

Josephine County Democrats

General Meeting Minutes

In Person/Zoom

Aug. 9 2022

A short business meeting after the featured program at the August 9 meeting of the Josephine County Democrats introduced a new Stonewall Caucus Chair, got a report from the Campaign Committee and previewed state representative candidate Brady Keister's campaign speech.

After approving the minutes, Treasurer Colette Storms reported JCD has about \$8,000 in it's account after spending money on a Josephine County Fair booth and paying some bills. She said donations are needed now because Democrats are doing a lot for the upcoming election in November.

Brittany Weifenbach was introduced as the new Stonewall Caucus Chair. She said she is looking forward to building membership for the Caucus, reaching out to younger members of the LGBTQ community in Josephine County and connecting with Stonewalls in other counties and at the state level. She also agreed to do a presentation at a future JCD meeting about LGBTQ terminology and issues.

Lynda Spangler gave an update of the Campaign Committee. They finalized their recommendations for endorsement, have been doing research for candidates, helped with the JC Fair booth and are working with the Neighborhood Leader program to get started on the Get Out The Vote (GOTV) drive which Lynda emphasized is "super important."

Chair Dorothy Yetter said Democrats' socials are catching on and there will be two a month now. In addition to the one at Weekend Brewery there will be a social at the Dinsdale Farm on Riverbanks Road. See josphinedemocrats.org for details.

Libby Watts reported she will have a training session Aug. 16 from 10-11 am at the Democrats' office in Grants Pass for people who have signed up to be Neighborhood Leaders. Outreach is already taking place in the form of a "Pledge to Vote" campaign.

PCPs voted to endorse the slate of Democratic candidates running for election including our own Brady Keister who will be having a fund-raiser Aug. 28 from 3-6 pm. Tina Kotek was endorsed for governor, Ron Wyden for US Senator, Joe Yetter for Representative in CD2 and Christina Stephenson for Labor Commissioner. In addition Democrats endorsed all state propositions on the ballot but held off on commenting on local ballot measures until they actually appear on the ballot. Local candidates are running for non-partisan positions so will not be officially endorsed.

Brady said as a candidate for state Representative in District 3 previewed the positions he's going to talk about during his campaign: he believes women have the right to choose regarding an abortion, 2- he believes in sensible firearm controls, he believes our LGBTQ members of society have the same rights as everyone else, he believes in separation of church and state and opposes spending taxpayers' money for vouchers for religious schools, he believes health care is a public good and a duty to our fellow citizens, mental health care should be expanded to include

schools and law enforcement to help them deal with people in crisis, he believes in workers' rights and he believes in science and that climate change is the greatest threat to our people right now.

The September meeting will feature candidates running for election.

Program

Democrats like to bring informative sessions to the community so after a couple of weeks of panic and misinformation about SB 762, the risk map released and the Oregon Department of Forestry letters telling people what risk level they're in according to that map, they invited Firewise Coordinator for Grants Pass and Josephine County, Rick McClintock and state Representatives Pam Marsh (D-District 5) and Lily Morgan (R-District 3) to our August meeting to explain the legislation and clear up some concerns.

McClintock, Firewise explained what "defensible space" is along with his working knowledge of SB 762 while Marsh and Morgan answered questions about it.

McClintock – My major job is helping people reduce wildfire risk. Firewise is a concept like Neighborhood Watch, getting multiple households in an area to clear a defensible space around the neighborhood and each home. Clearing a 100-foot space around dwellings and reducing "ladder fuels," the vegetation that goes from the ground up the trees is especially important, he said. Trees on property aren't what Firewise worries about, it's the litter trees put off that can get a fire off the ground and out of control. Being aware of flammable items in the yard like chair cushions and door mats.

The map has been out for approximately three years. It has been on Oregon Explorer at <https://oregonexplorer.info/topics/wildfire-risk?ptopic=2> It's been there. He said when he moved to the area three years ago he knew he was in an extreme fire area by looking at that map. In Firewise communities one of the things he has to do is go look at the map and fill out paperwork to put what risk they are in.

The bill was written July 21, 2021, and they had just under a year to get (the current version) this map out so it was extremely hard for them to go out and touch 83,000 to 86,000 properties to see if people have done defensible space. So they did satellite imaging to figure out what the tree canopy over houses was. The imagery is down to one pixel which is basically 100 feet so it can't show what anyone has done in the understory. They had to come up with a map in less than a year so OSU was part of this and that's how they determined these risks. It was done with climate, with weather, with topography and vegetation. That's how they figured out what zones there were. They ran many scenarios of what a fire would do. The bill said they had to have the map done by June of 22. Obviously there was a huge outcry saying, "hold on, stop what's going on here" and they rescinded the map. All the appeals are a moot point right now. Where it is going from this day on, I'm not sure. My major goal is how to educate you in doing defensible space and getting out there to do it.

Will doing defensible space lower you from extreme to high? I hope so. Insurance companies have looked at this map, they've known it was there on Oregon Explorer for the three years I

know about so it's not a new piece of information for them. I think the big part is now ODF has given its official stamp of approval. Go to Oregon Explorer, put in wildfire risk map and you can layer it, you can bring up the history, the vegetation, you can play with it quite a bit and see what's going on in your area. You can call ODF if you live outside Grants Pass and ask for an evaluation but I don't know if they're going to do them right now. There's a lot of questions on all that part. Firewise can tell you what the standards are and make recommendations but can't officially check off a hazard designation. We have approximately 1,000 Firewise homes in the county. We have 23 Firewise communities with three more coming on board, and if we can get those communities involved in saying here's a matrix we can use, we know they have defensible space because one of the things I have to do is come out and say yes, you have 100 foot defensible space in the extremes or 50 feet in the high and we've already gone through and checked those off and taken pictures and done those things. The pictures are just for our records, they don't go anywhere. But it's for us to be able to come back and say here's our 100 feet.

Question: If your property backs up to BLM or Forest Service land are these agencies going to clear their property?

McClintock – Good question. Are they going to come out and clean up. I'm not sure. Their budget severely cut. They do some in Cathedral Hills, but some sections are a mess. The hardest part with vacant land or absentee owners we don't have an ordinance in this county to say clean it up. Other counties send out a letter and say clean up by April 1 or we'll clean it up and you get a bill on your taxes and they aren't kidding. I wish we had some kind of ordinance to get vacant buildings, vacant cars, you know those types of things cleaned up and that would reduce the risk for us tremendously.

Williams Fire Chief Jeff Gilbert says he is asked to assess property for insurance purposes and has signed off on some but wanted to know if there are other officials responsible for this.

McClintock – About once a month I get a call saying someone's insurance will be canceled unless we do an assessment. I like it better when people give me couple months, not a week so if there are things do to fix they have the time to do it. Are the insurance companies going to recognize the Firewise assessment? I am not sure. Because in the matrix of doing this map, Firewise was not part of the matrix. They removed Firewise from being part of that matrix. I will still write them, I will still do it, I will still do what I need to do to help people with their insurance.

Question: Is there a list of trustworthy people we can hire?

McClintock - I have a list and it's vetted through ODF and I will email that to anyone who asks. If you hire anyone always ask the questions, are you insured, are you bonded? If they say so tell them to show you. The quality ones will show it to you. They know the game. If it seems to good to be true, like you get a bid for \$1000 and one for \$40, you gotta guess the \$40 guy isn't insured. Make sure they're licensed and bonded, those type of things. I always do three bids, pay 50 percent up front, and write up everything you want done. If want all hauled off write into bid. If finished give rest of money. If not, hold off money till they finish. They get it. they're professionals.

Fire departments know who has defensible space, where they can get their trucks in and if they can't, they can't do anything. If they come to two places, one defensible the other not, probably not going to go to the one that's not.

If there's a fire - I tell people to evacuate because if you don't firefighters have to focus on you and can't concentrate of fire. When they leave they're not coming to get you, they're going to leave,. Open your gates, turn on the lights so they can see your house at night, turn off your AC and fans, lock your house and evacuate. If you decide to stay do not leave. People (in the Siskiyou fire) decided leave and thought they could drive through the fire but what does a car need? A car needs oxygen so their car stopped and they passed away. You want to be up front of the line. You want to get out and get on that road early.

Make sure your driveways are wide and open. Put your garden hose out so they can see it and set your ladder out so we don't have to take our time getting ours out and putting it back. Make sure to lock your house. If we need to get in we have the tools to do that. Do not put a sign out saying "we evacuated." Don't flag your place. Burglars figure that out real quick. If somebody comes up in official uniform and says it's time to go that's good but if it's a guy in a U-Haul truck you might want to hesitate.

Question - What does it take to get a Firewise neighborhood?

McClintock - It takes four to six residents, so get a community meeting and I'll come out and give a presentation. It's free, your investment is usually about an hour of fuel work and keeping track how much litter you remove. In November you fill out a form saying how many cubic yards...a pickup truck bed is a cubic yard you've cleaned up. Then once a year you have an activity like a picnic or party or just sit down and talk about mapping.

Question – What things do we want you to take back to legislators?

McClintock - For Firewise to be recognized. Paradise might have been saved, according to fire expert Dr Jack Cohen. He says Paradise might have survived if they'd done some cleanup. It was badly tree littered, trees were growing on houses, there were dead trees and some firemen said it was a fire waiting to happen.

Rep. Lily Morgan – And one thing to add about the Firewise, in talking to Chief Mike McLaughlin from Applegate Fire, Oregon has interpreted that Federal Firewise program grant dollars that may be taxable, well Oregon has opted to tax, so anybody applying for those grant dollars is getting a 1099 and having to pay taxes on that so that is another legislative fix that we're looking at trying to take care of. If you look at the maps equitable distribution you'll see a lot of our poor, underprivileged communities are in the high and extreme risk areas so we want those communities applying for the grants and there are more grants coming. As Chief McClintock said, each of our fire agencies in Josephine County that are actually fire districts, Williams, Wolf Creek, Applegate, Illinois Valley and Grants Pass all received grants for basically staffing up for this fire season to be able to respond to any additional fires. Jackson County agencies also got it. The maximum award to every agency was \$35,000 but there's going to be another round of grants in September for municipalities to try to do some things. The state

Fire Marshal is going to follow up with Chief Gilbert so fire departments can help their citizens with prevention efforts and fuels reductions in their districts and so the opportunity to make sure the fire departments are connected with the grants that would help with the staffing. In January is when the grants will be available through the state Fire Marshal's office for citizens to be applying and to be able to get the funds outside of Firewise.

Question – Josephine County has a large, unprotected area. Some people like to call it under protected. If you have a contract with Rural Metro you're in that area, which means you don't have a fire district that can take advantage of the fire district grants. So it's unfortunate that an attempt to get a district failed. And hopefully we're going to have another round at it.

Mark Jones – We're working with a group of citizens for a Fire Safety Committee and we're looking into another round of possibly creating a fire district in the unprotected areas.

Morgan – You can't get the grants?

Jones – Not the community grants

Morgan – However the state Fire Marshal's office did say the county can apply for those areas covered by rural metro so there is an opportunity that the county, as a municipality, could apply.

Dorothy Yetter - Will they?

Question - I believe the state Fire Marshal is also going to do individual property owner grants. Is that correct?

Morgan - That's correct. The individual property grants start in January. September will be municipalities, and there is an opportunity if individuals who don't have the finances to do the clearings or can't physically do it so they're going to need help finding somebody to do that so that's where Chief Gilbert at Williams Fire said, what if the folks he hired to upstaff during fire season could then get grant dollars to turn around and help in the district and help those families that are within their district? Personnel is expensive and state grants for personnel is not necessarily something that's sustainable right now without further support from the legislature. All the fire districts are aware of how the funding works through the property taxes and the concerns there so the goal is to get the grant dollars in the hands of as many of our citizens as we can and see what we can do to see what we can do to make sure the fuels can be reduced and any of the grants, as was said earlier, as far as the rollout of 762 my preference would be incentive. If we have the ability to find a way that we can give grants for doing the home hardening, for doing the defensible space, for doing those things that would reduce the risk then how do we make sure there's an incentive involved. But there's still questions about the enforcement and during fire season when ODF has declared when fire season starts there's different enforcement efforts there. The state Fire Marshal's office at the community meeting last week said they're not looking to do enforcement, that they are looking to do education. There's still a question as if ODF can do that enforcement branch. But in talking with the department heads there are some legislative fixes that are needed with 762 and so those are some of the things we're trying to address. When the properties that burned in the 2020 fires in Alameda and up in the Detroit Lake area...those areas are now listed as moderate to no risk as the fuels burned. But we know they're

future high risk. When those fuels come back, when the brush comes back, it's going to be high risk again. And yet we have citizens in our communities that have cement siding, covers on their gutters, the systems in place that they need to do, have the brush cleared and all that, they're not getting credit under the current map. And that's one of the things we talked about. When people got the letters and they were upset the first thing I did was contact the state Fire Marshal, the fire chief with ODF and Doug Graff who used to be the fire chief but is now the liaison from the governor's office. They told me there are flaws in the maps and instead of pulling back the maps they had to move forward because of deadlines in the bill and I said it was better for them to pause the maps, get the information right so we can build community trust. It's too important a topic and our area is number one for fire risk so we do not need more distrust in the government at a time we need to be working together to reduce our fuels. I appreciate Rick and his effort with Firewise.

Question - We are in an unprotected area. Our Commissioners put us forward as Rural Metro. Can the county apply for grants?

Morgan - The county can apply for grant dollars in the round coming up. Technically they fall as a municipality so cities can apply and also the counties can apply for some of the grant dollars. And there's also going to be grants for some of the fire districts again and for the fire districts the recommendation is for them to reach out directly to the state Fire Marshal's office. Send me information and I'll get it out to the fire districts.

I'd also like to touch base about insurance because we've heard a lot of rumors. I've had a lot of people contact me saying they received letters that because of the fire maps they were being canceled or they were not being renewed. I had an insurance agent come into my office today and tell me she's seeing about 50 people a day that are saying they are not going to renew the property risk. They will give them personal liability risk but not property risk and so there's still some of those things that we have to deal with at the state level and the state insurance commissioner contacted the 150 plus or 180 plus insurance companies that operate in Oregon and learned that some of them were using the excuse of the fire maps to tell people they were not renewing because they didn't want to be the bad guys but they had other things going on in the background. So one of the letters that the insurance agent showed me today is a business on Hwy 199 and in downtown Cave Junction, literally dead center in the city, surrounded by other businesses and they said the business was listed as a high brush area and therefore they would not renew property risk. You look at it on Google Maps there's no brush on the property whatsoever. So it's one of those things from the feedback on the 762 maps. What's different is they calculated brush at a very aggressive level. There were areas that they understand the ground truthing did not happen. When you have piece of property that's irrigated in the valley it didn't matter what the fuels were if its farmland that's not likely to burn they still had it listed as fuels, therefore it's going to burn so there's some different things they have to deal with. The maps are going to come back out. They are going to move forward, but they've stamped them as draft. Everybody that has appealed, if you still want to appeal, if you believe your property should be considered you can send those emails in. They're taking that all into consideration as they're moving forward and taking the appeals as public comment essentially and then they're

going to move forward from there. The main thing we have to fix legislatively is finding a way for the work that people do to keep their properties take care of. Those that have been good responsible property owners can get credit for that. My understanding is in the rules we can't give that credit right now but legislatively we can fix it next year.

Question: What can be done about county or state or forest service land to clean it up and make it safe?

Morgan - That is the biggest concern. We're trying to be responsible neighbors. But when neighboring BLM they are 20 years behind in maintenance and that's a concern. I had submitted a bill see what opportunities exist to deal with this. I've tried to get hold of our federal representatives to see how to hold federal lands accountable. They used to do more trying find balance with environment and habitat. I had a hunting guy tell me animals are moving out of some places because the brush is so dense. I'm making an inquiry to see what we can do bill-wise. We as state legislators need our state to be accountable too.

Rep. Pam Marsh talked more broadly about what SB 762 does.

Marsh – In the big picture, 762 is an omnibus, which in legislative talk is a very broad bill touching a number of legislative areas around wildfire prevention and suppression. A lot of the suppression money, the firefighting money, is already at work in our community. It's funded individuals, fire districts, fire departments. It's enabled the agencies to keep staff on for a longer season which we know we need and to provide that backup so when our communities get to a very high risk situation we can have extra personnel stationed nearby in case we need them. We did not have that in 2020. So suppression money has been well put to work. The other part of the bill around prevention provides money for good forest projects. We already have in Jackson County millions of dollars from that bill that are being used for forest projects on the ridges back behind Talent and spanning over to Jacksonville. And that's really important because we know that's right behind our populated communities. And we have money for small forest owners. If you've got 5,000 acres or less in a parcel you can get some support for doing good forest health work. And then we have money in the bill for defensible space. So it's a broad bill. We allocated almost \$200 million to this work of both prevention and suppression with the intention of really bringing those resources to communities that are most at risk of wildfires. So that's the overview of the bill which I think sometimes gets lost as people dive right into details, but I appreciate a chance to give you that perspective.

Comment: One fear people in extreme and high risk areas have is being charged for firefighting.

Marsh - Let me make it clear. That's not contemplated anywhere in the bill. The bill does not make that possible. That is not going to happen.

Question: The other item is we have someone in town running around with fliers saying the state Fire Marshal can enter your property at any time and inspect your property. Is that true?

Marsh - So what the defensible space part of the bill contemplates is that your local fire district, if they take on the job, or the state Fire Marshal, will help you figure out what you need to do for defensible space. This is not a "come on the ground anytime." It's really intended to be a

collaboration to say, “here’s what we see as risks on your property.” If it’s appropriate to talk about funding opportunities that may be there. And frankly, if you’ve done your defensible space and you don’t need anybody to consult with you, then you’re just checked off. It’s about helping people understand their risks and ameliorate them.

Question: Have they outlined a plan for the enforcement of this?

Marsh - I think what will happen is you’ll work with the state Fire Marshal to figure out how to share the work. There are some local districts that are already doing a lot of this work so they’re going to want to take it on. There are others that may not have the capacity to do it. That’s part of the implementation process when you’ll be working with the state folks to figure out what you need, what they can do what you can do and so forth.

Something else I’d just love to share and I apologize if I’m repeating, but there was a lot of concern expressed and continuing around whether or not people’s insurance would be implicated in any of this. I talked to the insurance commissioner long before the map came out and they’ve been talking to insurance companies and what the companies have said is we’ve got way better maps than you’re going to have. And so they already know where you live. I will share with you as well my family owns 140 acres up in the mountains outside of Ashland that is noted as extreme and we lost our insurance a year ago because the insurance company said they are too small to be able to cover properties in high risk areas and the only reason we still have them is they made a mistake in the way they notified us and they had to keep us another year. So your insurance companies are already looking at risk on the ground. What we have a chance to do is to really demonstrate we’re doing good work in stabilizing fire situations across regions and in doing so stabilize the insurance companies and maybe we can partner with them to help people get some reductions on their rates when they’ve done good work or just to even keep their coverage. The insurance commissioner is currently doing outreach to all 150-plus companies that are licensed in the state to see if anybody is engaging in predatory practices which is what it would be if you used the state’s wildfire prevention program as an excuse for raising your rates. So far the answer is a resounding no. We’re not finding any company that’s looking at those maps. Some of them had no idea what the maps even were. And we’re also examining every single case where someone said my rates went up and I think it’s because of the map or the agent said it was because of the map. Again, so far we’re not finding that any of those bear out but if any of you know of or have yourselves or have friends who have heard such a message around their insurance policy I would ask you to have them, or have you, email me with the details and we’ll have the insurance commissioner look at them.

Morgan - My office as well Rep Marsh. I’m asking people to send them so we can all work together to make sure that they’re taken care of.

Chair Dorothy Yetter thanked the speakers for joining us and those present on Zoom said this was a very informative meeting.