

Sowers steps off of McCall City Council over residency

‘Unknowns’ make moving back to city uncertain

BY DREW DODSON
The Star-News

Thom Sowers resigned from his seat on the McCall City Council last Thursday amid “unforeseen circumstances” that has him living outside the city limits indefinitely.

Sowers has lived with family just outside of city limits since August when he sold his home on Boydstun Street as part of an eventual move to a home he is building in Bear Basin, which is inside city limits.

But the COVID-19 pandemic, building costs, a lack of rental units and other factors created “too many unknowns” surrounding his city residency, Sowers told The Star-News.

State law requires city council members to live in the city limits.

“I wouldn’t want to say my intention is to meet the requirements of living in the city and then three or four months go by and I’m still living somewhere else,” said Sowers, 50, a licensed social worker.

“I don’t think that’s

fair representation for the citizens of McCall,” he said.

McCall residents interested in filling Sowers’ seat on the council need to apply to the city by Nov. 23 at 5 p.m. Applications can be found at <https://www.mccall.id.us/openseat>.

Potential appointees will be interviewed by the council during a special meeting on Dec. 2.

Eligible candidates must have at least 30 consecutive days of city residency and be at least 18 years old, a United States citizen and a registered voter in McCall.

Sowers’ council seat is up for election next November. He was elected to the council in November 2017.

Sowers notified the city of his temporary residency change on Aug. 27, city officials said.

City Attorney Bill Nichols advised Sowers in a memo that living outside of city limits did not disqualify him from holding city office

because “his intention is to maintain his city residency.”

Nichols also cited a clause in state law that notes “a qualified elector who has left his home...for a temporary purpose only shall not be considered to have lost his residence.”

The Idaho Supreme Court has previously heard similar cases regarding the residency of elected officials, first in 1932 in *City of Huetter v. Keene* and again in 2010 in *State v. McDermott*.

Each case involved judges that were absent from the state for more than 20 consecutive days, which per state law rendered them ineligible to hold office.

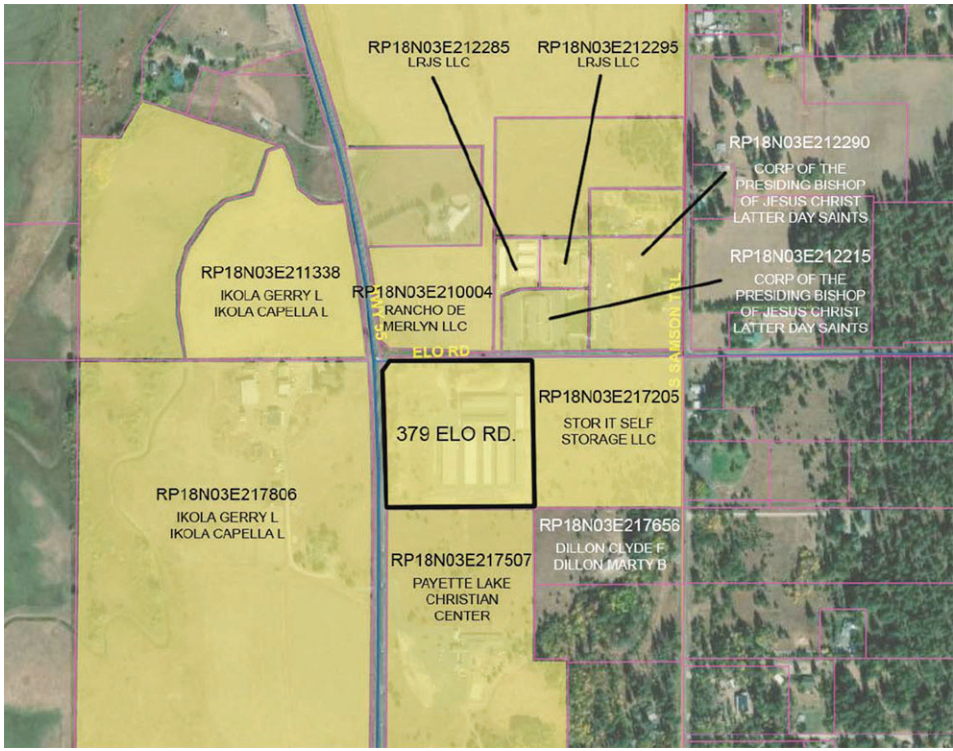
In both cases, the court ruled temporary absences do not disqualify officials from office unless the intent is to permanently change their residence.

In his resignation letter, Sowers gave thanks to voters and fellow McCall citizens and expressed a desire to remain involved.

“There are no words to express the love I have for McCall and its people,” he said. “I hope to continue to serve in capacities which will be beneficial to McCall and surrounding areas, as well as all of Idaho.”



Thom Sowers



Graphic courtesy City of McCall

Areas in yellow show the land that would be rezoned to allow commercial development at Idaho 55 and Elo Road under a proposal pending before the McCall Planning and Zoning Commission.

Elo

(Continued from Page 1) public comments on the proposal.

Public comments can be submitted ahead of the Dec. 1 meeting to City Planner Morgan Bessaw at mbessaw@mccall.id.us

“I’m not personally ready to move this forward,” commissioner Scott Tunnell said. “I don’t think we know enough about long-term intent, at least I don’t.”

City staff called the proposal “unusual” because there are few details to evaluate and it would do nothing immediately, yet could bind the P&Z to future decisions on the land.

“It’s a little abstract because they’re literally asking to change the map without specific development proposals or even kind of the zoning designation,” McCall Community and Economic Development Director Michelle Groenevelt said.

Approving the proposal would be a “dramatic” departure from public comments in the 2018 future land use plan that sought to “avoid commercial sprawl” south of McCall, Groenevelt said.

“I think if the commission was interested in seeing

commercial development on Highway 55 this far south, it would set that train in motion,” she said.

Retail stores, storage units, warehouses, contractor yards and professional offices would be some of the possible uses if the change is approved, Bessaw said.

Tunnell noted it is “hard to project the future,” but framed the proposal as “an opportunity to intentionally look at what will eventually come anyway.”

“I would just like to see maybe a little more master planning,” he said.

City water service and sewer service through the Payette Lakes Recreational Sewer and Water District would not be available to the parcels for the foreseeable future.

The fire station would be a satellite station for McCall Fire & EMS to store water pumper trucks, enabling a faster and more reliable response to the area in the absence of city water, Hurlless said.

Low-demand commercial usage and limited residential units could make septic sewer systems sufficient until sewer infrastructure is extended to the area, he said.

Also included in the application are two parcels totaling 78 acres across Idaho 55 from the storage

facility and a 71-acre parcel at 441 Krahn Ln.

Ikola Logging Company and Rancho de Merlyn LLC, the owners of the properties, signed an agreement consenting to the future land use designation change, Hurlless said.

\$20M earmarked for national forest health projects

BY MAX SILVERSON
The Star-News

The Payette and Boise national forests are eligible to receive \$20 million over the next five years to fund large-scale forest health projects under the federal Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program.

The West Central Idaho Initiative project was one of 10 recently approved nationwide, and would be the second such project in the area since its inception in 2012.

A key component of the projects is the collaborative planning process, which requires the Forest Service to plan the projects with groups like the Payette Forest Coalition and Boise Forest Coalition, a news release said.

“Participants work to find zones of agreement,

promote public engagement in forest management, and support thoughtful and well-designed forest management actions,” said John Robison, Public Lands Director for the Idaho Conservation League and Payette Forest Coalition member.

The members of each coalition are made up of representatives from the timber, ranching and recreation industries as well as conservation groups and others.

The new projects would be focused on 2.2 million acres on the Payette and Boise forests and include prescribed fire, logging, road removal or improvement and habitat restoration.

Within the projects, restoration and other ecological work can be paid for by timber stewardship contracts instead of govern-

ment funding.

Logging within the projects benefits the timber industry but also the ecosystem through selective cutting and efforts to mimic the natural burn patterns of wildfires.

“These collaboratively designed projects can not only help protect communities from out-of-character wildfires, but also protect and enhance existing old-growth stands,” Robison said.

The new Shared Stewardship Agreement between the State of Idaho and the Forest Service allows projects to be designed around the needs of the ecosystem across federal, state and private land, the release said.

The previous collaborative restoration project, called the Weiser-Little Salmon CFLRP, included over 970,000 acres of land in

and around the Payette National Forest on the Council, New Meadows and McCall ranger districts, including these five smaller projects.

- The 50,000-acre Mill Creek-Council Mountain project is nearing completion.

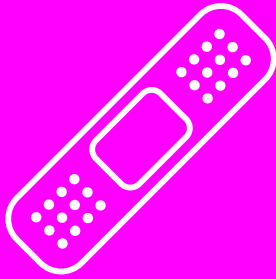
- The 80,000-acre Lost Creek-Boulder Creek was involved in a lawsuit in 2018 and the Forest Service is waiting direction from the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit on which parts will be allowed to proceed.

- The 50,000-acre Middle Fork Weiser River project was approved in 2017 and the project is underway.

- A draft decision on the 67,000-acre Huckleberry Landscape Restoration project came out Aug. 11.

- The 70,000-acre Granite Meadows project is currently being studied.

FLU FIGHTER GET THE SHOT!



This year, your flu shot is more important than ever. Having both flu and COVID-19 at the same time, or one after the other, could be devastating for your health and recovery. The flu vaccine is your best shot to protect against flu. Everyone six months or older should get this annual vaccine.

These illnesses are so similar, it can be impossible to tell them apart without a test.

- Both are contagious.
- Both can cause mild to severe illness and could possibly lead to death.
- Both often come on suddenly and can present with some or all of the following symptoms:

Fever, chills, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, muscle or body aches, headache, fatigue (tiredness), vomiting and diarrhea. COVID-19 may also cause shortness of breath and a new loss of taste or smell.

- Flu almost always causes symptoms in those who are infected.
- But many people with COVID-19 can have mild symptoms or no symptoms at all. Even without symptoms, people can still spread the virus, which has made it difficult to contain the pandemic.

For flu and COVID-19 resources, including common questions and symptoms, visit stlukesonline.org.



OPINION

Where federal dollars are put to good use (for once)

Examples of wasteful spending by the federal government are easy to find. There was the time the National Science Foundation received \$856,000 to conduct a study to see if it is possible to train lions to walk on a treadmill. And, the U.S. Air Force Office of Scientific Research conducted a study which determined that the first bird on earth most likely had black feathers. But the \$20 million that is about to be spent by the Forest Service on the Payette and Boise national forests will be money well spent.

The forests are to receive the \$20 million over the next five years to fund large-scale forest health projects under the federal Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program. These projects designate large swaths of forest that need work in several areas. They are overgrown with timber and brush that can fuel a wildfire, have old logging roads that put sediment into streams, and have difficulty supporting populations of wildlife and fish. The grants will pay for logging, brush clearing, prescribed burns, removal of roads and making the forest friendlier to deer, elk and fish. Besides making the forests healthier, they also will provide jobs for people to cut the trees and do the other work.

The best part is that these projects will actually get done because they will be planned as part of a collaborative process with the Payette Forest Coalition and the Boise Forest Coalition. The members of the coalitions are made up of representatives from the timber, ranching and recreation industries as well as conservation groups and others who have an interest in how national forests are managed. These groups have operated successfully for years to work out differences before decisions are made and contracts are let. They have proven their worth and the result has been hundreds of thousands of acres of healthier forests.

So the next time you shake your head when you read the U.S. National Institutes of Health funded a \$592,527 study to explain why chimpanzees throw their feces, don't think all of your tax dollars are going to waste. They are being put to good use in your own back yard.

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Letters to the editor

Valley deputies need more tools when facing active shooters

To the Editor:
In response to the letter to the editor in The Star-News a couple of weeks ago, regarding the purchase of equipment for Sheriff's Deputies ("Change in leadership is needed for Valley County sheriff," Oct 22, 2020). I feel it necessary to explain to all of you why this decision was made.

My top priorities as the sheriff is public safety, officer safety and being a good steward of the monies allotted to me to provide public safety. Three times in the last 12 months our deputies have responded to calls involving armed suspects with either shots fired or hostages reported taken or both. In each of these situations' deputies were confronted with suspects having superior fire power.

Due to our remote location, deputies wait for extended periods of time for appropriate back-up to arrive from outside agencies. In a debriefing of each of these incidents we became aware of the deputy's inability to get proper sight picture of the suspect in the dark. This put our deputies in danger as well as the hostage.

We identified a need for improved equipment for each of our deputies. The equipment we purchased is standard throughout the United States. We reached out to contacts within the industry, explained our situation and this allowed us to save the county taxpayers a significant amount of money to get caught up on the upgrades of current equipment and purchase some new equipment.

Our command staff comprised a proposal to purchase this much-needed equipment and had it approved by myself and the Valley County commissioners. This proposal included lights and non-magnified sighting systems for each current rifle in our armory and four additional rifles with scopes with magnifying capabilities.

These are needed to provide deputies with capabilities to wait for appropriate teams to arrive. All deputies have recently gone through an Idaho POST approved rifle school to assure familiarity and safe operations of the new equipment.

This training was provided for free of charge to Valley County Sheriff's Office due to our ongoing cooperative involvement with local law enforcement agencies. They are continuing this type of training on a regular basis, policy and procedure was in place prior to the deployment of this new equipment.

As the sheriff of Valley County, it is my duty to protect my constituents and all that visit Valley County. I also have a duty to supply the proper equipment to provide such protection.

Our calls for service are on the rise in Valley County, we have been discovered by the outside world. The demographics are changing and we would love to keep our little private piece of the world just the way it is.

Unfortunately, we must be realistic and understand that we have to make changes to meet the needs and expectations of the public. We can't keep our heads in the sand, we need to be prepared for what might happen.

The equipment that is needed is expensive, but we went into this very well educated. We are providing the proper equipment and training for when the next event occurs. Sadly, it's not a matter of if it will happen, it's a matter of when.

I am very aware that I may get some negative comments in regards to this, however that is part of being the sheriff, you take the good with the bad and you have many sleepless nights. I have always taken the high road and have done the right thing amidst adversity and criticism.

The safety of the public and the safety of the deputies and officers that serve this community should be high on everyone's list of priorities. The majority of our equipment, such as vehicles and armor are dictated by liability. We cannot afford, nor should we be derelict in our duty to supply inadequate equipment to such an important job.

Thank you all for your patience and understanding. Remember our Valley County commissioner meetings are open to the public and the agendas are posted. I also have an open-door policy. If you have

questions just come in and ask.
Patti Bolen
Valley County Sheriff

Political parties must protect a system of dissenting views

To the Editor:
The recent incident about theft and desecration of a Biden-Harris campaign sign in McCall ("Stealing, burning, dumping Biden sign does not show character," Letters to the Editor, The Star-News, Oct. 29, 2020) reminded me that every political party has adherents who do this kind of thing.

I am a registered Independent, but in the early 2000s in Seattle I was a registered Republican and I ran for state office against a Democrat. I placed Republican campaign signs in my yard on Queen Anne.

Awakened to noises outside several mornings before dawn, I looked out each time to see my campaign signs on fire. Someone had poured lighter fluid on the signs, and then torched them. This, in fact, occurred throughout the neighborhood several times with Republican signs during the election cycle.

In a multi-party system of government like ours there will always be those who construe an opposing campaign as oppressive (whether it is or not), and they may react to campaign materials with contempt or even violence.

The sober question each voter has to ask is: Does my party in its platform propose eradicating opposing parties, or does it protect a system that allows dissenting views?

Floyd (F.A.) Loomis
Donnelly

Hasbrouck thanks supporters for reelection to commission

To the Editor:
Thank you to all who supported me during my reelection to the commissioner position. A special thanks to the Republican central committee for the great help with ads and putting out signs during the fall general election.

I'm very grateful to be able to represent Valley County on the many sub-boards I'm on, including the Central District Board of Health. Even though this board has been challenging with the mask mandate towards all of us, I have gained valuable knowledge in the fight against the COVID-19 virus.

I'm looking forward to working with all the old and new elected officials and will strive to run our local government as efficient as possible. Thanks again.

Elt Hasbrouck
Cascade

Coronavirus thanks those who make spreading to others easier

To the Editor:
I want to thank you but first let me introduce myself. You certainly know me although you may not have met me yet.

I am the Novel Coronavirus which means that I'm new. I'm what's happening. My great-great grandfather was born in the Fall of 2019, which is the reason that the illness that I cause is known as COVID-19.

My official name is SARS CoV2. I come from an infamous family that has caused death and illness among humans in decades past.

But I digress. I'm thanking you for making your bodies available so that I can reproduce. Without your cells, I don't have the capacity to copy myself and my genetic offspring would perish from the Earth.

Worldwide, and especially in the United States, you have generously made your cells available to my ancestors so that we could use their machinery to produce offspring by the billions. Please keep up the good work!

I am grateful when you assemble in large groups for parties and gatherings. That creates a target-rich environment, allowing me to spread as you get close enough to each other that I can ride from one to another on the vapors from your respiratory tract as you talk, laugh, shout, and sing.

Oh, when in public, remember not to wear a mask. I get all tangled in the fibers of the masks making movement much more difficult, if not impossible.

If you must wear a mask to appear as

though you care about others around you, be sure to wear it loosely and under your nose. That gives me a perfect escape hatch to jump ship.

If you get sick, don't worry about it. You know that your illness will most likely be mild, or maybe not. Take a chance, live a little.

Isolating in your house when you are sick is for scaredy cats. How am I going to get out and survive if you stay at home?

Don't worry about washing your hands as frequently as you are told to. Your hands make a perfect vehicle for me to ride from contaminated surfaces that you've touched to your mouth, nose, or eyes, and voila, I'm in.

Thanks a million for all the Halloween parties that you attended last month. That was perfect, and I'm gratified to see the results of those get-togethers showing up as exploding numbers of cases in Valley County.

Remember that Thanksgiving and Christmas are coming soon. Be sure to assemble in large groups then, as well. You know that you are getting tired of having to deal with just the people in your "bubble." They are really getting on your nerves.

As I continue to spread and reproduce, your hospitals are becoming overwhelmed with my victims. This puts the provision of all kinds of healthcare, not just care for COVID19, at risk. Boy am I proud of that!

I can't thank you humans enough for all that you have done and have failed to do. It's making life for me so much easier and more rewarding.

Keep up the good work. Signed: SARS CoV2 (aka the Novel Coronavirus)

The above message is not meant to be serious. It is meant to spotlight how our personal choices and behaviors support the spread of this virus.

Positive COVID-19 cases have significantly increased in our community. You have a choice. Choose your loved ones, choose your community.

Choose to limit interacting with those outside of your household. Choose to wear a mask, watch your distance and wash your hands.

Gregory Irvine
Chief of Staff

St Luke's McCall Medical Center

Refusing to do your part during a pandemic is unpatriotic

To the Editor:
Almost a year ago, a dangerous and deadly foe invaded our country. It came on two fronts, from Asia and from Europe. It has now killed almost a quarter million Americans, more than World War II, and the Korean and Vietnam wars combined. It has devastated our economy and overwhelmed our healthcare system.

A pandemic is a relentless enemy. One person who has the infection spreads it to two or three other susceptible people, and so it grows exponentially, every seven to 10 days. First one, then more than 6,500 in two months and more than a million and a half in two months more.

But it can be stopped. If we can just reduce the infection rate, from three to less than one, it will exponentially go away. Reduce it to one out of two people, two months reduces the million to less than 25. Two months more and it is gone. If we had waged war effectively against the virus, it would be gone by now, as it is in Australia, New Zealand, Taiwan, Singapore and others.

How do we reduce the infection rate? Simple, we wear masks, stay at least six feet apart as we travel around, avoid large groups of people, wash our hands, quarantine if we are exposed, isolate if we are infected. When a vaccine becomes available, if we get it, that will help, too.

Some people have the attitude that they personally are not at high risk of getting it and if they do, they are not likely to get very sick or die, so it is not their problem. Imagine if an army felt that unless they were on the front lines, they shouldn't be bothered doing anything for the war effort.

In world wars, America has traditionally pulled together, bought war bonds, collected scrap metal and raised victory gardens. A pandemic is a global battle, and refusing to do your part is simply unpatriotic.

It is time people who refuse to follow
See LETTERS, Page 5

VIEWPOINT

Keep state lands open to the public and ecologically healthy

BY JEFF CANFIELD

We are the Payette Endowment Lands Alliance, a new grassroots organization working to conserve and protect the Idaho endowment lands located in the McCall area.

These lands, constituting approximately 28,000 acres of the 100,000 acres in the Idaho Department of Land's Payette Lakes Supervisory Area, surround Payette Lake and extend out from there in every direction.

Currently, under state constitutional authority, the Idaho Land Board holds these lands in trust for designated beneficiaries, primarily K-12 public education. We envision a future where the McCall area endowment lands and their ecosystem are protected and enhanced in perpetuity while generating revenue for the Idaho Endowment Trust.

It has become clear that the McCall area endowment lands are at risk of being sold or traded to private interests. For example, Trident Holdings LLC has expressed interest in acquiring these lands for development, and it is likely that numerous other companies will submit applications to the IDL to acquire specific parcels of endowment lands.

Why is this concerning? This land is owned by Idaho trust beneficiaries and man-

aged by IDL. Trading or selling it off to the highest bidder could come at the long-term expense of these beneficiaries.

Also, if these lands are privatized, gates will go up and the public should expect to lose access to them forever. Lastly, loss of the McCall endowment lands is a statewide issue. If big money can buy these lands, it can happen to endowment lands all over the state.

The long-term values of the McCall area endowment lands for the trust beneficiaries go far beyond their present dollar value. These lands provide a buffer around the lake and protect its water quality, which in turn enhances the value of the lands. These lands also provide viewsheds, wildlife habitat, and recreation, generating valuable tourism revenue and tax dollars that indirectly benefit public education.

These endowment lands are critical for the health and survival of our ecosystem and consequently must be protected for the beneficiaries and the citizens of Idaho who can continue to enjoy them as they have since statehood.

So what can the public do? Although the land board has the authority to decide the fate of endowment lands without public input, the public can attend the monthly land board meetings virtually or in person

and provide comments by email or mail prior to the meetings.

The next land board meeting is Nov. 17 at the Capitol in Boise. Agenda items are expected to include an update by the IDL of a draft strategic plan for McCall Area endowment lands and a presentation by Trident Holdings.

The public can provide comments about the items presented at the Nov. 17 meeting by writing to the Land Board and IDL prior to the subsequent meeting on Dec. 15. More information can be found on the IDL website at: <https://www.idl.idaho.gov/about-us/land-board>.

PELA supports forming a coalition to work together with the City of McCall, Valley County, Ponderosa State Park, and IDL to find pathways to keep the state lands open to the public, ecologically healthy and protective of the lake and the watershed while helping the state generate "long-term financial returns" for the trust beneficiaries. This would be a "win-win."

Currently, PELA is strategizing and collaborating with state and local officials, conservation organizations, and local people. To learn more about what we are doing, please visit our website that provides information and resources, including how to support PELA. The website address is

pelamccall.com. PELA's mailing address is P.O. Box 2351, McCall, ID 83638.

Over the past several months PELA has been contacted by many people. What has struck us most are the passionate feelings everyone has for this area.

Whether they were talking about crouching under a ponderosa in the rain to watch the mergansers playing and diving in the lake, hanging out with friends on the cliffs to watch the sunset, or taking their children to see the first spring flowers on the south facing slopes above Little Lake, all were verifying the joy in connecting to the natural world.

When trying to articulate the values of these experiences it's difficult to speak in the monetary terms the state demands. You can't say listening to the song of the creek as you lie on the granite rocks above Lake Fork Creek was worth \$50,000, but at that moment what it did for your heart was worth everything.

(Jeff Canfield is a board member of Payette Endowment Lands Alliance. Other board members are Lea' Albright, Judy Anderson, Melissa Coriell, Debbie Fereday, Jenn Gray, Julie Manning, Jeffrey Mousseau, Amy Rush, Douglas Smith, Dr. Darby Webb and Dr. Thomas Welty.)