



Cherise Kaechele photos/The Observer

Above: Members of the La Grande Fire Department were one of the first on scene to try and catch the body before it continued downstream.

RESCUE

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cies teamed up to perform the recovery operation. La Grande Rural Fire Department, La Grande Fire Department, La Grande Police, Union County Sheriff's Office, Union County Search and Rescue, Oregon State Police, and Wallowa County Search and Rescue were all present.

Most of the search took place in the rapids near Riverside Park because the body had not been spotted floating downstream or even passing through the rough waters. However, in case the body had moved down the river, law enforcement personnel were looking out from the Highway 82 bridge in Island City, according to Nick Vora, Union County SAR lieutenant.

"The reason we looked (near Riverside Park) was because based on obstructions in the water, there was a high likelihood a person floating through there would have gotten caught," he said.

Remnants of a demolished bridge remain just below the surface of the Grande Ronde River in that par-

ticular spot, littering the riverbed with large blocks of concrete with protruding rods of rebar. Vora said this, combined with the high water level and low water temperature, made for an extremely hazardous search and rescue mission.

"The water right now is extremely cold and has a fairly high flow rate," he said. "In the summertime, in that area where we were working, someone could walk across the river without having a problem, but with the snowmelt this time of year, there is a lot of water moving through there."

The Wallowa County Swift Water Team, a branch of the county's search and rescue team, offered their support and expertise on the scene with trained swift water technicians who probed the waters with long yellow rods, hoping to find the body.

Craig Kretschmer, La Grande Rural Fire chief, said the swift water team was paramount to the combined efforts of Wednesday's recovery operation.

"The Wallowa County Swift Water Team was a huge asset and gave us better equipment and more

The Wallowa County Swift Water Team used multiple members to see if the body had been captured in the rough waters. The search was suspended by 6:30 p.m. Wednesday with no recovery.

trained personnel to get in the rapids and do a thorough search," he said. "Whenever you get the chance to work with agencies like that, (you realize) it's a blessing to know they're out there and available if we ever need them again."

While the swift water team was at work in its bright red boat, members from Union County's SAR team controlled the vessel with ropes and pulleys as LGFD members watched from above in the basket of a fire truck ladder that had been

extended over the rapids, and a marine deputy from the Union County Sheriff's Office, a marine deputy from the Wallowa County Sheriff's Office and a SAR volunteer waited downstream in a jet boat owned by the Wallowa County Sheriff's Office to ensure the rescuers' safety.

"There weren't any activities that were just search and rescue," Vora said. "Everything was a combination effort by all teams involved."

The teamwork from all agencies made for an "almost seamless"

search and rescue operation in regard to the safety of the rescuers, Thomas said, even though they were not able to recover the body.

"All of the agencies worked really well together. We even talked about having additional training in the future," he said. "We came up with a plan, and everybody went home safe." ■

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ETHICS

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meetings law.

"I hope this will bring light to the regulation and that people will want to learn more about it," she said.

Patterson, in her complaint, said on June 15, 2017, an executive session was conducted in which a law was violated because of a procedural error. The Ethics Commission found a violation possibly occurred when the severance package for an employee who had resigned may have been unlawfully discussed during the executive session.

The meeting was conducted just two days after Patterson indicated she planned to step down in a month as Union's city administrator after a 12-year tenure. The months following this announcement was a controversial and cloudy period in Union's history.

In a written statement about her resignation provided to The Observer in the summer of 2017, Patterson said, "I provided the notice (of resignation) based on concerns about potential unethical actions taken by third party(s) and which are outside my control." But after consulting with her attorney, she formally retracted her decision

in a letter dated June 15, 2017. That same day, however, the city council met in executive session and agreed via consensus to accept the terms of Patterson's resignation.

The Ethics Commission wrote in its March 7, 2019, Stipulated Final Order that the June 15, 2017, meeting may have violated law because severance pay is not a topic permitted for discussion in an executive session under the statutes cited in an announcement advertising the meeting.

"Discussion of the resignation of a city employee and the severance package to be offered to the employee is not a topic authorized for discussion in an executive session under ORS 192.660(2)(a), 192.660(2)(f) or 192.660(h)," the Ethics Commission wrote.

The commission also wrote in its Stipulated Final Order that discussion of this topic in the June 15, 2017, executive session would constitute one violation of ORS 192.660. The Stipulated Final Order said state law authorizes the commission to assess civil penalties of up to \$1,000 for such a violation. There is no chance of a fine being assessed because of the settlement.

Flint said that he agreed to a settlement because

continuing the process would have meant the City of Union would have had to spend additional money on legal fees.

The Oregon Ethics Commission began an investigation into Patterson's ethics complaint after conducting its preliminary review. The results of the preliminary review were evaluated by the commission, and on Nov. 17, 2017, it voted to launch an investigation.

The investigation was later put on hold when Patterson and the Union City Council agreed to begin negotiating a settlement.

The mayor also said it is important for people to realize that the members of Union's city council are not legal experts.

"We are laymen," Flint said.

Had a settlement not been reached, the Ethics Commission would have completed its investigation, after which the case would have been dismissed or a hearing would have been conducted before an administrative law judge, according to an Oregon Ethics Commission staff member.

Flint said the process the city council has gone through as a result of the ethics complaint has been informative and will prove beneficial as the council moves forward. ■

COUNTY

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firearms or firearms accessories to determine whether or not they are constitutional. The ordinance makes "unconstitutional in Union County any law or regulation that restricts a person from possessing firearms, ammunition and firearms accessories," according to the text of the measure.

MURDER

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charges of murder.

Sheriff Boyd Rasmussen said the two were acquaintances but would not further elaborate on the relationship between Hamilton and Lee.

Rasmussen declined to comment on the reason for Hamilton's later arrest than Lee's.

He did confirm there would be no further ar-

rests in the case. Both arrests were made based on an indictment issued by a Union County Grand Jury after an investigation by the Union County Major Crimes Team. The Major Crimes Team consists of members from the Union County Sheriff's Office, the La Grande Police Department, the Oregon State Police and the Union County District Attorney's Office.

After the ordinance was put on the ballot and passed by voters, the measure's chief petitioner, Ken Wisdom, found a similar ordinance passed by another county with more specific language that he feels would further protect the Second Amendment in Union County. He proposed making significant changes to the ordinance such as identifying the county

as a Second Amendment Sanctuary county and adding language stating that local governments have the "legal authority to refuse to cooperate with state and federal firearm laws that violate (Second Amendment) rights."

The commissioners denied Wisdom's request, saying the ordinance cannot be changed unless it goes onto the ballot again. ■

Lee and Williams were married until July 2018, according to court records. ■

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