

EOU board remains quiet on OPM

By Alyssa Sutton
The Observer

Eastern Oregon University administration has provided little public information regarding an upcoming decision that has the potential to drastically affect the future of the university and its students. Some members of the Board of Trustees, who will be making the final decision in November, on whether to partner with an online program management company, would not offer a lot of information on what they know about the company or how they individually feel about bringing on an Online Program Management (OPM).

History

In August 2017, Eastern Oregon University requested proposals from online program management companies.

OPM's are third-party for-profit companies that assist universities in developing online curriculum and marketing strategies.

According to Eastern's executive director of regional outreach and innovation, David Vande Pol, who has previous experience working in online program management, the reason Eastern should partner with an OPM is simple: to increase enrollment.

He told the EOU Board of

Trustees in April that there has been a shift in demographics in higher education, with more and more students pursuing degrees online rather than on campus.

"Things are only going to get more competitive in the online space, especially for small universities without brand recognition," Vande Pol said at the April meeting, explaining why he believes the university should partner with an OPM. EOU saw a 3 percent decline in enrollment last fall.

Three OPM companies submitted proposals to EOU within a few weeks of the request, and two were invited to campus in October 2017

"I'm sure there are scenarios where our reserves could be used up, but I wouldn't say that in six years our reserves would be gone if we don't increase enrollment."

— Richard Chaves, Board of Trustees member and Finance and Administration Committee chair

— The Learning House and Pearson Online Learning Services. Vande Pol was the vice president of business development for the latter agency from 2013 to 2015.

In December 2017, EOU President Tom Insko and Vande Pol decided that EOU should explore a partnership with Pearson, and they presented the idea to the Board of Trustees in February 2018.

In February, Insko told the trustees he wanted to com-

plete the evaluation process with Pearson by May 25 and provide a recommendation to the board at that time.

In the February meeting, the trustees had a few questions regarding Pearson — mostly about what the process would be once integration began — and why Insko had created such a short timeframe to determine if a partnership with Pearson would be beneficial for the university.

"I think we have a sense of urgency to address our enrollment issues," Insko told the trustees at the February meeting. "The longer we wait, the more risk we (run)."

However, Vice President for University Advancement Tim Seydel told The Observer in June that Insko's and Vande Pol's teams had decided to wait until the next school year — fall 2018 — to make any moves regarding the partnership, allowing for faculty and staff to be back on campus prior to any changes.

Insko wrote in an inoffice email to faculty — which was part of a 60-page document a faculty ad hoc committee

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Fawns, calves fared better over the past winter

■ Deer and elk survival rates up in region

By Dick Mason
The Observer

The overall numbers are good — but the inconsistencies are a bit mysterious.

Census counts by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife indicate deer in Union and Wallowa counties came through the relatively mild winter of 2017-18 in solid shape, ODFW biologists Leonard Erickson of La Grande and Pat Matthews of Enterprise said Wednesday night at a presentation at Cook Memorial Library.

Fawns in Union County clearly benefited from a mild winter, Erickson said. He said the overwinter fawn survival rate in Union County's largest wildlife districts was just more than 80 percent.

"That is excellent," Erickson said.

The survival rate is much higher than it was after the winter of 2016-17, one of the most severe in Northeast Oregon in decades.

Curiously, the mild winter of 2017-18 did not significantly boost fawn survival rates in Wallowa County. Matthews said the fawn survival rates this year were only slightly better than those following the harsh winter of 2016-17.

"Why were the survival rates so low this winter? I don't know. With a much milder winter I expected the survival rates to be much better, but that was not the case at all," Matthews said.

The good news is that fawns in Wallowa County fared better during the

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Marijuana main topic of discussion by LGCC

By Cherise Kaechele
The Observer

La Grande City Councilor Nicole Howard ended Wednesday night's three-hour meeting asking the councilors to "own up" to their decision in June not to pursue allowing the voters to legalize recreational marijuana dispensaries within city limits.

Mayor Steve Clements admitted it was a decision he has regretted making.

"We got into the (discussion) of the pros and cons of marijuana," Cle-

ments said. "I didn't vote for the item in front of us. I didn't vote correctly."

In April, the majority of the council voted to put a measure that would ask voters whether they wanted to legalize recreational marijuana dispensaries on the ballot. Some of them stated although they would likely vote against the ordinance in the November election, they would support the action of taking that decision to the voters.

At the June meeting, when

the ordinance was in its second reading, a group of people pleaded with the council not to support putting it on the ballot. The council listened to those participants and voted not to pursue the ordinance.

Because of that, a citizen-led initiative is circulating to bring that issue to the voters.

Clements said the council lost sight of the original intention and should've let the voters decide.

"There are very few times I've regretted a decision I've made, and

this is one of them," he said.

Councilor Gary Lillard said those community members who had supported the ordinance in April but did not return in June to give testimony should not have assumed the process was over.

While many argued the council took away the voters' democratic rights, Lillard said he doesn't agree, noting that "the county and city (already) voted against it."

He said a citizen-led initiative is

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Organizers continue marijuana petition efforts with days left

■ Citizen ballot initiative to vote on marijuana ban 400 signatures short

By Max Denning
The Observer

With the deadline quickly approaching to get on the ballot in November, the citizen-led initiative to let voters decide whether to allow recreational marijuana sales in La Grande has collected more than 800 signatures of the necessary 1,200.

At a rally held at Max Square on July 11 before the city council meeting, around 30 supporters of the initiative gathered. David Moyal, co-sponsor of the initiative and chief petitioner, said he was impressed with the amount of signatures they had collected so far.

"I think it's an amazing achievement considering we've done it in nine days," Moyal said.

If the ballot initiative doesn't receive 1,200 signatures by July 17, then supporters of repealing the ban will have to wait until 2020 to try again to get it on the ballot.

In 2014, recreational marijuana was made legal in Oregon; however, the legislature allowed counties that voted against legalization to vote on whether to legalize dispensaries. The City of La Grande had a very close vote for the legalization, but ultimately voted against it. This led to the city council opting out of the sale of recreational marijuana. This April, however, the city council revisited the issue and voted 5-2 in support of taking steps toward letting citizens decide whether to repeal the ban.

In May, the council held the first formal reading of the measure, without much discussion from the public or the



Max Denning/The Observer

Mayor Steve Clements signs the petition to vote on the recreational marijuana ban July 11. In June, Clements voted against having the citizens of La Grande vote on the ban in November.

council itself.

At the June city council meeting, the second reading of the measure was held, and more opponents to repealing the ban attended the meeting.

After their testimony, the council voted 6-1 to leave the ordinance as is, with councilor Nicole Howard being the single vote against.

"They closed off the democratic process from both ends," Moyal told The Observer Tuesday. "They said, 'Well we're not going to give it to the people to vote and we're not going to give it enough time for an initiative process either.'"

Moyal said he had originally pulled the paperwork to start a citizen ballot initiative in March, but halted his efforts when the council began steps toward letting citizens vote in April.

Some petition signees are more focused on the democratic process than they are on legalizing marijuana, Moyal said.

"I can't tell you how many people say, 'I don't use pot and I don't approve of the use of pot, but I think that we should be able to vote on it.' I've heard that response dozens of times," Moyal said.

Many of the petitioners and indi-

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Elgin City Council discusses progress on sewer and water system

By Audrey Love
The Observer

The Elgin City Council met July 10, to conduct its regular council meeting at Elgin City Hall. Mayor Allan Duffy, City Administrator Brock Eckstein and Councilors Mary West, Kathy Warren, David Reed and Risa Hallgarth were in attendance; Councilors Teresa Shaffer and Rocky Burgess were excused.

The meeting kicked off with a revision to the agenda by Eckstein, citing a reading of Ordinances 5 and 6 concerning Lightspeed Networks, Inc., and Eastern Oregon Net, Inc./ Priority One Telecommunications, Inc. — two franchises bidding to construct, operate and maintain a telecommunications network within the city — to be read by the council at the conclusion of the meeting.

Municipal Court Judge Laura Eckstein reported she expected a full court day July 11 with three trials and a full docket. She stated she would also be attending the first community service program meeting to initiate and expand an in-progress community service program, which would offer those unable to pay court fines the option

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Friday 58 Low Mostly clear
Saturday 91/55 Mostly sunny
Sunday 94/55 Sunny and warm

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