

WKNA General Meeting
Sept. 11, 2025, 7 p.m.
At Keizer Civic Center
Submitted by Carolyn Homan, WKNA Secretary
26 people in attendance

Call to Order: President Rhonda Rich called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m. Introductions made around the room.

Minutes of the May 8 meeting – Art Mauer moved approval; Kathy Lincoln seconded. Motion carried.

Budget Report for July 2024-July 2025 \$1,200 budget – Expenditures so far of \$206.90 for 250 copies of August newsletter and \$43.99 for printer ink, leaving a balance of \$949.11

Guest speaker -- Rhonda introduced Jim Trett, Mayor of the City of Detroit to talk about the Santiam Canyon's recovery from the 2020 wildfires and the future of the Detroit Lake Recreation Area. His family moved to Oregon from North Dakota when he was 7 and he resided in Keizer until retirement. He dedicated 35 years to the Keizer Fire District as both a volunteer firefighter/EMT and staff member, before moving to Detroit. He still teaches First Aid and CPA classes at Whiteaker Middle School and provides First Aid coverage at various sporting events.

Recreation led him to Detroit. He had a boat at Deroit Lake, then bought a house there and eventually moved. His route to the mayor's office started with a stint on Planning Commission, then as a "fill in" on City Council. He discovered that the candidate getting the most votes for Council was automatically the mayor. He's now served several terms in a job that was "easy" until September of 2020.

He described the crazy set of weather conditions, area topography and technology break-downs that created the fiery holocaust that became the 2020 Labor Day fire disaster. In many ways, it mirrored the 2018 fire that leveled Paradise, Calif., which also sits at the spout of three canyons.

The Beachie Creek fire broke out in late August 2020 but officials saw no threat given wind conditions early on. Officials called a Level 2 evacuation notice (be set) on Labor Day but Trett said Detroit residents went to bed Tuesday and turned their phones off because things didn't look that bad (and they wanted their phones to be charged in the morning). At midnight, however, sirens went off and the word spread to get out now. People could see fire coming down the canyon, now driven by terrible winds. But the warning systems had failed.

People were told to drive east to Sisters, but they were blocked by the Lionshead Fire that was spreading explosively. When they turned to drive west, by then they were driving into the fire coming down French Creek canyon. He showed an infrared map of the fires at 11:50 – bright red splotches, but miles apart. By midnight, just 10 minutes later, the splotches were on top of each other and spreading disastrously fast. Just 15 minutes after the evacuation order, the town was in flames.

He thanked Keizer and Mayor Clark for reaching out that night to offer aid that included opening Volcanoes stadium to evacuees. More assistance followed and he said Detroit and Keizer feel like "sister" cities now.

Residents could not get back into Detroit for 3 weeks. He showed pictures of the devastation, capricious in spots as some homes reduced to ashes were flanked by a house (like his) that was seemingly untouched. Damage of some kind affected pretty much everything, however. Despite that,

plans to rebuild occurred almost immediately as the town came together.

FEMA came and promised help, although it would be slow, by their own admission. It's taken 5 years, but FEMA helped with, among other things, the new water plant. They even approved rebuilding an expanded version with resiliency, should another fire occur. The FEMA share was \$5 million. And FEMA representatives say they've never seen a town come back so fast, he said.

There were lots of trailers and RVs at first. There were some hard feelings over rebuilding restrictions. But the sentiment was that Detroit would come back as a community, not an incorporated RV park, he said, and it has worked out.

Volunteers and donations made a huge difference. One such donation was from the "Rich Duncan construction coalition." That donation = a brand new City Hall. The Detroit Community Church was also rebuilt by volunteers. He said the motto has pretty much been that Detroit is coming back and coming back better.

The biggest remaining issue is that a commercial septic system is being held up by Oregon's "three basin rule" prohibiting new or increased wastewater discharges into the Clackamas, North Santiam and McKenzie River basins. The rule is in place to protect municipal water supplies and aquatic life. There are some exceptions for subsurface discharges but none have yet been made for the North Santiam, he said. Thus, there's no septic system yet that will allow businesses to be licensed.

As for the proposed Detroit Lake drawdown, he said the Corps of Engineers does not want to proceed, but they are under a court order. Draining of Green Peter Reservoir a couple of years ago damaged water systems in Albany, Lebanon and elsewhere. The action, designed to save salmon, also killed the kokanee population in the river.

If the drawdown proceeds, he said the Corps thinks they can do it differently at Detroit to protect downstream water systems, including Salem's. The water supply to thousands of people could be affected if the drawdown isn't handled differently.

The reservoir level is important to Detroit's tourist industry. He said Detroit is the busiest lake in Oregon, according to the state Marine Board. The reservoir and tourism it generates basically is the Detroit economy. In addition, the reservoir provides flood protection to towns downstream and the water is also vital to the valley's agricultural industry for irrigation.

If the drawdown proceeds, the Corps plans to raise the water level after the smolts are transported. But that recharge depends on winter rains and snow, he said, which have been lower than normal in recent years. To help counteract drawdown effects at the marina, he said the Corps has a plan next year to excavate under the docks to lower the water level and provide a longer boating season.

Rhonda thanked Jim for his informative presentation.

REPORTS

City Council -- Councilor Shaney Starr said Keizer Council had recently signed a letter in opposition to the drawdown of Detroit Reservoir. The Council joined the Parks Advisory Board on Monday, Sept 8, for the annual parks tour. The group visited Keizer Rapids Park, Wallace House and Bob Newton. The new play structure at Bob Newton was praised as being designed for inclusivity and ADA accessibility features. Patti Tischer, President of Greater Gubser Neighborhood Association, said neighbors in the area served by Bob Newton Park were contacted for input on the park improvements as well.

LITTLE LIBRARY/KEIZER COMMUNITY LIBRARY -- Kris Adams said the Little Library on Rafael is doing well and book donations keep coming in. Another Little Library is being built with grant funds and will be placed at the 5th St. entrance to Willamette Manor Park. Keizer Community Library is looking for a new manager after the former manager left for a full-time job. Candidate interviews start in the next week. Betty Hart, Library Board member, noted that the fall book sale will be Friday and Saturday, Oct. 17 and 18, in the City Hall lobby. Paperbacks will be 50 cents and hard-bound, \$1 each.

PARKS – The proposed pavilion at Keizer Rapids Park will be discussed at the Oct. 14 Parks meeting. Turf field lighting hours were discussed at Parks and Council meetings, but were retained at 9 p.m. dimming, with everyone to be out by 9:30 p.m. Phase 2 improvements – concession stand, bathrooms, etc. – are under way with Phase 3, parking lot paving, to follow.

TRAFFIC SAFETY BIKEWAYS PEDESTRIAN COMM. – Neighbors on Manbrin Ave. requested traffic calming measures on their street from Rowan to Rivercrest but the complaint did not meet requirements in the Neighborhood Traffic Management Plan and a request for a speed limit sign was turned down by the Public Works Director. Rhonda said neighbors plan to go back to renew that request.

PLANNING – Robb Witters could not attend but sent a written report from the Sept. 10 meeting. Construction on River Road was noted – the former Freeman Chiropractic building will be the new home for an accounting firm. Pho Keizer is remodeling the former Shari's and wants to redo the landscaping as well. More businesses are coming to Area A (REI area) at Keizer Station. A Marriot hotel and a Discount Tire shop are planned for Area D. Keizer saw 4 single family homes and 46 multi-family projects be developed in the last year. The Verda Lane Apartments historic plaque needs to be redone (telling the story of the family farm that once occupied that area.)

OPEN DISCUSSION

Traffic – A neighbor brought up concerns about speeding, noise and “street racing” type activity going on in Keizer, specifically River Road but also neighborhood streets. Rhonda said she would be in touch about taking the issue to TSBP

Graffiti – JROTC students from McNary are helping homeowners who request it with graffiti removal. Go to the City website if you need to report graffiti and need help with removal.

Keizer Fire District open house – Oct. 6, 6-8 p.m.

Upcoming Trashy Tuesdays in West Keizer -- Sept. 16, 5-6:30 p.m. at Keizer Rapids (parking in Dog Park lot) Oct. 21, 5:30-6:30 p.m., Wallace House Park.

Next WKNA meetings –

Oct. 2, 7 p.m., WKNA Board

Oct. 9, 7 p.m., General meeting – Shane Witham, Keizer City Planner guest speaker