

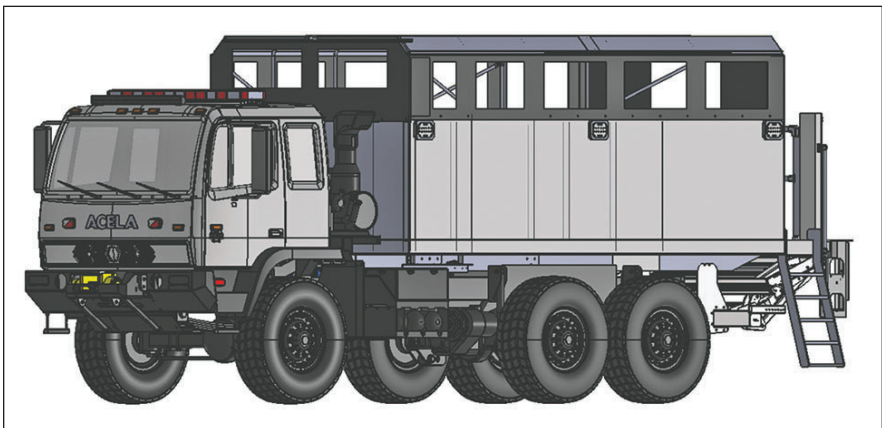
County buys beast of a truck for emergencies

■ \$350,000 for flood evacuations

By KELLY NIX

COUNTY SUPERVISORS this week approved spending \$350,000 on a “high-water” emergency vehicle that officials say will help first responders rescue people during floods.

The Monterey County Board of Supervisors on Tuesday



RENDERING/ACELA TRUCK CO.

Monterey County firefighters will use this 21-passenger truck for emergency rescues during floods and other disasters.

OK’d the purchase of an Acela Monterra 6x6 High Water Vehicle, which is described as a “purpose-built truck designed to operate in extreme conditions where conventional vehicles fail.”

“The purchase of this critical equipment is necessary to improve response capabilities in and during flood events,” according to the report to the supervisors about the vehicle, which is manufactured in Montana.

State legislators made \$20 million available to Monterey County to support flood relief and preparedness for the community of Pajaro, which flooded in March 2023 after the Pajaro River levee gave way. More than 200 people had to be rescued. In December 2023, supervisors approved spending \$500,000 for “flood-fighting equipment” for North County Fire Protection District, including a high-water vehicle.

The 112-inch-high, 270-inch-wide, all-wheel-drive Monterra has a 7-speed automatic transmission, 46.6-inch military-grade tires, an integrated rear-ladder system and

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Council axes ad hoc committees

By MARY SCHLEY

WHEN THE new council’s special meeting started Tuesday, the city had 10 small committees formed over the past several years to delve into various topics, from the police station remodel and house numbers, to Flanders Mansion and Flock cameras.

By the end, it had none.

Fledgling Mayor Dale Byrne opened the Jan. 7 session — which was scheduled so that newly elected councilman Bob Delves could participate before leaving on a three-week vacation that will have him missing next week’s regular meetings — with prepared comments on structuring meetings “with clear time frames and focused discussions on actionable items.”

“Public comments and council input are crucial, but brevity and relevance will help us maintain a productive pace,” he said.

Nonetheless, the meeting ran four hours after a prolonged public-comment period dominated by speakers who continue to complain about the Covid shutdown of the beach in 2020, and discussions by council members regarding the midyear budget report and the latest concepts for overhauling the deteriorating and inadequate police station.



Dale Byrne

Doing nothing

After taking public comment on items not on the agenda, Byrne — who at one point during the meeting banged the gavel with glee and remarked that he’d like a larger one — launched into a presentation on the roles of the mayor and mayor pro tem.

Byrne subsequently announced he would appoint Delves as mayor pro tem, and Delves replied that he was “honored and flattered” to be selected. Among their duties, Byrne and Delves will be in charge of determining the agendas of council meetings and recommending appointments to the city’s boards and commissions.

On the topic of ad hoc committees, which typically include two council members undertaking relatively short-lived deep dives into specific topics without the burden of Brown Act open-meeting rules, Byrne described their

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Panetta votes ‘No’ on Laken Riley immigration bill

By KELLY NIX

IN THE first piece of legislation presented to members of the new Congress, Rep. Jimmy Panetta on Tuesday opposed a Republican-led bill aimed at making it easier to deport illegal immigrants who commit theft-related crimes, like shoplifting.

Current law says that people in the United States illegally are subject to deportation if convicted of a felony, but not for minor crimes such as stealing.

Says he wanted changes to add protections for Dreamers

Panetta explained his vote against the Laken Riley Act, named after the 22-year-old nursing student who was murdered last year in Georgia by a 26-year-old Venezuelan man who was in the United States illegally.

“I support the provisions of the act that focused on keeping criminals in custody,” Panetta, a former prosecutor, told The Pine Cone. But he wanted the bill to include “safeguards” for what he called “law-abiding immigrants, including Dreamers, recipients of temporary protected status, as well as farm, hospitality, and other essential workers, who all contribute to our local and national economy.” He said such immigrants “may be indirectly impacted” by the Laken Riley bill.

Panetta said he reached out to House Speaker Mike Johnson in hopes of changing the bill to include “reasonable protections for law-abiding immigrants,” but Johnson opted for a legislative path that prohibited amendments. The bill was approved by the full House and could go to the Senate for consideration as early as Friday, where all 52 Republicans and Democratic Sen. John Fetterman of Pennsylvania are co-sponsors. Republicans need seven more Democratic votes to overcome a filibuster and begin debate of the bill in the Senate, according to USA Today.

Giving states a role

If the Laken Riley Act becomes law, it would also empower state attorneys general to sue the federal government if they determine their citizens have been harmed by Washington’s immigration policies, another provision Panetta didn’t entirely agree with.

“Although I appreciate a state’s authority to implement necessary protections for border security, especially those along our borders, I believe it is the federal government’s role to create and implement immigration law,” he said.

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Whyte’s sculpture of Jimmy Carter draws crowds

By CHRIS COUNTS

IN THE days that followed former President Jimmy Carter’s death last week at the age of 100, mourners laid flowers at the base of a striking bronze bust of the late statesman that was made by local sculptor Steven Whyte. The bust adorns a garden that’s part of Atlanta’s Carter Center.

For Whyte, seeing people gather at the bust was the supreme compliment. He noted that it has become a place for people to pay their respects to the former president in the aftermath of his death.

“I view my work as successful when it engages the viewer and brings people together,” said Whyte, who has a studio and gallery in The Barnyard shopping center.

The first of three

Starting in 2020, Whyte made three pieces for the Carters. The first was a small bust of Carter. The sculptor noted that Carter was hesitant to be the subject of a sculpture but warmed to the idea after seeing the small bust, which is slightly larger than life-sized.

“As soon as he saw the original bust, he called me up on my cell phone and asked me to sculpt one of Rosalynn,” Whyte told The Pine Cone.

Whyte spoke with him again by phone on Christmas Eve 2020 after Carter received the bust of his wife.

“He said it was the best Christmas present ever, and

that he had fallen in love with it,” Whyte recalled. “It was so sweet.” The works are displayed at the Jimmy Carter National Historical Park in his hometown of Plains, Ga.

After making the larger bust, which went on display

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PHOTO/INSTAGRAM

An Atlanta newspaper reported that crowds — including these tourists — were flocking to see Steven Whyte’s sculpture of former President Jimmy Carter in the aftermath of his death.

Gallery owner complains about real estate offices

By MARY SCHLEY

OVER THE decades, locals have predicted the demise of downtown Carmel due to the proliferation of souvenir shops, chain stores, fast-food restaurants, jewelry stores and art galleries, to name a few. Some of their complaints led to outright legislation — like the cap on jewelers and the ban on food franchises — and now, a former gallery owner thinks the city should stem the scourge of real estate offices, which he described at Tuesday’s city council meeting with doomsday language.

“There is an existential threat to our village’s economy, character and quality by the conversion of retail spaces downtown to non-retail uses — particularly, real estate offices,” said Richard Kreitman, who recently decided with his wife, Barbara, to close Gallery North on Dolores

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