

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

MINUTES OF THE BOARD SESSION – Regular Session

Wednesday, January 23, 2008
Marion County Courthouse Square

9:00 a.m. Board Session
Senator Hearing Room

PRESENT: Commissioner Sam Brentano and Commissioner Patti Milne. Also present were John Lattimer as chief administrative officer, Jo Stonecipher as legal counsel and Kim Hulett as recorder.

ABSENT: Commissioner Carlson.

Commissioner Brentano called the meeting to order.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

CONSENT

PUBLIC WORKS

Receive petition to vacate a public walkway in block 5, Randall's Elkhorn subdivision #2, Clerk's File #2096R, and schedule a public hearing for March 5, 2008.

Receive petition to vacate Fourth Street between Rockdale and Riverton Streets in Brooks, Clerk's File #2097R, and schedule a public hearing for March 5, 2008.

Receive 2007 annual report on road easement and dedication acceptances.

PUBLIC WORKS – PLANNING

Receive Planning Commissions decision clarifying a partial denial and partial approval of subdivision, case SUB 07-14, McKillip, Clerk's File #5566.

MOTION: Commissioner Milne moved approval of the consent calendar. Commissioner Brentano seconded; motion carried. A voice vote was unanimous.

ACTION

PUBLIC WORKS

Consider approval of the Marion County Community Wildfire Protection Plan – John Vanderzanden, Marion County Emergency Manager; Howard Strobel, Oregon Department of Forestry, and Gregg Cline, Oregon Department of Forestry.

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John Vanderzanden, Marion County emergency manager, introduced Howard Strobel, recently retired from the Oregon Department of Forestry, and Gregg Cline, District Forester of the North Cascade District for the Oregon Department of Forestry.

Mr. Vanderzanden said the creation of the Marion County Community Wildfire Protection Plan has been in process for the past three years. They started developing the plan with the help of the United States Forest Service, the Oregon Department of Forestry, the Bureau of Land Management, Marion County Planning Division, and Marion County Emergency Management. There was also considerable input from many of the local fire chiefs in fire districts throughout the county. Thanks to Mr. Strobel and other members of the team, it has been a thorough process. Mr. Vanderzanden is pleased that the process is now complete, and he believes it will provide a real benefit to the agencies and to the private citizens who live on or adjacent to forested areas in the county. It will be especially helpful in terms of education, fuel reduction projects, and other areas. He invited Mr. Strobel to speak further on the Community Wildfire Protection Plan and what it will do.

Howard Strobel said this plan provides tools for federal and state agencies and local fire departments to address forest fuel management hazard issues in their jurisdictions. This includes wildland/urban interface areas and scattered residential areas throughout Marion County. Their focus with the plan is eastern Marion County, which is where most of the federal and forest lands are located. The fire departments in the eastern part of the county, including Turner, Jefferson, Sublimity, Silverton, and those in the Santiam Canyon, were active and interested in addressing these issues. Marion County previously approved a Title III project for the Department of Forestry and they began doing some work in the area of Detroit, Idanha, and the Little North Fork Santiam Canyon on some issues. This wildfire protection plan will give agencies the ability to address some of those same issues in a more detailed way and in a broader area. The protection plan was authorized under the Title I portion of the Healthy Forest Restoration Act of 2003. The plan addresses communities and residences on issues of defensible space, wildfire hazards around communities, and ways to reduce the hazards for state and federal agencies. As a part of the protection plan, there is an action calendar that outlines their projected actions over the next few years. They plan to meet annually to update the plan and keep it rolling.

Commissioner Brentano asked how the plan would translate into actual help for an individual or an agency. Mr. Strobel said that the Oregon Department of Forestry and fire districts could apply for grant funds through this legislation. They plan to do this on projects by addressing issues such as defensible space and fuels hazard reduction. They will even be trying to bring some of these issues in front of planners and developers to incorporate them into construction standards and development standards to minimize the risk of potential damage from wildfire. Some of these grants will use incentives such as cost share projects or technical assistance to individuals to reduce wildfire hazards around their houses and to make their property more accessible to fire crews and equipment.

Commissioner Brentano asked what the process of obtaining a grant would entail. Mr. Strobel said the deadline for the 2009 grant is February 8, 2008. Every year there is a grant application process through the federal government. Those proposals that are submitted by the deadline this year will be considered for funding in Federal Fiscal Year 2009.

Commissioner Milne mentioned two key things to note about this plan. The first is that the plan will provide greater opportunities to seek funding to address wildfire-related issues. Previously, if someone needed assistance in this area, there was really no avenue to get this work done. Mr. Strobel agreed that in the past there was no mechanism or structure to get assistance in doing this work. Commissioner Milne praised the group for putting the program together. She realizes it can take a while to get these efforts into place, and is glad that no major wildfire events have happened in the meantime.

She also praised the program for creating a structure for partnerships involving various local, state and federal agencies. Mr. Vanderzanden said this collaboration has been a real plus for the entire process. He thanked Les Sasaki of the Marion County Planning Division, who was in the audience and who was instrumental in putting the process together.

Gregg Cline of the Oregon Department of Forestry commented on the plan as the starting point of a long-term effort to address wildland fire issues centered on public safety. This includes the welfare of residents traveling the corridors through the forest areas and also those who live within the development areas that border against forestlands. One example of this was a fire two years ago on September 1, which began about 50 miles south of Mehama, just east of Sweet Home. A wildland fire started and though it did not threaten structures, the total suppression cost of the fire was approximately \$4.4 million dollars. He said that this kind of fire could easily have happened in Marion County. It is important to be prepared and have the state Department of Forestry ready to work with Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the U.S. Forest Service at the federal level, Marion County Emergency Services at the county level, and the local fire jurisdictions at the local level. The fire east of Sweet Home also involved the collaboration of several county agencies, including the Sheriff's Department. Parks and Recreation provided a site for 1000+ firefighters for two to three weeks.

Mr. Cline said it is essential to have these relationships in place before emergencies arise. This includes non-forest fire emergencies. By having the partnerships in place already, coordination can be done much more quickly, and funds can be used more effectively. Finally, he noted that the severity of wildland fires over the last 10 to 15 years is definitely increasing. Population growth has led to more fires being started by residents in the urban interface areas. Another important development is the increase in fuel loading (the amount of fuels present on some landowners' properties). An additional notable factor is the change in climate, which may be a short-term or long-term trend. The fire indices show that the temperatures have increased. The statistics over the past ten years show some of the warmest temperatures on record. At the national level, last year was the fifth warmest season in over 100 years of keeping records on temperatures. When all these factors are thrown together, it leads to a significant risk. This plan provides an opportunity to do an assessment, to prioritize the best uses of resources, and to fund individual needs on a priority basis with other county governments across the state. Mr. Cline commended the commissioners for considering this plan, which will provide an opportunity to start making progress in this area.

Commissioner Brentano said he has been interested in the wildfire plan for some time. He was involved with the Sublimity Fire Department in the past and remembers a Fourth of July when it was close to 105 degrees out, fireworks were being set off everywhere, and the winds seemed to be blowing from the south. He was on duty that day and realized that if a fire started in Sublimity under those conditions, it could easily have gone all the way to Silverton. Luckily, nothing of this kind happened, but it certainly increased his awareness of wildfire issues. The other contact he has had with wildfire plans happened when his father died Page -3-

and left him a lot along the Deschutes River in Deschutes County. He received a letter from the county telling him to clean up the fuel load on the lot. After looking into the amount of work needed in order to do so, he decided to sell the lot instead. He learned from this that many other Oregon counties, such as Deschutes County, are very serious about removing fuel load and even asking individuals to do this themselves. This is not part of the plan for Marion County at this time, but there may be a point in the future when removing fuel load becomes a necessary or feasible part of the program.

Mr. Strobel said that in 1997 the legislature passed a statute that dealt with fuel hazard on small residential lots in the urban interface areas. This was Senate Bill 360, and this is a process that the State of Oregon is trying to institute statewide. They have developed standards for Deschutes and Jackson Counties, and eventually all counties will be going through the process. The Marion County Wildfire Community Protection Plan recognizes this type of formal process for counties to set standards for fuel loads and construction standards in order to minimize fuel hazards on residential lots.

MOTION: Commissioner Milne moved to approve the Marion County Community Wildfire Protection Plan. Seconded by Commissioner Brentano; motion carried. A voice vote was unanimous.

Commissioners Brentano and Milne presented Howard Strobel with a certificate from the Board of Commissioners to recognize and thank him for his tireless efforts and dedication in developing the Marion County Community Wildfire Protection Plan.

MEASURE 49 VESTED RIGHTS CONSENT CALENDAR

Approve case #M06-86, Guerra, to partition, Clerk's File #5091.

Commissioner Brentano said there has been a request for this item to be removed from the consent calendar and sent before the hearings officer for a hearing instead. The Board of Commissioners will comply with this request.

Commissioner Brentano said the Board of Commissioners discussed their current procedure on these cases last week, and they will be making some changes in the procedure. Currently, the procedure automatically honors all such requests for hearings, but in the future they will be requiring those making the request to at least explain why they want an item removed from the consent calendar and sent to the hearings officer. Commissioner Brentano noted that for this particular case, the planning director felt the case was far enough along in the process after Measure 37 that it could go to the consent calendar. The case has already been through the entire partition process, and a plat was recorded completing the process on May 31, 2007. The case is finished for all practical purposes, and he says it seems silly not to recognize this.

Commissioner Milne said this is just a straightforward partition case and that there is really no need for a hearing. She feels it will be necessary to change the procedure to make sure valid reasons are provided when hearings are requested in these cases. The applicant's vested rights are clear-cut in this case and the call for a hearing is a nuisance in her view. However, the ordinance calls for this process when requested, so they are required to honor it. Commissioner Brentano agreed and said that this procedure will need to be changed.

No motion.

**PUBLIC HEARINGS
9:30 A.M.**

None.

Commissioner Brentano read the weekly calendar.
Commissioner Brentano adjourned the meeting at 9:25 a.m.

Attachments: Agenda

ABOVE MINUTES APPROVED

CHAIR

COMMISSIONER

COMMISSIONER

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