this event are Threads That Bind and Dyeing Arts Studio. In conjunction with them the Art museum will extend their hours on Sunday, February 2nd, 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. and evenings until to 5:30 p.m. On February 7th the Art Museum will remain open until 7:30 p.m. All downtown merchants are encouraged to extend their hours on Sunday, February 2nd and Friday, February 7th. An estimated 700 to 800 people were brought into the downtown area with last years quilt run. This is a great opportunity for all the merchants to bring in the visitors to you store. Contact Sharon at Threads That Bind if you will be extending your hours. Sharon has graciously volunteered to keep a list of merchants extending their hours and will encourage the quilt visitors to visit these merchants. Thank you Sharon!

DOWNTOWN ASSOCIATION'S ANNUAL BRIDAL SHOW – The Annual Bridal Show is scheduled for Saturday, February 8th beginning at 10:00 a.m. through 2:00 p.m. at Old City Hall. For further information please call Anna Brands at Weddings Etc. at 269-5191. A lot of work has gone into organizing this event and will include vendors with displays, refreshments, and a fashion show. The Miss Coos County contestants will be the models.