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Charter review commission weighs in on county comments



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The Clark County Public Service Center in downtown Vancouver

FILE PHOTO

Posted Tuesday, June 29, 2021 11:37 am

Rick Bannan

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The Clark County Charter Review Commission has heard from hundreds of county residents about potential items they could put on the November ballot which would change the way county government works.

During a June 23 meeting, the review commission looked at the results of a countywide survey it had sent out regarding changes it will potentially recommend for a vote. The 15-member commission is tasked with reviewing the Clark County Charter, the governing document for the county, and could potentially propose amendments that would alter the way the county is run.

The survey received nearly 440 responses, with a number of changes receiving support from those who chimed in.

More than 55 percent of respondents favored a non-partisan council, as opposed to the current makeup where four out of five councilors identify as Republican.

“I think generally what we do on the council is really community-based, it’s less partisan-based,” Clark County Councilor Julie Olson, one of those Republicans, said during public comment at the meeting. “To be able to look at solutions to our community without the lens of a political letter or political process is beneficial to our community.”

Olson also favored the idea of moving to five districts as opposed to the current four-district setup, which includes an at-large chair position. More than three-fourths of respondents favored adding a fifth district with a county chair being nominated among the councilors.

More than 63 percent of respondents also favored non-partisan executives like the assessor, auditor, clerk, prosecuting attorney, sheriff and treasurer.

“Being nonpartisan makes me more approachable to taxpayers regardless of their party preference,” Clark County Treasurer Alishia Topper said.

Topper added her office also processes \$9.3 billion in banking transactions and also handles investment funds for the county.

“Partisanship does not play a role in banking services,” Topper said.

Almost nine out of 10 respondents were in favor of drafting an ethics code, with more than eight out of 10 in support of an independent ethics commission. More than seven out of 10 respondents also favored an ethics oversight and compliance office within the county organization.

More than half of respondents also were in favor of the creation of an office and commission for diversity, equity and inclusion.

During public comment, Clark County Assessor Peter Van Nortwick said he would support some sort of diversity commission, adding his office often has trouble reaching out to underrepresented populations.

“A lot of times the people that we see come in for our services, and even the people that apply for the positions in our office, we don’t see the diversity that we would like to see that we know is out in the community,” Van Nortwick said.

Much of the takeaway from commissioners included the need for more education and outreach about what exactly the commission — and the county as a whole — did and how they are composed.

Commissioner Kelsey Potter noted numerous comments on the question of moving to five districts were under the assumption that currently only four members of council are voting members.

“I think moving forward once we get these things on the ballot, we really need to take a look at how we best serve the public after these things are on the ballot,” Potter said. “If we don’t really hit the educational component hard, I’m worried that people really won’t understand what they’re voting on.”

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Brush Prairie farm in jeopardy over water rights

RICK BANNAN
rick@thereflector.com

A historic Brush Prairie farm may have to cease its current state of operations if pending legislation from the Washington State Department of Ecology comes to fruition.

In an Aug. 7 opinion, the DE farm announced they are in a dispute with the Department of Ecology regarding a well, which is likely a century old.

According to Bill Zimmerman, an irrigation consultant for the farm, the well was dug early in the 20th century before 1930. It was initially used for domestic and livestock water on the volume it produced.

The family applied for a water rights permit in 2009, but a backlog in requests both the permit to languish in bureaucracy.

Ecology spokesperson Jeff Zink said there was "quite a backlog" in permitting, leading to the department sending out a letter asking if applicants were still interested in pursuing the water rights in November 2020. Zimmerman said. Though he couldn't put an initial permit, though the farm successfully attained a temporary one for well testing, Zink said.

Although the farm had been operating since the 1970s, more recent laws required a different level of compliance. Zimmerman said the family understood that his father had applied for water rights for the well, but in actuality the family received a certificate stating the well's existence, the longest Zimmerman said. Though he couldn't put an

See WATER on Page A10

One suspect pleads not guilty in shooting of detective

RICK BANNAN
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One of three suspects connected to the shooting death of Clark County Sheriff's Detective James Brown has pleaded not guilty while the alleged shooter remains in jail in a pre-arrest situation.

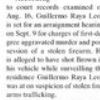
According to court records examined on Aug. 16, Guillermo Raya Leon is set for an arraignment hearing on Sept. 9 for charges of first-degree assault on a police officer and possession of a stolen firearm. He is alleged to have shot Brown in his vehicle while surveilling the residence of Guillermo Raya Leon was at an suspect of stolen firearm trafficking.

Guillermo Raya Leon was initially set for an arraignment on Aug. 13 though the date was postponed, according to court records. He is currently in the Clark County Jail, according to jail records.

The shooter suspect's alleged accomplices have also received charges. Abram Raya Leon, inmate out of custody of the county, though he has numerous charges in the local courts, including second-degree murder while possessing a firearm and obstructing justice by suppressing the firearm, according to court records.

Maria Raya was the only suspect to enter a plea as of Aug. 16. She entered a not guilty plea and stands trial for nearly three dozen charges of firearm trafficking, among other charges, relating to

See SHOOTING on Page A10



James Brown

Carnival makes debut at county fairgrounds

THE REFLECTOR

Crowds flocked to the Clark County Event Center at the Fairgrounds for an anniversary celebration in place of the Clark County Fair.

The Barker Amusement Carnival, a 10-day event running from Aug. 6-15, ended the Family Fun Series.

The series started July 30, which included monster truck shows and a rodeo.

At the carnival, attendees had a chance to play games and pick from about 12 amusement rides.

Event organizers announced the Clark County Fair will make a return Aug. 5-8, 2022, after a five-year hiatus.

The Clark County Fair Board Executive Committee announced an decision in May to postpone the fair.

Fairgoers like increasing COVID-19 infection rates and safety concerns for volunteers, led to the decision, according to a Clark County Fair Facebook post. On Saturday, crowds flocked to the air fair activities in nearby Oregon and California.

The Oregon Department of Environmental Quality warned Clark, Combs and Skamania county residents of air quality conditions that exceeded because of wildfires, according to a news release.

By the Editor at Clark County resident, rides the carnival with friends on Aug. 13 at the Clark County Event Center at the Fairgrounds. More photos on page A10



The Clark County Event Center at the Fairgrounds presented a family-friendly carnival Aug. 6-15 in place of the Clark County Fair because of COVID-19 constraints. More photos on page A10



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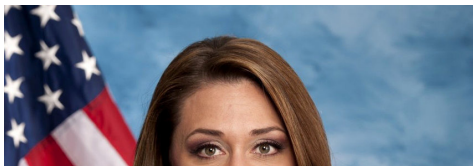
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Joe Kent further solidified his place as perhaps the furthest-right candidate challenging U.S. Rep. Jaime Herrera Beutler Thursday night. The Conservative Ladies of Washington candidate forum was ...



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Referrals to fund an additional 800 households for rental assistance in Clark County will open at noon on Monday, Aug. 23. The county started providing eviction prevention rent assistance ...



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Washington state's Department of Health (DOH) is reporting concerning drops in 2020 vaccination rates among preteens. While 4- to 6-year-olds saw a drop in vaccine rates by around 2-3 ...



Those with invalid drug possession convictions can petition Inslee to eliminate supervision (/stories/those-with-invalid-drug-possession-convictions-can-petition-inslee-to-eliminate-supervision,270881)

OLYMPIA — About 1,200 people on community supervision because of drug possession convictions could have their sentences commuted by Gov. Jay Inslee. The Washington state Supreme Court ruled ...

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OBITUARIES



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In loving memory of Tom Croley (/stories/in-loving-memory-of-tom-croley,270791)

James Thomas "Tom" Croley was born the youngest of three kids to Harold and Nell Croley. Growing up, Tom excelled in science and playing chess. He loved getting into mischief with his friends and ...



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