

RESOLUTIONS

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lin Lane. The city finished the construction project, which provides a safer option for students walking to and from school, in October. The other project was finding a new company to purchase the power produced by the city's hydro-electric plant. In November, the city began a new contract with Avista. The contract spans 18 months. A representative from the Cove City Council did not respond to a request for comment.

Elgin

At the beginning of the year, Elgin Mayor Allan Duffy told The Observer about two major projects the city would work on in 2018. Both projects have made significant progress since then. The first project was an effort to receive a block grant of \$3.5 million to redo the city's sewer system. Duffy said the city has submitted the first part of the application for the grant and is hoping to hear back in January 2019.

The other major project was the opening of the Elgin Museum. In January, Duffy said he hoped the museum would open in the summer of 2018 — now he said he is hoping it will be open by the summer of 2019. The museum will take over Elgin's former city hall, which was vacated when the city offices moved into the old W.C. Construction building in late September. “(The museum organizers) are in the process of putting their program together,” Duffy said. “We were working on a previous building and we found out about the availability of moving into city hall, so we shifted the focus a bit.”

He added the new arrangement “works out better for everybody.” Overall, Duffy said, 2018 went great for Elgin. He cited Cycle Oregon's stop in the town as a highlight, calling it a “huge success.”

Imbler

Imbler Mayor Mike McLean told The Observer in January that he wanted the city to continue with its water meter replacement project in 2018. Eleven months later, the project is moving full steam ahead. The city replaced 10 to 15 water meters in 2018.

“We want to replace between 10 and 20 a year,” McLean said. Imbler's meters are about three decades old. The city started its water meter replacement program in 2017.

There are now approximately 120 water meters left to replace. McLean hopes the project will be completed in the next five to six years.

RETIREMENT

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Mendoza and the La Grande School Board. The educator said the decision to retire was a difficult one. “My wife, Debbie, and I agonized over the decision for a few years but now seems like the right time to retire from the district. The school district is in a wonderful position to continue advancing student learning with our supportive school board members, effective superintendent, outstanding school leaders and dedicated teachers. I would not have wanted to work at any other district other than La Grande,” Tolan wrote. Tolan has won a number of noteworthy honors over the

Island City

A year ago, Island City Mayor Delmer Hanson said he wanted to start a street maintenance program a year ago. A year later the program is off to a promising start.

The program Hanson started calls for maintenance work to be done on one or two streets a year. The purpose of the staggered maintenance plan is to keep up the condition of the roads so they never need extensive, and expensive, repairs.

In 2018, the city had work done on McAlister and Walton roads. McAlister Road received an overlay of asphalt and was chip sealed to boost its longevity, and Walton Road's potholes were filled. The potholes were filled to make the road's surface less vulnerable to deterioration in bad weather.

“We did not want to lose the bad spots in the winter,” he said.

The mayor said the city had planned to do more work on Walton Road, but it had to be delayed because of early winter-like weather.

Another goal for 2018 that was met was completing the city's \$2.9 million water project. The final steps included upgrading the pumps and electrical system in the city's well on Walton Road. Other water system upgrades were taken care of in 2018. Valves were replaced in Island City's Walton Road well, aging pipes were repaired throughout the city and fire hydrants were repaired.

La Grande

In January, La Grande Mayor Steve Clements said the city would like to move forward with the Quiet Zone, work toward fixing housing availability issues and continue to solve economic development challenges.

The process toward implementing a Quiet Zone has come quite a way this year, he said.

“We made great progress,” he said. “We filed a plan with the Federal Railroad Association in August and we're anxiously awaiting their response. We may get it by the end of this month. I'm hopeful they'll approve the plan and we can move forward in the spring.”

Clements said the Quiet Zone — a project that will require installing safety barriers at the major train crossroads in the La Grande city limits so trains would not have to blow their whistles while traveling through — received full support from Sen. Jeff Merkley and Rep. Greg Walden, who both wrote letters toward the request.

Though the housing crisis is a long way from being solved, La Grande received a grant from the state to help conduct a study to see what the city's needs are.

course of his career, including the Union County Chamber of Commerce's 1997 Union County Educator of the Year award, Island City's 2008 Citizen of the Year award and the 2014 Apple Eyecare Fred Award for community service.

Tolan taught fifth grade his first 20 years at Island City Elementary. He next taught physical education at Central and Willow elementary schools for 1-1/2 years before being named Island City Elementary's principal.

Tolan said that Island City Elementary and its community have been a perfect fit due to the support he has received from the staff, parents and community.

“It has been such a wonderful place for me that I have never wanted to go

“It's a great step for us,” Clements said. “La Grande was designated as a rent-burden community. That's an issue. However, we have a potential developer working to provide low-income housing to try to clear the hurdles that we're working on.”

Clements has also been a part of the mayors meeting, which is a monthly meeting for the mayors in the county to come together and talk about what they're working on and share resources.

“It's an ongoing thing,” he said. “I have to give credit to Union County Chamber of Commerce Director Bob Kavanaugh and Union County Commissioner Donna Beverage for starting this. It has taken on a life of its own.”

The mayor noted that changes are on the horizon for the mayors meetings, saying, “We'll have new mayors in Cove and Island City. Jim Whitbeck is the facilitator (and he'll be leaving the position when he joins) our city council. Bob Kavanaugh will be moving away from his role as Chamber director. This is a good opportunity to find continuity through ownership, and I think it will survive just fine.”

North Powder

A milestone was achieved earlier this year when work crews completed chip seal work at Fourth and F streets in North Powder. Completion of the work meant all of North Powder's streets had been chip sealed over the past 12 years. Achieving this by the end of this year was one of Mayor Bonita Hebert's goals. She said chip sealing has been a focus of hers since she was first elected mayor in 2006.

Much of the work was done by Union County crews, which were contracted by North Powder.

“(They) did an awesome job,” the mayor said.

The final chip sealing was done at Fourth and F streets because that is where Hebert lives. She had asked the area she lives in be chip sealed last because she did not want it to appear that she was receiving favoritism due to her position.

The mayor also said a year ago that she wanted strides to be taken toward the creation of a new wastewater facility in North Powder. She said a 13-acre site has been identified for the plant and the city is now working with its landowners about the possibility of purchasing it. The wastewater facility will make it easier for the City of North Powder to meet state environmental standards.

Another goal for 2018 was to replace North Powder's aging city hall and library.

anyplace else,” Tolan said on Tuesday. “It has been a home away from home.”

Superintendent Mendoza had only words of praise for Tolan on Monday following the school board meeting.

“He's been a very valuable leader,” Mendoza said. “He has created an excellent culture and environment for learning (at Island City Elementary).”

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Hebert said only limited progress was made toward this goal because so much attention was placed on the chip sealing work and the wastewater project.

Hebert, who did not run for re-election this year, will step down as mayor in January 2019.

Summerville

Summerville officials planned to look into storm drainage in the town in 2018. Summerville Mayor Sheri Rogers did not respond to a request for comment.

Union

Union Mayor Leonard Flint said in early January that he hoped to help Union fill two voids in 2018 — hire a city administrator and draw in a banking institution.

With Flint's guidance, the city succeeded on both counts, hiring a permanent city administrator, Doug Wiggins, in March and landing a commitment from Old West Federal Credit Union in the fall to open a branch there in the late summer.

Wiggins succeeded Sandra Patterson, who had served as city administrator for 12 years before departing in June 2017. The loss of Patterson came at an inopportune time for Flint, who was in the middle of his first year as mayor.

“It made for a long and difficult road,” Flint said. “It was a fast learning curve.”

The mayor felt a sense of relief when Wiggins came on board and took on some his workload.

“My wife (Cheryl) says she actually sees me now,” Flint said.

The mayor said Wiggins has been an ideal fit for Union because of his experience, which includes about 10 years as a police officer and 2-1/2 years as a city administrator in Wheatland, Wyoming, a town of 3,500.

“His experience fits what a town of our size needs,” Flint said.

Old West Federal Credit Union announced in August that it would open a branch in Union. The branch is expected to open in the first part of 2019. Union has not had a bank since Umpqua Bank closed its Union branch in June 2016. Flint said the credit union will help Union's economy because residents will be less likely to do their shopping in La Grande now that they can take care of their banking closer to home.

Flint also said one of the city's goals was that Union's seven working committees would complete their work in 2018. The committees began meeting in the spring of 2017 to develop recommendations for addressing local issues. The committees — made up of city councilors, city staff and community members

Mendoza added Tolan is highly respected by his peers.

“He is seen as a leader of administrators (in the school district),” Mendoza said.

Mendoza said his regard for Tolan is such that he hopes he can talk him into changing his mind and continue to work for the school district.

“I am going to try to keep him as long as I can,” Mendoza said.



Observer file photo

The Farmers Merchant Award banquet, held annually, is a big event for the Union County Chamber of Commerce.

— did finish up their work and made recommendations regarding subjects including law enforcement and economic development. Flint said the recommendations made by the committees will be re-evaluated in 2019.

Union County Chamber of Commerce

Chamber Director Bob Kavanaugh had economic development on his mind in January, when he said he wanted to see a new business in every town in the county in 2018. While this exact goal was not met, Kavanaugh said the Chamber was instrumental in getting many businesses into storefronts this year.

“We were either a partner in (helping locals) bring (new businesses) to the community or instrumental in getting (businesses) to move here,” Kavanaugh said, estimating the Chamber worked on at least 10 projects. “It's fun to be a part of it.”

He added the Chamber has met its goals “by having a (positive) attitude that we want to partner (with the business) and do everything we can (to help).”

He also said the mayors meetings have been a very positive step and they have someone to replace facilitator Jim Whitbeck when he steps into his city councilor position.

“We got the mayors together and they're networking,” he said. “We feel strongly that this has been

beneficial, and the mayors seem to really enjoy it.”

The idea of the mayors meeting stemmed from Kavanaugh attending meetings in which he felt communication was lost between the towns.

“I realized there are some powerful men and women and they are local champions,” he said. “I found they wanted to get together, build friendships and leverage resources. They wanted to have open and honest communication.”

An example of the success of the mayors meetings is how the towns are now working together for to promote county-wide economic development. If Elgin has a storefront that is better suited for a business, but the owner is looking in La Grande, then the two mayors collaborate and work toward the best fit for the business.

“They're playing well in the sandbox,” Kavanaugh said. “They're very good at it.”

Finally, Kavanaugh mentioned wanting to increase the membership of the Chamber. He said in January the Chamber's membership was approaching 300. He said then that he wanted to have 500 members by the end of the year.

“That was a very ambitious goal, looking back,” he told The Observer. “We went from (approximately) 150 (when I first started) to 340 (now). We'll hit 500 members. I'm sure we will.”

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