

City of Monmouth

City Manager's Report

A Report on City of Monmouth News, Happenings, Successes and Other Items

June 16, 2016

MINET

MINET (Monmouth-Independence Networks) has been providing services to Monmouth and Independence homes and businesses since 2006. The decision to create a municipal-owned telecommunications company was thoroughly researched and reviewed before moving forward. The impetus for starting MINET was a very visionary recognition that high-speed internet service would be a necessity for community health in the future. Since companies had no interest in providing better service to our area, Monmouth decided to look into alternatives. In 1998, a feasibility study was completed regarding institutional and business services. This study was extended to cover Independence and the two cities started in earnest to move toward building our own system. MINET was legally formed by the Cities in 2002 and the key "trunk" lines and connections were installed that year. MINET is governed by a Board appointed by the Cities.

Since MINET started providing service, a lot has changed. As visionary as the original decision to build the network was, no one could have envisioned the rapid changes that would happen in technology and user needs and desires. The first big shift was people switching to cell phones. We have foregone a great deal of revenue as many people see no need for a landline phone. The economy also has had a great impact on MINET. During the last recession, many customers dropped or downgraded services. The most recent unhelpful trend for MINET revenue is the imploding world of cable TV. Profit margins continue to decline due to massive price increases from the content providers.

To build the physical side of MINET, a great deal of debt was acquired by the Cities. The ability to pay back this debt was based on assumptions. Many of these assumptions didn't play out as planned.

At present, MINET is an amazing asset. Our communities are envied by people living in areas with lesser services (which is a lot of people). A recent performance review of MINET gave it high marks across the board. We have a great asset that is well managed, can cover regular operations, but can only cover about half of the outstanding debt that was needed to build the system. What can't be covered by MINET is provided by the Cities. Rather than seeing our current situation as static, MINET is working diligently to acquire every customer it can in the two cities and is currently working on some exciting new opportunities to provide service outside our cities. The new outside opportunities could provide a very nice boost to revenues and MINET's overall finances.

WOU Interns

The City is blessed with having a ready source of well-educated and energetic interns coming from the WOU campus. They are a continuous presence at the library and senior center. City administration usually has one or two a year. These interns have also done work in other City departments. Most recently, we had two excellent interns. One focused on updating the City's personnel handbook. This would not be a typical project due to its complexity, but this intern had personnel experience. He integrated a model handbook with our current handbook and gave me a great head start on this project.

Our second intern supported our Community Development Director and looked at Monmouth growth trends and the possible need to expand our urban growth boundary. In addition to gaining an understanding of Oregon's complex land use laws and doing a great deal of data compilation, he learned on his own how to produce maps using a geographic information system. We really appreciated their work and hope that their experience will help them with their future careers.

Amphitheater Dedication

The City will officially dedicate the new amphitheater in Main Street Park on Monday, June 27 at 6:00 p.m. This wonderful new asset continues the City's efforts to improve Monmouth and to support our downtown businesses. For some, projects like this consist of hiring a contractor and coming to the grand opening. For anyone that ever been involved with a construction or remodeling project, you know this isn't true. Construction projects are very hard to manage and take a lot of time and energy to get done right. In addition to the regular struggles, the amphitheater project was a challenge due to its unique design and how it integrates with other park features. Russ Cooper and the Public Works staff have done an excellent job shepherding this legacy project.

Highway 99 Project

Preliminary engineering continues on the Highway 99 reconstruction project, which will be completed by the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT). We made a decision to eliminate irrigation from the project as low water plants and trees will be used in the new planter strips. We also requested that ODOT analyze whether a right turn pocket could be installed at Church St. and if a protected pedestrian island could be installed at Madrona St. ODOT staff are currently working with local property owners regarding right-of-way needs.

Local Business Support

As was noted in a recent Mayor's Notes, running a small business is tough. While a business owner is driving the bus, help is available. In our area, the City of Monmouth, Monmouth-Independence Chamber of Commerce and the Monmouth Business Association are all here to help. There are also a variety of other supports for local businesses. On a new front, the Monmouth Engaged Retail and Restaurants committee is developing a new guide for small businesses. The City can provide local "intel" to a new business and help get its name out. The Chamber and MBA provide a variety of networking and educational opportunities. And residents can help by shopping at our local businesses....

Chickens and Marijuana

While these topics are separate (although I'm guessing that marijuana infused eggs are already out there), they are linked by the fact that no one in city government thought that these would be items under discussion five years ago. We now have approved "backyard chickens" and are working to allow chickens in a group setting. Marijuana is a topic regarding law enforcement, retail businesses and potentially commercial production. It also impacts our workplace policies. I wonder what the next unforeseen topic will be.

If you have any questions about items in this report or anything related to the City, please call me at 503-751-0146 or e-mail me at smcclure@ci.monmouth.or.us.

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