

May 14, 2021

GARDENING & DROUGHT ►

Even in the driest of times, there are ways to conserve and still have a garden

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City manager Mike Kirn resigns; no reason given



Mike Kirn

By Kim Beltran
Tribune Editor

Calistoga city manager Mike Kirn has resigned.

The City Council is scheduled to approve at its May 18 meeting a “separation and release agreement” that guarantees Kirn a payout of \$185,684 as well as continued medical and dental coverage through COBRA (the Consolidated Omnibus Budget Rec-

onciliation Act), a federal program that gives workers and their families who lose their health benefits the right to continue receiving those benefits for limited periods of time under certain circumstances such as voluntary or involuntary job loss, reduction in the hours worked, transition between jobs, death, divorce and other life events.

No reason has been given for why Kirn chose to leave. He has been ab-

sent from his post for the past three weeks. The City Council held a special closed session meeting on the subject on Saturday, April 6, but there was no report of any action taken.

Personnel issues are private and City Council members are not allowed to reveal the content of discussions held in closed session meetings. They are only required to publicly report any action they take in such a meeting.

A text to Kirn from the Tribune last

week went unanswered.

Until this week, mayor Chris Canning had maintained that Kirn was on vacation. Now, a search for a replacement is underway.

“We’ll be in the market initially for an interim city manager, and eventually we’ll start a search for a permanent replacement,” Canning said Wednesday.

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Movement afoot to ban gas-powered leaf blowers

■ City Council sets aside \$30,000 in 2021-22 budget for environmental causes

By Sterling Shore
Tribune Intern

For the past several months, a group of local citizens has been mounting a push to have the use of gas-powered leaf blowers banned within the city.

Their movement took a giant step forward this week when, during a study session on the 2021-22 budget, the Calistoga City Council asked staff to include \$30,000 for environmental protection causes, including a possible gas-powered leaf blower rebate program.

“It’s a small but practical effort to eliminate what should be a pretty clear source of pollution and raise awareness that we can do something right here in our small town and be part of the tremendous effort it will take to come together to make the necessary sacrifices and to slow climate change,” said resident John Gleazer, who along with Millie Pease, has been garnering support by educating locals at the weekly Farmer’s Market and in front of Cal Mart about the hazards posed by gas-powered leaf blowers. They and others want a city-wide ordinance that would ban their use.

The city’s Public Works Department has already committed to replacing its own gas-powered blowers and has allocated \$10,000 in this year’s budget to do so.

According to ban proponents, some 80 California cities have banned the use of gas-powered blowers. Last October, in response to a citizen-led petition, the Yountville Town Council passed an ordinance banning use of the noisy

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250 vaccinated at Calistoga clinic



PHOTOS BY CLARK JAMES MISHLER

People wait in line at Calistoga High School on May 6 to receive a COVID-19 vaccine. Below, volunteer nurse Mitzi Mishler administers a shot to a resident.

By Pat Hampton
Tribune Publisher

Some 250 people were vaccinated against COVID-19 at a walk-in clinic in the Calistoga High School gym last week, increasing the total number of injections given to Upvalley residents by St. Helena Hospital Foundation/Adventist Health to 31,000.

“It’s always uncertain knowing how many people are going to show up to a walk-in clinic, but the community responded beautifully,” said Glen Newhart, president and CEO of the St. Helena Hospital Foundation, which sponsored the May 6 clinic.

Newhart said the Thursday night clinic ran smoothly in part because of the “army of volunteers” that help check people in, collect paperwork and assist at injection and recovery stations. He said Karen Cakebread, a Calistoga resident, is responsible for coordinating 130-140 volunteers “and she does a remarkable job.”

“Calistoga is a real working community,” Newhart said. “Many can’t just leave work to get here at a particular time or can’t drive to a clinic. It worked extremely well. Anecdotally, it was gratifying to see younger people bringing their mom or dad. The kids were vaccinated and wanted to make sure their parents were as well.”

He said the idea of a walk-in evening clinic seemed to fit the town’s needs better than a daytime clinic with scheduled time slots. Bilingual services



were provided by a dozen staff from the Upvalley Family Center, music played and the support was heartfelt, he said.

Newhart said reaching 31,000 vaccinations in the upper part of the county is remarkable for the smaller cities here compared to Napa and American Canyon.

“We’ll never get to 100%,” he said. “But we can get to 70-80%.”

This week county officials announced that 58,638 county residents have been fully vaccinated.

Newhart said the mobile unit will begin administering Pfizer COVID-19 vaccines for adolescents ages 12 – 15, with a clinic for Calistoga in partnership with the school district sometime next week. He did not have an exact date but said it will be announced through the school district and support service agencies. The first youth clinic was held

BUDGET TALKS

Council asks staff to add \$1.2 million in spending

By Kim Beltran
Tribune Editor

With a 34 percent reserve in its General Fund and revenues on the rise, the Calistoga City Council this week asked staff to add another \$1.2 million in expenditures to the proposed 2021-22 budget.

The bulk of that money would pay for new and vacant staff positions as well as better retirement compensation for firefighters and police officers.

Nearly four years of lean budgeting in the wake of fires, power shutoffs and a pandemic has forced managers and the council to leave vacant staff positions unfilled. At the same time, employee workloads have increased due to an improving economy, a laundry list of capital improvement projects and the ongoing burden of meeting federal, state and regional requirements to receive funding or necessary approvals.

“We’re stretched pretty thin right now, but we’re making it work,” Planning and Building director Zach Tusinger told council members during a four-and-a-half-hour budget study session on Tuesday. Current staff is doing a good job of filling in the gaps, he said, but it’s not something that can be maintained for the longterm.

Council members agreed, approving requests to hire an assistant/associate planner (vacant), an assistant/associate engineer (vacant), a code enforcement officer (vacant), three new full-time firefighters, a new full-time police dispatcher and a new full-time police lieutenant. The council also

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