

August 25, 2008

**City of Milton-Freewater  
City Council Minutes**

The Council of the City of Milton-Freewater met in regular session Monday, August 25, 2008 at 7:00 p.m. in the Albee Room of the Library.

The following members were present: Mayor Lewis Key, Councilors Orrin Lyon, Ed Chesnut, Keith Woods, Debbie Kelley, Steve Irving and Brad Humbert.

Staff members present were: City Manager Linda Hall and City Recorder Leanne Steadman.

Citizens present were: Tracy Carr, Rhonda Holcomb, Jim Holcomb, Renoa Zorn, Jeff Knopf, Mark Gomes, Michael LeFore, Ben Lawrence, Merle Sherman, Dorothy Heard, Betty Alexander, Roger Cosner, Rick Saager, Aaron Hall, Ray Hall, Elvira Torres, Gail Soderquist, Andrew Brown, Scott Hays, Ronald Brown, Gretchen Brown, Steve Sprague, Alma Chavez, Guadalupe Alameda, Jeff Anliker, Gary David, Joe West and Ray Denny.

Press member Melanie Hall of the Valley Herald was present.

**CONSENT CALENDAR ITEMS:**

The consent calendar items consisted of minutes from the August 11, 2008 regular council meeting, accounts payable from August 6 – August 20, 2008 and liquor license application for the Golden Village.

Councilor Humbert motioned to approve the consent calendar items. Councilor Woods seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

**BUSINESS ITEMS:**

**REQUEST BY RICK SAAGER – MILTON-FREEWATER EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES FOR FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE FOR AMBULANCE SERVICES**

Joe West, a consultant hired by Rick Saager of the Milton-Freewater Rural Fire Department asked Scott Hays to please approach the Council.

Scott Hays approached the council by saying he had been asked by Tracy Carr who worked for Milton-Freewater Rural Fire Department to say something nice about the Rural Fire Department. He referred back to December 14, 2007 when he had an incident while performing his normal work duties as a Milton-Freewater Police Officer. The Milton-Freewater Emergency Medical Ambulance was dispatched to the scene where Mr. Hays said he received very polite and professional care from the responding personnel. He said he felt they provide a great service.

Mr. West asked Ronald Brown to please approach the council.

Ronald Brown, 84156 Winesap Rd. – He complimented the ambulance service. He referred to several incidents where he had a need for the ambulance service. He said he would support a bond issue if the City was also willing to help. He said he felt the City needed an ambulance service that was close because Walla Walla, Washington was too far away.

Gail Soderquist, 141 W. Broadway Ave. Apt. #16 – She said she was at the Muddy Frogwater Festival at Yantis Park and was stung by a bee. She said she was very allergic to bee stings and could feel the reaction and had it not been for the Milton-Freewater Rural Ambulance she

said she wouldn't have known what she would have done. She thanked them very much for saving her.

Guadalupe Alameda, 53752 Appleton Rd. #34 – She said the Milton-Freewater Rural Ambulance had been to her house nineteen times to help with her husband who had medical problems. She said she would hate to see the ambulance service disband and that there needed to be a local ambulance service. She said she had a petition going around to help support the service.

Alma Chavez, 53752 Appleton Rd. #24 – She said she was a caretaker for Evergreen Retirement Center and that the ambulance service helps her a lot and they were very polite. Ms. Chavez said if it wasn't for their service the patients would probably be deceased.

Joe West, 101 Latoya, Texas – Stated he was a consultant hired to represent Rick Saager with the Milton-Freewater Rural Fire. He said the need for advanced life support ambulance service had increased significantly along with the cost of training. He stated that 80% of the people who receive the ambulance service are on Medicare, Medicaid or uninsured. Of those 80%, 40% are in the City of Milton-Freewater with 10% - 20% being covered by private insurance. Mr. West also said that the ambulance has been dispatched to assist in the removal of taser barbs for the police department. They also get a lot of calls for non-emergency transports. He said that Rick Saager was asking for reimbursement from the City of Milton-Freewater for \$70,000 - \$100,000 per year for un-collected services. He stated he wanted to start negotiating on the funding as soon as possible. Mr. West also stated that if there was no funding allowed from the City then there would be no ambulance service.

Councilor Kelley stated she objected to Mr. West's statement that there would be no ambulance service if the funding was not provided. She stated there would always be ambulance coverage because it was mandatory under the Umatilla County franchise agreement.

Mr. West thanked Councilor Kelley for correcting him. He said what he meant was there would not be any ambulance coverage by his client, Rick Saager.

Councilor Kelley said she understood that Milton-Freewater Rural Fire had approached Umatilla County for funding and was turned down.

Mr. West said the county told him they were not obligated to fund the ambulance service.

Councilor Kelley said that the ambulance service area (ASA) 4 that Rick Saager currently holds the franchise on is much greater than the City of Milton-Freewater boundaries.

Mr. West said that 80% of the ambulance calls dispatched were from the City of Milton-Freewater.

City Manager Linda Hall said she had received a log of the dispatched calls from the dispatch manager and unless Mr. Saager's numbers were different from what she had she showed an average from years 2003 – 2007, 3950 ambulance dispatched calls with 2670 calls being within the City of Milton-Freewater that equated to 67.6%. She also said about one fifth of the 3950 calls were from Evergreen Retirement home. Ms. Hall asked Ms. Chavez who worked at Evergreen if they paid anything towards those calls.

Ms. Chavez said she did not have that information.

Ms. Hall asked Mr. Saager if he billed Evergreen separately for the ambulance calls.

Mr. Saager stated he had talked to a representative at Evergreen and he was told they were not liable for their clients.

Councilor Chesnut said he felt the ambulance service was very important. He stated although he was unsure that the city could financially support the ambulance he was willing to help find a solution.

Mr. West said the proposal from Milton-Freewater Rural Fire was for a short term solution until a long term solution was figured out.

Councilor Woods asked about the air ambulance subscription service.

Mr. West said he felt the air ambulance subscription service was very limited.

Councilor Lyon said there was no question in his mind about the service and the need for the ambulance service but felt the same as Councilor Chesnut on financial support.

Ms. Alameda said she understood this was not the first time the ambulance service was tried to be disbanded.

Ms. Hall explained that the ambulance service was a Umatilla County franchise and not a city franchise.

Ms. Alameda asked if it was too late to issue a bond measure.

Ms. Hall explained that a bond measure was usually to build a structure like an aquatic center and not necessarily to fund a service like a serial levy would. She explained how a serial levy worked and talked about what affects Measure 5 had on tax revenues and public services.

Councilor Humbert asked if Milton-Freewater formed their own district in ASA 4, wouldn't that allow for that district to be taxed.

Ms. Hall said they would have to establish boundaries and it would have to be passed by the voters, but yes, it would be a taxing district if approved.

Ray Denny, Umatilla County Emergency Management/CSEPP – said if the districts were maxed out also called “compression” and another tax was introduced to that district then the other agencies that were receiving the tax benefits would receive less.

Mr. West said it takes a long time to become a separate district. He also said the Milton-Freewater Unified School District boundaries were the exact same as ASA 4.

Councilor Woods said he had only heard a lot of what couldn't be done and asked Mr. West what he suggested could be done as a solution. Councilor Woods also said the city's budget had already been passed and there was no line item for the request.

Mr. West did not have a clear suggestion of what the solution was and said again that Mr. Saager was looking for financial support on a short term basis until a long term solution could be found.

Mr. Brown asked Mr. Saager if the fire department was subsidizing the ambulance service. Mr. Saager said yes but, it could not do it any longer.

Ms. Hall said while doing research on ambulance funding she found that Ashland, Oregon had just implemented a \$250 fee that would be assessed to a person who needed medical aid but was not transported to the hospital.

Mr. Denny said the ambulance franchisee could assess a fee and it would not have to be approved by the county.

Mr. Woods asked about subscription billing. He said some people would probably pay and some wouldn't but at least there would be some kind of income.

Ms. Hall said that Ashland had an ambulance service membership program that was \$52 per year.

Councilor Humbert said he understood there was an Oregon law that allowed service providers to be able to bill the property owner for the service that was received. If that bill was not paid, then there could be a lien put on the property.

Mr. West said those that are using the service are not the ones who are funding the service.

Councilor Kelley suggested that all seven ASA franchise holders get together and approach the county. She believed that would make a much bigger statement.

Mr. Saager said he has an ambulance subscription service and there are only 300 subscribers a year. He said there was \$563,000 turned into the Collection Bureau and that he receives about \$300 a month from them. He said there needs to be a fix. Mr. Saager complimented his consultant, Joe West, on doing a great job and that he had learned a lot from him. He said that the county would find another ambulance service provider but if they could find one for \$70,000, what he was asking the City of Milton-Freewater for, then they should do that.

Councilor Chesnut said he has had a business out of his home since 2001 and since that time he has been the one that has opened the mail daily. He said in the past seven years he has not received an ambulance subscription contract in the mail.

Mr. Saager said he hires a company on Stateline Road to send out the information to all addresses and post office boxes. He said a subscription program was not a way to fund an ambulance service. He also stated that he provided the ambulance service and felt he was not obligated to provide the funding source.

Councilor Lyon asked if the county was responsible for providing the ambulance service.

Ms. Hall said the State of Oregon has required Umatilla County to provide the ambulance service.

Mr. Denny said he does not know of any user fee other than property taxes that have been imposed by the county.

Councilor Lyon asked Mr. Denny to find out if the county could charge a user fee to the ambulance service area 4.

Mr. Denny said he would research Councilor Lyon's question and get back to Ms. Hall on what he found out.

Mr. Saager said the county had the option to separate the boundaries within ASA 4 and the city could have their own ambulance area.

Mr. Brown said the meeting had been very educational. He said he felt citizens did not really know what it meant to have the ambulance service. He felt that the Rural Fire Department had not done a good job of getting the information out to the public.

Mr. West said it would take a forty five day written notice to Umatilla County for discontinuance of the ambulance service.

Councilor Humbert said he understood it to be a sixty day notice and that Umatilla County was required to provide the ambulance service and not the city. He said the city's budget had already been adopted and there was not an extra \$70,000 - \$100,000 in the budget and he did not see any short term funding available.

Councilor Kelley said she still believed the focused needed to be with the county and that all seven ambulance service areas should get together and approach the county. She complemented the Milton-Freewater Rural Fire Department on the great service they provide.

Mr. Saager said his concern was for the people of the county. He said he had approached the county for the past seven years and the County Commissioners have told him they did not want anything to do with funding the ambulance service. Mr. Saager said again that he did not believe the provider of the service should be responsible for collecting the funds to support it.

Councilor Humbert said even if there was a short term solution, a long term solution was still needed.

Mark Gomes, 52325 Hwy 332 – Said he had been a volunteer for the past fifteen years for Mr. Saager. He said he talks to people all the time to try and save the service.

(Councilor Lyon left the meeting at 8:47 p.m.)

Dorothy Heard, 177 SE 6<sup>th</sup> – She said she expected to see letters to the editor for the Valley Herald from everyone at the meeting.

(Councilor Lyon returned to the meeting at 8:50 p.m.)

Merle Sherman, 716 Pierce – Said he wanted to thank the city for the newly paved street in front of his house. He also reported that the Senior Blues Golf Tournament that was held with seventy one people attending from all over. He said even with the fuel prices and the rain the golf course still took in \$710.00

Betty Alexander, 85312 Winesap Rd. – Reported that there was a movement towards getting Freewater School on the historic preservation list. She said if the school was going to be demolished that it should follow proper procedure. She felt if the pigeons, asbestos and ventilation system was fixed then the building could possibly be good enough for another 100 years.

Roger Cosner, 910 NE 1<sup>st</sup> – Asked what the business hours were. [Recorder's note: What Mr. Cosner was referring to was the city's noise ordinance.]

Councilor Humbert said the hours were 7:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m.

Mr. Cosner said when Rogers Cannery on Mill Street was torn down they violated the ordinance. He said he was concerned if Freewater School was going to be demolished the ordinance would be violated as well.

Ms. Hall explained that the construction company that tore down Rogers Cannery may have had a noise variance which is approved through the Police Department with the City Manager's signature.

Mr. Cosner said he wanted the city council to take a strong stand on the ordinance in place and not allow any variances. He said he felt if he couldn't be allowed to break the rules then no one else should be able to.

Councilor Humbert told Mr. Cosner he could apply for a variance and said the noise ordinance was a complaint driven ordinance. He said if there were noise complaints when Rogers Cannery was being torn down then they would have been stopped regardless of them having a variance.

Mr. Cosner said he felt the ordinance should be followed just as it was with no exceptions.

### **MANAGER'S REPORT:**

Manager Hall reminded council about the Umatilla County Planning Commission meeting that was scheduled for August 28, 2008 at 4:00 p.m. at the Justice Center in Pendleton Oregon. She said she understood the meeting to be a joint work session between the Planning Commission and representatives from Oregon State regarding the wind turbines proposed for the Blue Mountains and transmission line siting. Councilor Kelley and Councilor Chesnut both confirmed they would be going along with Ms. Hall which would be leaving at 3:00 p.m. from City Hall. She reminded council about the League of Oregon Cities registration deadline of August 28, 2008 to be turned into Ms. Steadman. The Economic Opportunities Analysis project is moving ahead. She also reported that she and the Police Chief had been working on an ordinance that would hold property owners accountable for repeated criminal activity.

### **COUNCIL ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Councilor Irving said he wanted to discuss the League of Oregon Cities registration form after the meeting.

There being no further business, council adjourned at 9:02 p.m.

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Lewis S. Key, Mayor