

NISQUALLY VALLEY NEWS



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Inside This Edition



Company Pulls Out of Biosolids Venture in Yelm

Application in Limbo

BY ERIC ROSANE
erosane@yelmonline.com

A manager with the Washington State Department of Ecology's Solid Waste Management Program confirmed Thurs-

day that Abston Henricksen Land and Timber Company has pulled out from their agreement with a Lewis County biosolids applicator to spread biosolids on their farmland off 128th Avenue in Yelm.

Peter Lyon, the manager, said he received an email from President of Abston Henricksen Jason Abston on Sunday that said they would like to pull out from their

agreement. Abston gave no reason for rescinding their letter of agreement, which now puts Fire Mountain Farm's permitting application in limbo, Lyon said.

"From ecology's standpoint, it's no longer a complete application and so we'll stop working on it," Lyon said.

Jason Abston did not respond to a request for comment Thursday.

Lyon said Fire Mountain Farm's application will still be on file, and that Abston could change his mind and resubmit a letter of agreement, which would continue the process.

Ecology was hoping to have a decision made on Fire Mountain Farm's application by the end of summer.

"The question posed to me was: Does this mean that there

are going to be no biosolids applied in Yelm? And this doesn't mean that at all," Lyon said.

Opposition to the practice of applying biosolids has been spearheaded by Preserve the Commons, a group of community members who believe the sludge-treated fertilizer will have serious repercussions for environmental and human health.

Former Yelm Finance Director Was Investigated for Intimidating Behavior

Joe Wolfe Agreed With City to Resign Despite Inconclusive Findings

BY ERIC ROSANE
erosane@yelmonline.com

Former city of Yelm Finance Director Joe Wolfe left the city on mutual terms following a third-party investigation into allegations of intimidating behavior that was sparked by complaints from city employees who said he would sometimes become angry and have sudden outbursts, according to records obtained by the Nisqually Valley News through a public records request.

The report on the investigation, submitted May 17 by the Seattle consultation and investigation firm Daphne R. Schneider and Associates, concluded that Wolfe had behaved in an unusual and questionable manner during disagreements or interpersonal conflicts. However, because of the different interpretations of Wolfe's behavior, the investigation was unable to conclude whether he had violated city policy, which states that "violent or intimidating behavior is unacceptable."

City Administrator Michael Grayum chose not to comment on the investigation, but he said he was proud of the work he did with Wolfe.

"The big thing is, I can't say it enough, is how proud I am and the improvements we made to the budget," Grayum said

'We're Roughing It, But We're Alive'



MORE COVERAGE

Read about another suspicious Yelm area fire on **page A7**.

Eric Rosane / Nisqually Valley News

Firefighters battle a blaze that eventually destroyed a doublewide mobile home in Yelm Wednesday, June 12. The occupant of the home suspects arson, but the fire remains under investigation.

Yelm Family Homeless After Recent Fire

Father Suspects Arson as Community Members Raise Money, Provide Donations

BY DANIEL WARN AND ERIC SCHWARTZ
Nisqually Valley News

A Yelm family of five, including children ranging in age from 2 to 14 years old, are homeless after a fire tore through their doublewide mobile home on Stevens Street Wednesday, June 12.

Billy Lemm, father of Ashton, 14, Jazzlyn, 11, Byllie, 6, and Taitayn, 2, is currently living in a tent on the property along with his wife, April.

Though authorities have not made any public announcements, Lemm said foul play is suspected as the family had been the target of recent threats. He also believes it could be linked to the death of his 19-year-old son Austin last December, which he described as a murder. There have been no arrests in the case, he said.

"The kids are taking it pretty rough," Lemm told the Nisqually Valley News Thursday. "They're scared. The big word 'arson' comes out of the firefighter's mouth and that tends to put a spook in them."

Fire officials with the Southeast Thurston County Fire Authority have not announced a

cause of the fire.

The urn containing Austin's remains was pulled from the ashes, but other than that, the family lost just about everything in the blaze.

The family wasn't home at the time of the fire, but their black labrador Blue was inside. A neighbor kicked in a door to allow the dog to run to safety, Lemm said.

"Quite a heroic move on their part," he said.

Lemm, who was born and raised in Yelm, said the family had been at the Stevens Street home for about eight years. Now that it's gone, he and his family are left looking for a house or apartment to rent.

He said he'd rather not move into another mobile home or camper. The damage wrought during the fire has left his children in fear of such structures, he said.

Support has come in the form of the Lemm family's church. Jesus Name Pentecostal Church, located at 204 Jefferson Ave NW, is accepting donations to replace the family's belongings, and the family does have a storage unit. A family member has created a campaign on the online crowdfunding website GoFundMe.com. As of Monday, about \$600 had been raised out of a goal of \$5,000.

"We're relying on our church to try to calm the storm for us," Lemm said. "We're relying on the Lord to calm the storm for us."

To donate, visit www.gofundme.com/f/our-sister-lost-her-home-in-a-fire.

The Fire

The fire, which occurred just before 6:30 p.m., caused a temporary closure of a portion of the street as firefighters with the Southeast Thurston Fire Authority extinguished the blaze and cleared the scene.

As of June 13, the cause of the fire was still under investigation, according to Southeast Thurston Fire Authority records. In addition, the fire was confined to the mobile home and the area of the fire's origin included a heat source.

Four fire authority vehicles arrived to fight the fire, while six personnel were dispatched.

The alarm sounded at about 6:26 p.m. and the fire authority dispatched that same minute. It took about eight minutes for the Southeast Thurston Fire Authority to arrive at the scene from when it was alerted of the fire.

"Upon arriving I connected (Southeast Thurston Fire Authority's) LDH to the hydrant at

WHAT THE FAMILY NEEDS

- Ashton is a 14-year-old boy who wears a size 14 boys pants and XL boys shirts
- Jazzlyn is an 11-year-old girl who wears a size 9/10 and 11/12 girls pants and large shirts
- Byllie is a 6-year-old girl who wears a size 7/8 girls in both pants and shirts
- Taitayn is a 2-year-old boy who wears size 2T/3T
- April wears size 9 pants and Large/XL women's shirts
- Billy wears size 36/32 men's pants and XL shirts

Fourth and West Road E. and noticed what appeared to be a fully involved structure fire of a double-wide mobile home with law enforcement already on the scene..." wrote Lt. Russ Barstow in the fire authority's record of the incident. "I would estimate that we used about 2,000 gallons of water for extinguishment."

It was the second house fire in Yelm in just two days.

On Tuesday, June 11, a residential fire destroyed a two-story house on the corner of Solberg Street and 133rd Avenue in Yelm. Authorities believe it might have been the result of arson, a narrative from Southeast Thurston Fire Authority suggests.

Lemm, the former occupant of the burned home on Stevens Street, said he doesn't believe the same person set both fires.



Yelm Students Named to Dean's List at University of Washington

NISQUALLY VALLEY NEWS STAFF REPORT

Students from the Yelm area have been named to the Dean's List at the University of Washington for the winter 2019 Quarter.

To qualify for the Dean's List, a student must have completed at least 12 graded credits and have a grade point average of at least 3.50 (out of 4). Students are notified that they have achieved this distinction when they receive their grades for the quarter.

Here are the members of the Dean's List from the Yelm area.

- David Burnett, junior
- Juan Sebastian Castiblanco, sophomore
- Alexander Scott Christensen, senior
- Andrew Joseph McCauley, sophomore
- Seonhwa Pak, sophomore
- Richard B Parker, senior
- Raymond Piwinski, junior
- Melanie Jeanne Preston, senior
- Tanya S Ramanan, senior
- Taylor Brianna Russell, junior
- Aidan Christopher Thaler, junior
- Iesha Lena Ticknor, senior
- Lily Christine Wilkinson, senior

Roy Publishes New Transportation Improvement Report

BY NISQUALLY VALLEY NEWS STAFF

The city of Roy disclosed on Tuesday, June 11, an updated report of its transportation improvement costs, their status and collected revenues from 2018. There are no current construction schedules or projects.

According to information from the report, which cites the city's six-year Comprehensive Transportation Improvement Program that ends in 2024, the city plans on contributing \$6,000 to hire a contractor to patch potholes as needed and will contribute \$2,000 to replace missing, damaged or faded street signs.

The program details setting aside \$6,600 in reserve and matching funds for a future grant project.

The city also received \$17,582 in fees and \$534 in interest revenues in Washington State Department of Licensing fees.

The Roy City Council held a public hearing during its last meeting on Monday, June 10,

to discuss the six-year plan. No comments were made by the public.

Roadwork Near Nisqually Bridge to Cause Reduction in Lanes

BY NISQUALLY VALLEY NEWS STAFF

Near the Nisqually River Bridge, Washington State Department of Transportation crews will replace a bridge approach slab, resulting in lane reductions for two consecutive weekends on northbound Interstate 5.

The work will take place from 10 p.m. Friday to 4 a.m. Monday, June 21-24.

While two lanes will be open, they will be narrower than usual, so the speed limit will be reduced to 35 miles per hour.

Since WSDOT expects traffic to be backed up throughout the weekend, and especially on the respective Sunday afternoons, it suggests that people allow extra time for travel, use public transportation, carpool or travel before 9 a.m. and after 9 p.m.

Work on the roadway caused extensive delays last weekend, the first wave of the project. All work will be weather permitting.

Board of Health Approves Thurston County Opioid Response Plan

BY NISQUALLY VALLEY NEWS STAFF

The Thurston County Board of Health approved last week an Opioid Response Plan to help lead the county's response and address what the board calls "the greatest public health crises of our time."

According to a Thurston County press release, the plan identifies six goals and includes 25 response strategies. It's the result of 11 months of planning by 38 organizations, and nearly 100 individuals.

In brief, the plan includes efforts to reduce exposure and access of opioids, prevent misuse, treat abuse through expanded access, prevent deaths from overdoses and expand the distribution of naloxone, use existing data to draft response strategies, and identify and implement innovative strategies that reduce the risk of overdose.

"I'm very grateful for all the members of our community that worked so tirelessly to develop this plan. Together, we can save lives and hopefully end this

epidemic in Thurston County," said Schelli Slaughter, Thurston County Public Health and Social Services director, in a press release.

The Board of Health declared the opioid epidemic a public health crisis in Thurston County in June 2018. For more information on the Opioid Response Plan, visit the Thurston County Board of Health's website.

Washington's Average Wage Tops \$65,000 in 2018

SUBMITTED TO NISQUALLY VALLEY NEWS

OLYMPIA — Washington's average annual wage grew by 5.5 percent in 2018 to \$65,301, according to the state Employment Security Department — representing the largest percentage increase year over year since 2006.

The average weekly wage rose from \$1,190 in 2017 to \$1,255 in 2018. These figures include only those wages that are covered by unemployment insurance.

Much of the increase was driven by an 8 percent increase in total earnings, which grew by nearly \$15.8 billion in 2018. Overall, the average number of workers in Washington covered by unemployment insurance grew by just over 75,840 in 2018.

The industries with the largest average wage growth in 2018 were retail trade, up 16.9 percent; information, up 13.1 percent; and professional, scientific, and technical services, up 9.7 percent.

The average annual wage is used to calculate unemployment benefits for jobless workers. The minimum weekly unemployment benefit, calculated at 15 percent of the average weekly wage, will increase by \$10 to \$188, for new claims opened on or after July 1. At the same time, the maximum weekly benefit, which is the greater of \$496 or 63 percent of the average weekly wage, will increase by \$41 to \$790.

Currently, about 20 percent of unemployment insurance claims are paid the maximum benefit amount, and 10 percent receive the minimum.

In addition to unemployment benefits, the average annual wage is used in computing employers' unemployment taxes. Beginning in 2020, employers will pay unemployment taxes on the first \$52,700 paid to each employee — up from \$49,800 in 2019.

The state average wage also is used by the Department of Labor & Industries in calculating worker's compensation benefits and Employment Security's Paid Family and Medical Leave program in calculating benefits starting in January 2020.

50 Electric Buses Coming to Washington Transit Agencies

SUBMITTED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF ECOLOGY

LACEY — The number of electric buses rolling through Washington communities will more than double in the months ahead as the Washington Department of Ecology invests \$13.3 million to help local transit agencies buy 50 zero-emission, battery-powered electric buses.

"This is a transformational investment in our clean energy future and continues to push Washington toward zero-emission transportation technology," said Governor Jay Inslee. "Getting 50 more all-electric buses on the road is a big step forward, and it will pay off in better air quality across our state."

Transit agencies in King, Snohomish, Pierce, Clark, Benton and Spokane counties will receive up to \$300,000 per bus from Washington's \$112.7 million share of the federal Volkswagen settlement. The grants are intended to help cover the additional costs of purchasing an electric bus, compared to a conventional diesel bus. Transit agencies can also use some of the funding to pay for charging stations.

Heavy-duty diesel engines in buses and trucks account for about a third of all diesel emissions in Washington. Replacing these 50 buses will eliminate 68,000 tons of carbon dioxide emissions, and cut nitrogen oxide emissions by 70 tons over the lifetime of the vehicles.

"Big diesel engines are some of the largest sources of air pollution and greenhouse gases in our state, and investing in zero-emission alternatives is essential for improving air quality and protecting Washington communities," said Maia Bellon, Ecology's director.

The 50 buses supported by the federal Volkswagen settlement follow a \$9.4 million investment announced in December that is helping transit agencies buy 19 electric transit buses. That funding came from Washington state's separate \$28.4 million settlement with Volkswagen for the carmaker's violations of state law.

Both the state and federal settlements stem from the discovery that Volkswagen illegally installed software on its diesel cars that activated emission controls only when it detected the emissions were being tested. In ordinary driving, the software allowed the engines to emit as much as 40 times the legal limit

for nitrogen oxides, violating the state and federal Clean Air Acts and threatening public health.

Washington's Newborn Screening Program Now Testing for Additional Life-Threatening Disorders

SUBMITTED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

After expanding laboratory space and purchasing improved equipment, the Department of Health's Newborn Screening Program is testing babies for additional rare congenital disorders and plans to add more conditions in the near future.

"We save lives by testing all babies born in Washington for these rare congenital disorders, which can quickly lead to death or long-term disability if not rapidly identified," said Washington State Secretary of Health John Wiesman. "Babies with these conditions often seem healthy at birth, which makes early detection and treatment critical."

The department currently screens for 29 conditions using a dried blood spot collected from a baby's heel on a special filter paper card. Each year the laboratory performs nearly 12 million tests on more than 164,000 specimens from about 85,000 newborns. Each year, around 200 infants with one of the disorders are identified and can receive treatment early in life.

The State Board of Health determines which conditions are included in the screening, and additional conditions often require more equipment and laboratory space. The recent remodel and expansion has helped the department meet its needs for adding testing for X-linked adrenoleukodystrophy (X-ALD), an inherited disorder that affects the nervous system and adrenal glands. New equipment for X-ALD testing was funded in part by the Ethan Zakes Foundation.

Additionally, DOH will start second tier testing for cystic fibrosis this summer, which will increase the accuracy of test results and follow-up. In the near future, the department plans to add testing for mucopolysaccharidosis type I and Pompe disease, and is exploring adding testing for spinal muscular atrophy—all serious conditions that can be debilitating or deadly.

More information on newborn screening is available on the department's website.

WOLFE:

Continued From Page A1

Tuesday. "Realistically, I'm just excited Joe got a new position, and we look forward to working with him in the future."

Wolfe has since found new employment.

Wolfe said he was placed on administrative leave on Monday, April 8. Earlier this month, he resigned his position to "pursue opportunities closer to home," city Communications Specialist Andrew Kollar stated.

Kollar also wrote that the city was better because of Wolfe's efforts. He held the position for a year and nine months.

Allegations made against Wolfe span the last seven months, according to an executive summary of the investigation. While complaints came predominantly from the city administrator and customer service staff, finance department employees reportedly interpreted Wolfe's actions

differently, and have said that while he may become frustrated at times, "his behavior, even at those times, remains within the bounds of acceptable workplace behavior."

Investigators interviewed 12 employees, including city customer service staff, finance department staff, a council member, a department head, Grayum and Wolfe.

In an interview with the Nisqually Valley News, Wolfe said he had been looking for a new job before the investigation began and that the city harbors an unprofessional environment, which he described as "toxic." It wasn't a good fit for Wolfe, he said.

"At the end of the day, it was beneficial for both parties for me to move into a new decision," Wolfe said. "I'm happy that the investigation confirmed that I didn't violate any workplace policies. Now I can move forward knowing that I did everything

for the citizens of Yelm."

Allegations against Wolfe seemed to begin during a reorganization effort of the customer service and finance department late last year. According to the investigation, the two departments never agreed on the duties of the new customer service department, which had just absorbed two positions from the finance department, or the role of its newly promoted manager, Dana Spivey. Conflicts and disagreements ensued.

On April 2, Spivey lodged a formal complaint against Wolfe and a subsequent third-party investigation was launched.

Allegations of concerning behavior compiled through interviews with Spivey and other employees, included sudden outbursts, cases where Wolfe slammed his phone and desk drawers or pounded his desk, accusations of disrespectful and accusatory discussions toward customer service staff and an

incident where Wolfe smashed a coffee cup on the ground outside city hall, afterwards saying he "felt pretty stupid" and that it "wasn't the closure he wanted."

Grayum, one of the only city employees named in the investigation, said multiple times in the report that he felt intimidated by Wolfe's behavior. At one point, Grayum said he felt like he needed to "get ready to be punched" by Wolfe because of his behavior.

Conversely, staff of the city's finance department spoke quite highly of Wolfe and asserted that while his actions weren't normal, none of them felt frightened or witnessed any concerning behavior from him.

Accounts from finance department staff also contradict other claims that Wolfe accused a customer service staff member of lying about the number of calls she was sending to the Utility Billing Clerk, storming into her office with the intent of play-

ing those voice messages. Staff from the finance department described a "lively discussion about who should be responding to questions about utility billing."

They also contradicted claims that Wolfe would slam drawers or his phone and said they would have known if that occurred because of their proximity to his office.

None of the finance department staff ever recall Wolfe speaking disrespectfully or rude to anyone. Numerous interviewees did note that Wolfe would regularly apologize for his behavior when he believed he was frustrated.

Wolfe has denied ever slamming his phone or drawer as a result of frustration, according to the investigation. He did confirm that he smashed the cup, and explained that he does become angry and that his frustration does occasionally come through.

OUR CUSTOMER SERVICE IS CHANGING!

Our last day with customer service in house is June 27
Our new phone number for Customer Service 360-687-5151

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