

Appeal Tribune

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Mid-Valley communities face cuts if bonds fail

Voters to decide on multiple tax levy proposals May 18

Bill Poehler
Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

The impact the Stayton Family Memorial Pool has had on Mya Joyce's life is immense.

She was 1 when she went there for swim lessons for the first time. Later, she competed for Stayton Manta Ray Swim Club. She had her first job as a lifeguard until the pool was forced to close in 2020 due to COVID-19-related restrictions.

It's more than a building with a body of water inside to her.

"Pretty much every single kid in this community has learned to some extent



The Stayton Family Memorial Pool may be permanently closed if voters oppose a levy in the May 18 election. STAYTON MEMORIAL POOL

in that pool," said Joyce, a senior at Stayton High School. "It's so incredible what our pool has done."

But even as COVID-19 restrictions begin to ease, the pool's future remains in jeopardy.

Stayton voters are being asked to approve a pair of operational levies in the May 18 election. If the recreation levy fails, the pool will remain closed indefinitely because the city won't have the funding to operate or maintain it.

Over the past year, it's been tough to pass a bond or levy in the Mid-Valley.

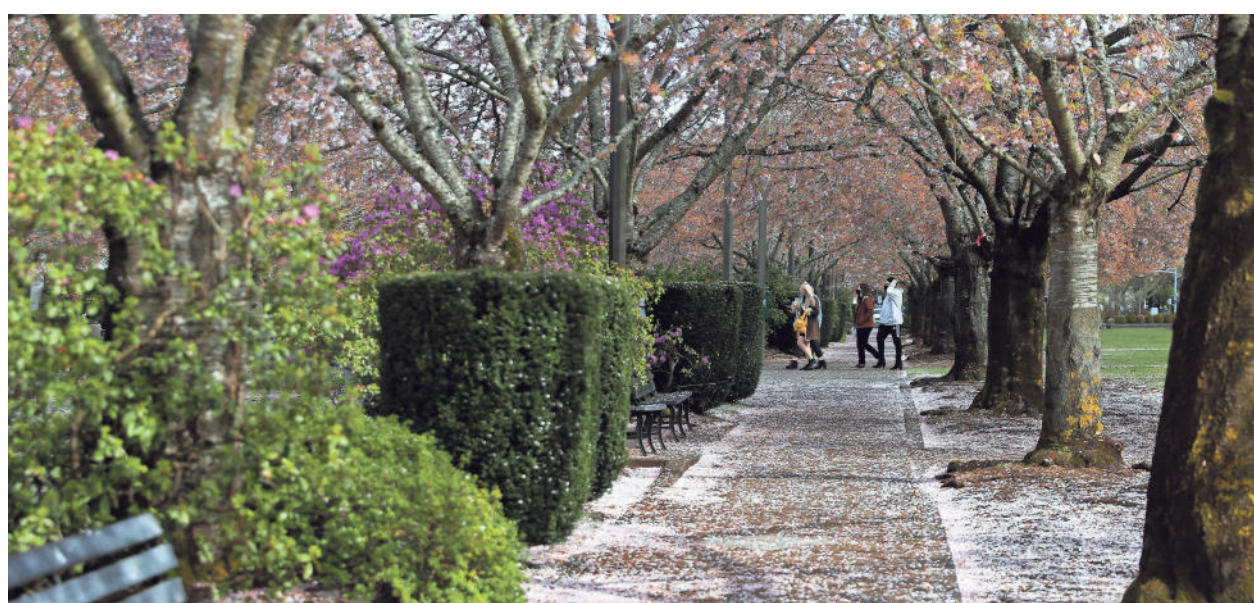
Voters in several districts, including Stayton, have voted down requests for money for operations or capital improvements in the past year.

Stayton had two levies that would have funded the pool operations on ballots in 2020, but both failed. It has now split up its levy on the May 18 ballot.

If those fail, some of the temporary closures could become permanent, such as at Stayton Pool.

"On me, personally, it would be probably very hard because it's basically my second home," said Bethany Wagar, a freshman at Stayton High School. "I was planning to have my first job as a lifeguard there."

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People walk the paths at the Capitol Mall as the cherry blossoms fall on Thursday. More sunshine and warmer temperatures are ahead for the Willamette Valley. BRIAN HAYES/STATESMAN JOURNAL

Warm, dry spring raises concerns

Conditions cause worry over rivers, wildfire

Zach Urness Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

Sunny and warm weather is forecast in the Willamette Valley for the coming 10 days, but increasingly dry conditions are also becoming a moderate concern over summer water supply and wildfire conditions.

With the exception of a few weak systems unlikely to bring much rainfall to Western Oregon, the forecast is primarily sunny with temperatures rising into the 70s next week.

That's good news for cooped-up Oregonians itching to get outdoors, but a bit worrisome for reservoir levels, river flows and wildfire conditions.

"At this point, I would say it's a 'cautious concern,'" said Andy Bryant, a hydrologist with the National Weather Service in Portland. "The issue is that April is looking pretty dry and we're running out of time for when we normally get the significant precipitation that would benefit the state."

"It's something we're keeping an eye on not only because of water supply but also for the potential for summer fire conditions."

Most dire in Southern Oregon

The issue is most dire in Southern Oregon, which is almost entirely under a moderate, severe and even exceptional drought, depending on the location, according to the U.S. Drought Monitor. Oregon Gov. Kate Brown already declared a drought emergency in Klamath County, due to low below-average snowpack and precipitation.

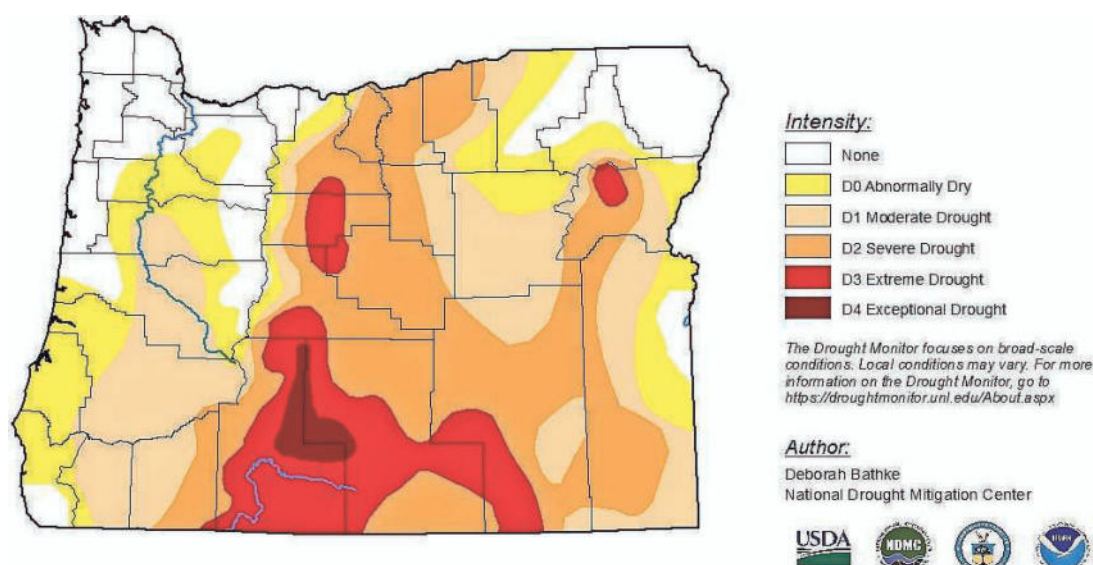
"What that reflects is just having dry conditions not just this year but for the past couple of years," Bryant said.

Northern Oregon in much better shape, but reservoirs a concern

The situation in the northern half of Oregon is much better than in the south, particularly in the mountains.

Oregon's snowpack is above normal across the length of the state's northern half thanks

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The latest drought conditions across Oregon as of April 6, 2021. U.S. DROUGHT MONITOR

Homeless deaths in Oregon not tracked

Advocates believe the number has skyrocketed in Marion County

Whitney Woodworth Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

A series of escalating events — a missed rent payment, septic arthritis in her hip, an eviction notice delivered Christmas Eve and a court ruling evicting her from their South Salem apartment — left Jill Koehmstedt and her family living in Cascades Gateway Park.

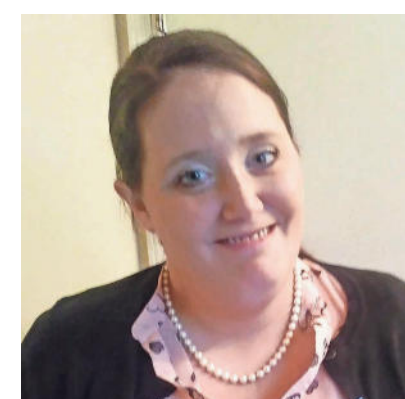
Less than a year later, in November, the MRSA infection spreading throughout her body left the mother of three dead at 36.

She didn't need to die, her longtime partner Josh Walker said. But the stress of not having a home and Koehmstedt's fear of having her children taken away if she sought medical treatment devastated her body.

She struggled to walk and over-self-medicated with Tylenol and ibuprofen, Walker said.

Meanwhile, Koehmstedt put on a happy face as the couple tried to find an apartment with an eviction on their record and take care of their children.

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Jill Koehmstedt, 36, died after experiencing homelessness in Salem.

JOSH WALKER/
SPECIAL TO THE
STATESMAN
JOURNAL

Lawmakers consider changing how votes are cast

Ranked-choice and STAR voting plans offered

Connor Radnovich Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

Oregon has been at the forefront of election reforms for years, positioning itself nationally as a gold standard for ballot access with the inclusions of vote-by-mail, automatic voter registration and prepaid ballot postage.

Now, state leaders are starting to take a look at the very system used to select winners.

Election reform advocates have proposed at the Oregon Legislature competing overhauls to how the state conducts its elections, with both plans aiming to expand voter participation and better reflect voters' true opinions.

Despite those shared goals, proponents of each measure say the other is not a suitable solution to the problems they see in the current system.

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