

Damascus votes to cancel councilor and mayor communications in city newsletter

Published: Thursday, April 14, 2011, 10:12 PM Updated: Thursday, April 14, 2011, 10:32 PM



By **Natalie Feulner, The Oregonian**



[View full size](#)

Natalie Feulner/The Oregonian

The Damascus City Council discusses the content of the monthly city newsletter Thursday at city hall.

DAMASCUS – The Damascus City Council voted 6-1 during a work session Thursday, to discontinue communication written by councilors and the mayor in the **monthly city newsletter**.

Council also made a recommendation to the **Committee for Citizen Involvement** to discuss and vote whether a monthly newsletter is necessary or could be cut down to published every other month.

The concerns arose after many residents wrote and spoke with councilors about a

recent article by Mayor Steve Spinnett regarding a forum held April 9.

The forum was sponsored by the Taxpayer Foundation of Oregon and included presentations by the **Cascade Policy Institute** and the **Cato Institute** about understanding the city's comprehensive plan.

Many residents felt the article promoting the event was a political move by Spinnett and should not have been included in a taxpayer funded, non-biased publication.

All articles by the mayor or council usually include the following disclaimer: "*Council and Mayor's articles are written from the perspective of the author and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the entire council.*"

Councilors Diana Helm and Barb Ledbury argued Thursday that this wasn't enough and that problems surrounding how articles were interpreted had been going on for too many years.

"There's always going to be people who take issue with what we are saying, whatever type of article it is,"

Ledbury said.

Councilor Mary Wescott also said concerned citizens had been coming to her family's business complaining about what they saw as an advertisement.

However, Spinnett stood by his argument **made at a council meeting earlier this month** that not allowing the Mayor's Monthly was an attempt to censor him.

"This is a very sacred thing and to have a practice that's been ongoing for years and then to choose at this point in time to stop communicating ... is very inappropriate and censoring the mayor," he said.

However, after the meeting Spinnett said he was not in poor spirits about the decision because he has other ways of communicating information to the public.

The other dissenting voter, Councilor Randy Shannon argued it wasn't the Mayor's Monthly as a whole that caused him concern. Instead Shannon argued, that the article shouldn't have been published because it spoke directly about the comprehensive plan which is on the ballot for the May 17 election.

"My concern has been about using taxpayer's money during an election era," Shannon said. "From the time that the signatures are submitted, if a councilor or mayor was going to write an opinion about something, it should come by council."

To see how residents felt about this issue, see our poll from last week. As of Thursday evening, 62 percent of the 105 voters did not think the mayor should have had the power to write whatever he saw fit in the city newsletter.

-- **Natalie Feulner**; Twitter: **@hppyvlyreporter**

© 2011 OregonLive.com. All rights reserved.