

COUNCIL

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bridge. All three of the phase II options suggested by the Greenway Exploration Committee call for the trail to be extended from here for about 1-1/4 miles to the pond in Island City.

Hanson said the council decided on separate hearings to prevent confusion.

“We realize that (holding separate hearings) will make the process longer, but we want the public to be clear on all options,” Hanson said.

The Greenway project has been a point of contention in recent years at some city council meetings. People living near the proposed route fear that having a public path close to their homes will cause problems. Supporters say the Greenway project would draw in visitors, boost the local economy and improve the quality of life of residents.

Option A

The Aug. 7 public hearing will discuss Option A, which proposes the trail travels east along the Grande Ronde River until it connects to at

least three private properties. The route, which would cost \$1.24 million, would pose few engineering problems and offer many vistas and access points, according to a report by the Greenway Exploratory Committee.

The drawbacks of this option are riverbank safety issues on portions of the route because of erosion. Erosion mitigation where the river has cut deeply into the bank would have to be conducted. Another concern is the number of easements that would have to be secured where the trail runs into private property.

Hanson said a boardwalk would have to be put in if the easements are not obtained. It is not known how much the boardwalk would cost.

Option B

Option B will be discussed at the Aug. 21 hearing. In this option, the trail would follow the same route of Option A until reaching private property. The pathway would then follow a ditch easement the City of Island City has through two to five other properties until reaching the Island City pond site. This route would

not require riverbank restoration nor major pathway construction along the river. Another plus is the pathway is direct and on flat ground, according to the committee's report.

A drawback is Option B has the least contact with the Grande Ronde River. A second is the status of the ditch easement along the proposed route is unclear. It may be that the ditch can't be used as a trail under the easement's restrictions, Hanson said. If this turns out to be the case, the city would have to purchase another easement along the route, the cost of which is not known.

Option C

Option C, which will be the focus of the Aug. 28 hearing, would cost \$2.69 million, making it the most expensive of the three options. This route would require two bridges to be constructed. One would take travelers to the north side of the river at a site where there is a severely eroded bank and private property. A second bridge would take users to the south side of the river to avoid an unim-

proved area.

This option would have limited impact on residential property and require little money to be spent on stream embankment work, according to the Greenway Exploration Committee's report.

Option C drawbacks include the cost of the bridges, which would raise the total expense as well as the cost of future maintenance work on the bridges, Hanson said.

Planning for the Grande Ronde River Greenway, a joint project involving the cities of Island City and La Grande and Union County, began more than two decades ago. The project has been on hold since 2011 when the first phase was completed.

Hanson said the city council will choose an option within two months of the Aug. 28 hearing. Should an option be selected that exceeds Island City's \$1.1 million ODOT grant, steps will have to be taken to secure additional funding.

“We will go as far as the money (from the ODOT grant) will allow, then we would have to wait until we had the opportunity to receive another grant,” Hanson said.

WAGE

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than the current Idaho minimum wage.

“It puts us at a competitive disadvantage,” Hassinger said.

Both Hassinger and Rudd argued that minimum wage shouldn't have to be a family wage.

Hassinger said he considers the minimum wage a training wage, which workers can quickly rise above with experience.

Rudd also pointed out many of the jobs he hires people for don't require a college education.

“It doesn't make sense that I have to pay a family wage job to a high school student who does not support a family,” he said.

According to a calculator designed at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the living wage in Union County for one adult supporting himself or herself is \$10.36 an hour. For one adult who is also supporting a child, it's \$22.99 an hour.

As of the 2017 third quarter, there were 160,274 minimum wage jobs in Oregon, according to the Oregon Employment Department. In Union County, there were 1,015 jobs paying \$10 or less an hour, which made up 8.8 percent of the total

number of jobs in the county. In Wallowa County, there were 270 jobs that paid the minimum wage or less, making up 8.9 percent of the total number of jobs in the county. In Baker County, there were 686 jobs paying \$10 or less an hour, constituting 11.6 percent of the total number of jobs. Each county has a higher share of minimum wage jobs than the statewide share of 7.4 percent.

Rudd said the steady raising of minimum wage until 2020 will lead to more autonomous methods of farming.

“If I'm spending \$100,000 on contract labor, it makes it pretty appealing to go build a robot,” Rudd said.

SENATOR

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wage survey of occupations and crafts performing commercial building and heavy and highway construction in the 14 geographic regions of the state. The rates in effect at the time bid specifications are first advertised are those that apply for the duration of the project. If during the bidding process, the prevailing wage rates change, the public agency has the option of amending the bid specifications to reflect such changes.

Robert Strope, La Grande city manager, asked the legislators to work to preserve local control to provide flexibility for the smaller counties that can't compete with the robust construction industry when it comes to wages.

“It died in committee (on the Senate side) last legislative session,” Barreto explained. “But it was a big issue in a lot of small communities around the state.”

Wallowa County Commissioner Susan

Roberts said, “One of the guys taking out debris (during the installation of the elevator at the Wallowa County Courthouse) was earning \$28 an hour. He was getting paid way more than guys in our county, or guys being paid by private business. But it could depend too on where the money comes from.”

Tim Seydel, EOU vice president for university advancement, said that the university will be looking for funding for construction projects including Inlow's grand staircase at the base of Ninth Street in La Grande. He added that campus safety was another issue EOU would like Hansell and Barreto to focus on.

“On the policy side (we will be looking for legislation) connected to school and campus safety,” Seydel said. “These are resources we looked at a few years ago after the tragedy at Umpqua Community College at a statewide level that wasn't funded. There are a lot of needs there to provide safer environments.”

Umatilla County Sheriff Terry Rowan discussed plans he has to modify the county jail and asked for funding for the project,

currently estimated to cost \$1.1 million.

“Eastern Oregon is struggling significantly with the mental health population in our area,” Rowan said. “As years go by all of those (mental health) resources have dried up. We usually tag (individuals struggling with mental health issues, addiction or suicidal tendencies) with a low level minimal crime to get them in the door, because you can't just drop someone going through a mental health crisis off (at the jail).”

Rowan explained the Umatilla County facility holds individuals from Umatilla and Wallowa county and also provides space for overflow from

Union County.

“We're a regional facility in that respect,” he said. Rowan said last year the county started working on gaining funding to make the project possible.

“Currently we have six holding cells, where we have to keep an eye on them 24/7, that quickly fills up,” Rowan said. “The modification plan is to repurpose (the jail) to house more individual cells.”

Roberts added that parole and probation officers struggle with the extra work load that should otherwise be directed to mental health professionals.

“This doesn't help parole or probation either,” Roberts said. “They have to cite them for something to get

them in the jail to get them help. But this means when they get out they fall under the purview of the parole and probation folks. We have two people in Wallowa County handling 120. It's not helpful to us how the legislature finances the parole and probation, especially with these folks who need a different kind of care.”

She recommended forming legislation that would impose a sales tax for law and justice, to create funding for mental health services.

“(That would be up to) a vote from the people,” Hansell responded.

Hansell and Barreto and their chief of staff took

information from the local representatives to possibly form future legislation in the 2019 that will impact Eastern Oregon. Additionally they took requests for state funding and grants.

Past legislation that has passed was a bill allocating \$9 million toward building a field house at Eastern Oregon University, developing a pilot program for urban deer population control in 2017, and in 2016 House Bill 4040, which was passed blocking a judicial review of the decision that removed gray wolves from the state's endangered species list, which assisted in a wolf management plan.

FIRE

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and playing in the forest there is reason to exercise caution. Along with the declaration of fire season, burn permits are now required for open burning and burning in barrels. To acquire a permit, a landowner must call a local ODF office and meet with an official.

Goodrich said the moderate fire rating could jump to high pretty quickly.

“Fuel conditions are changing rapidly,” Goodrich said.

High winds across the region the last week could easily spread a fire through light fuels like canyon grass, prompting precautions. The state requires industrial forest operators to have a water truck, hose, fire fighting tools and do a fire watch at the end of the work day. Sky lanterns are prohibited year-round throughout Oregon and tracer ammunition is not allowed during fire season.

“Wind accelerates fuel. Drying it sucks moisture right out of grass and light fuels,” Hessel said. “The other thing it does is if we get a fire in relatively green fuels with the wind pushing it, it carries fire a lot easier.”

Goodrich said waves of low pressure systems and cold fronts moving through the region have winds blowing westerly one day and from the east the next, but a high pressure system should be settling in by the second week of July.

During the heat of the summer a high percentage of forest and wildland fires are started by lightning. Restrictions like not using tracer ammunition on private land or fireworks on national forests are intended to reduce fire starts. Tracer ammunition started a fire outside Basalt, Colorado July 3 burning 5,200 acres, three homes and displacing almost 2,000 people.

“Most of the issues we've had with tracer ammo or some type of shooting has been on the west side — they've had some real challenges in Northwest Oregon,” Hessel said.

While all is quiet across the region, he said a lot of his staff are helping with fires all over the state like southeastern, southwestern and north central Oregon.

“We are fortunate to be able to go help in other places,” Hessel said.

As for the Wallowa-Whitman, Goodrich said the lookout towers are staffed, his crew dispatched to Arizona has returned and minus some chainsaw training, everyone is ready to respond to a wildfire when the time comes.

“We are geared up and ready to go,” Goodrich said.

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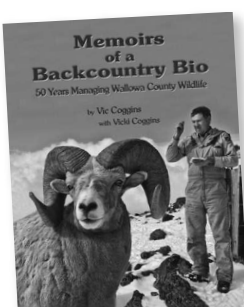
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