

BUDGET

Continued from Page 1A from,” said Dixon, who also stressed the spending plan would not allow his school district to enhance programs like it is hoping to.

The \$8.8 billion budget is proposed by the Legislature’s Committee on Ways and Means, which is the state’s budget writing committee, co-chaired by state Rep. Dan Rayfield (D-Corvallis), Sen. Betsy Johnson (D-Scappoose) and Sen. Elizabeth Steiner Hayward (D-Beaverton). The proposed education spending plan is up \$600 million from the \$8.2 billion budget for the current biennium. However, for school districts like La Grande and North Powder, the additional money they would receive would go to paying for increases in “roll up” costs including increasing staff wages and benefits and higher payments into the Public Employees Retirement System.

“We can live with it, but it does not have much maneuvering room. It is a survival budget. It is not a budget you can build programs with,” said Chris Panike, the La Grande School District’s business manager.

Panike said there had been talk that the Joint Committee on Ways and Means would recommend a \$8.7 billion budget. That \$100 million would have made a painful difference.

“It would have damaged all school districts (in the state),” Panike said.

Mendoza said the proposed budget would not allow the school district to

add staff it has a need for, such as physical education teachers, behavioral specialists and additional staff for high needs students.

“We will need more funding to innovate at a high level,” he said.

Dixon said the proposed budget would mean that his school district would have to delay finishing work on its new Career Technical Education building. The district would also have to put off boosting the amount of counseling time available to students and wouldn’t be able to hire intervention specialists for math and language arts instruction.

These limitations, however, might be averted. Mark Mulvihill, superintendent of the InterMountain Education Service District, believes there is an excellent chance the Legislature will increase funding for education beyond the \$8.8 billion mark.

“I am very, very optimistic,” he said. “We are at the beginning of a conversation on how we can reinvest in education.”

The Legislature will now begin debating the education budget and will later vote on adoption of one. The 2019-21 biennium begins July 1.

Mulvihill said he was encouraged by the education budget of \$8.97 billion Gov. Kate Brown recommended in her proposed 2019-21 spending plan earlier this year. He said this was indicative of the governor’s support for education.

“I’m excited,” he said. “She set the bar very high.” ■



Courtesy of Community Kindness
Liz Meyer, right, said baby dolls like this one bring joy to seniors with dementia.

DOLLS

Continued from Page 1A disease without using lots of pharmaceutical medications, which is better for the resident.

Both Meyer and Wright said when a doll is given to a resident, it is an extremely emotional moment. They both expressed it was hard to describe just how much joy a doll can bring to a dementia patient.

“To see them pouring on so much affection to this doll or talking to this doll (is) very sweet. It soothes them and makes them feel like they have a purpose,” Wright said.

Meyer said she is glad

Community Kindness is able to give residents a moment of happiness.

Meyer is taking donated dolls and baby items as well as monetary donations to be used for the project. She said for some residents, toy dogs or cats might be more suitable than a baby doll, and some residents prefer stimulating items like fidget toys and blankets. Community Kindness is working toward providing those types of items too. To contact Meyer, call 541-805-1410. ■

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ELGIN

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Elgin Mayor Allan Duffy said he’s excited and ready to revamp the city’s sewer system — a project that is long overdue.

“A city our size is only about one square mile, so it doesn’t seem like a big project, but it is,” he said. “To have a grant like this makes us feel good because our project can move forward.”

The mayor said while this grant of \$476,400 is a huge step forward, he estimates the wastewater system project will take several years and nearly \$6 million to complete.

Built in 1964, Elgin’s outdated sewer system experiences inflow and infiltration from groundwater sources. This can overwhelm the sanitation process because once it mixes with wastewater, the fresh rain water is also considered as waste and must be treated as such.

The City of Elgin experienced so much inflow and infiltration in February 2017, the sanitary sewers overflowed into the Grande Ronde River — an event resulting in a warning letter from the Department of Environmental Quality

for exceeding National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permit requirements.

Duffy said although the city knew the wastewater system needed work, the overflow in 2017 was the catalyst for its action on the project, and eventually led city counselors to apply for the Business Oregon grant in December 2018.

“(Inflow and infiltration) was out of control,” he said. “It’s something we’ve needed to correct for a long time to prevent overflow.”

To save on costs, the City of Elgin’s public works department will work on the wastewater system itself. Mayor Duffy said he has full faith in the city’s public works department staff because they know the sewer system extremely well.

“Our public works department is very knowledgeable of the system,” he said. “We tend to keep city projects in-house because we like to do it ourselves.”

Elgin’s mayor and the rest of the city council are grateful for the opportunity to apply for and receive grants whenever possible. As Duffy noted, receiving

financial aid through grants is the one way a small rural community like Elgin can expand, improve and progress.

“We heavily rely on grants to get work done,” he said. “Being aggressive in going after them is setting us apart.”

The CDBG program in particular is focused on offering aid, expanding economic opportunities and developing livable communities, especially in areas of the state with low to moderate income.

“These awards can make a big difference for Oregon communities, particularly smaller rural areas that can use a partner for large infra-

structure investments,” said Chris Harder, director of Business Oregon, in a press release. “The projects set the stage for long-term economic growth and community health in rural Oregon.” ■

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DEPOT

Continued from Page 1A large nature preserve.

But Elfering says the biggest economic boon could come from developing two stretches of industrial land. The depot lies at the intersection of Interstates 84 and 82, giving it great potential as a transit hub.

“You go 185 miles or 180 miles to the west, and you’re in Portland,” Elfering says. “You go a couple hundred miles to the northwest, you’re in Seattle. You go a couple hundred miles to the northeast, you’re in Spokane. If you go to the southwest, you’re in Boise.”

Mayor Drotzman says that type of development could provide a huge boost to his community.

“Most of those people will be either living here or doing business here, buying their groceries or doing their doctor visit with us,” he said. “So it will have a significant impact, and we need to be prepared. We want to start that process, and so that’s where the frustration comes from.”

While the years of delays have been frustrating to many locals, another group has been waiting much longer to return to the site.

Chuck Sams is with the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Reservation. The depot runs through

his nation’s hunting and gathering lands, including the religiously-significant Coyote Coulee. He’s eager to see the land to return to the tribes so they can begin rehabilitating the land.

“There’s been wildfires that have went through there,” he said. “It’s burnt the shrub-steppe habitat. So there’s a lot of cheat-grass and foreign species. We want to reclaim the land and put more natural species in there.”

Bill Elfering says the number of stakeholders has made what initially looked like a straightforward process much more cumbersome.

Each group has had its own specific interests at heart: protecting natural areas, preserving sacred lands, providing security for military assets and making sure the economic benefits are evenly distributed. Those competing interests have occasionally led to gridlock. But, Elfering says the coalition is closer than ever to an agreement.

“We need one more piece of paper, maybe two more pieces of paper that say it meets their objectives,” he said.

Until then, the 1,000 bunkers at the Umatilla Chemical Depot remain empty - aside from the occasional stash of vintage army supplies. ■

CHASE

Continued from Page 1A

ond Street and traveled north at a high rate of speed as he approached Broadway. Baker City Police attempted a traffic stop, calling out a pursuit as Nunez continued on, traveling through a red light at the intersection.

Nunez became more reckless in his efforts to elude police, the press released stated. The pursuit was called off at 5:41 p.m.

Newman said officers ended the chase in the interest of public safety.

“The risk outweighed the benefit,” he said.

Nunez abandoned the pickup a short time later. It was found at Ninth and B streets. During

the investigation, police discovered the vehicle had been stolen from Canyon County, Idaho, on Jan. 12, Newman said. It is registered to Robert H. Breshears, 60, of Caldwell.

The police chief said community residents helped officers find Nunez as he made his way through neighborhoods and finally hid in a garage in a backyard in the 2500 block of Ninth Street where he was arrested.

“I appreciate the participation of the public so we could get that guy off the street,” Newman said. “Dispatch got phone calls, people were pointing to officers. ‘That’s a good thing,’ he said. ‘That helps a lot.’ ■

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