

PHARMACY

Continued from Page 1A
pharmacy a new home, Brookshire would serve as its pharmacist until he retires, which he plans to do in about four years.

Wing said if a plan is agreed upon by the South County Health District and the Cove-Union-Powder Medical Association, the business must be maintainable.

"If we move forward, (the pharmacy) would have to sustain itself," she said.

Wing said she wants to find out if any other pharmacies or health care organizations in the region would be interested in helping to support the relocation of Union's pharmacy.

She noted the South County Health District has limited funding because it collects no taxes. Options for raising funds for the purchase of the pharmacy discussed by Wing and others at Tuesday's meeting included applying for grants.

Community members who spoke out in support of Brookshire's work as a pharmacist included Judy

Johnston of Union.

"Walt has done an awesome job all of these years," Johnston said.

She praised him for providing thorough counseling to patients about the medications they are prescribed.

Wing also said Brookshire goes the extra mile to help patients, by delivering medications and doing research on them to the benefit of patients.

Brookshire's proposal is designed to help not only the short-term situation but also the long-term picture. He believes it would be much easier for Union to find a pharmacist to replace him when he retires if the pharmacy is part of the Cove-Union-Powder Medical Association and the South County Health District system. He explained all that would need to be done was hire a pharmacist.

If the pharmacy remains private, Brookshire doubts he would be able to find a buyer for the business and the building when he retires.

Several at Tuesday's meeting noted if the building's potential buyer goes forward with the purchase, issues of logistics and fund-



Dick Mason/The Observer

The Union Drug Co.'s pharmacy may be moved to a site next to the Union Family Health Center.

ing would make it impossible to relocate the pharmacy in permanent fashion within the 90-day deadline.

"The timeline is the biggest issue," said Marty McKeon, a member of the Cove-Union-Powder Medical Association's board.

Brookshire was asked how he would feel if steps were taken to temporarily relocate his pharmacy to another site until a permanent solution was developed. Brookshire said he might accept this, but stressed he would prefer this course not be taken.

"If we don't put our best foot forward, we can't ensure long-term viability," he said.

Several people said they were worried that, even if Brookshire's plan is realized, Union would not be able to land a new pharmacist after he retires. They explained it is difficult for rural communities to attract professionals such as pharmacists.

Brookshire noted, however, there is presently a surplus of pharmacists in the United States, which would make it easier for Union to

find one to succeed him.

If Union loses its pharmacy down the road, it would be the first time the city didn't have one in more than 110 years.

The Union Drug Company opened in 1903. Brookshire, who grew up in Union and earned a degree in pharmacy from Oregon State University, purchased the building and its pharmacy in 1994.

He said operating a pharmacy has become more difficult since then in part because of increased insurance paperwork and stiffer Medicare rules. The pharmacy portion of Brookshire's business is breaking even, but he is losing money on the soda

foundation and gift shop.

Brookshire said the risks faced by CUP and SCHD would be relatively small if they agree to his proposal. If the pharmacy fails, he explained CUP would be able to use the building for seniors' meals, wellness classes and physical therapy, or it could be leased to a private entity. Brookshire said the SCHD would be able to sell the medications and files it purchases for almost full value.

He believes the risks CUP and SCHD face would be worth it in light of what the pharmacy means to the people.

"The risk to the community of doing nothing is greater," Brookshire said. ■

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LGCC

Continued from Page 1A
used for a mini-grant program people can utilize.

With the chamber's grant program, Strope made the suggestion to the city council to use its \$16,000 toward wayfinding signage, which are signs pointing tourists toward certain areas in town.

"We are currently exploring potential grant opportunities that could result in a larger project," according to the staff report given to the council.

As an example, a sign could point tourists toward local parks.

Councilor Jim Whitbeck asked whether the money could be better spent elsewhere.

He used the City of Pendleton and its Whiskey Fest as an example. Pendleton makes a significant investment toward a big event like Whiskey Fest, and it brings in a lot of money for the city. He asked why La Grande couldn't do something similar.

Whitbeck said he's heard

many people say the city of La Grande doesn't support the local events.

The chamber's mini-grant program, which the city financially supports, can go toward events happening in the area but has a maximum amount of \$1,000.

"It's not obviously coming from the city," Whitbeck said of those grants. "It seems strange we're not supporting these events."

Councilor Corrine Dutto also added it would be nice for the city to make it easier to hold events.

Strope said the TRT funds can only be used toward advertising and promotion of the event or to invest in a tourist facility, like the Blue Mountain Conference Center.

To utilize TRT funds, the event has to attract tourists from more than 50 miles away, Strope said.

He said the Eastern Oregon Film Festival, which has made requests for funds before, isn't eligible for the funds per their requests because they would use the money toward employees.

Strope said the Cove

Cherry Festival and Union's Grassroots festival make requests and receive TRT funds.

Whitbeck had questioned whether the TRT funds could help Art Center East build a handicap accessible ramp for their building.

"I think the Art Center would be a stretch (for being a tourist attraction)," Strope said.

No decision was made about the TRT funds.

The council also discussed the \$288,000 of unanticipated funds from the last fiscal year.

According to the city council packet, a resolution was requested to specify how the unanticipated funds would be allocated:

50 percent to the general reserve fund for future capital investment — such as a new roof for the library or possibly toward the new police station — 25 percent for capital investment to be identified as part of the proposed budget and the remaining 25 percent would be unallocated, serve to increase the

fund balance, and would not have any restriction on use.

According to the packet, an increase of 10 to 25 percent is requested to go toward projects and activities outside the Urban Renewal District.

There is a request to increase funds to go toward marketing and advertising of URD properties.

Strope said the city doesn't want to use the unanticipated funds for new employees because the money isn't guaranteed every year.

There was no official decision made on the resolution. ■

ELGIN

Continued from Page 1A
the ambulance, the ambulance uses the fire department. We train together really well."

As for the decline in numbers over the last two decades, the fire chief theorizes it has to do with a lack of enthusiasm for community service across the board.

"I think volunteerism, overall, not just for fire department, has gone down in general. A lot of the younger kids aren't into it," he said. "People also don't have the time for the dedication we need. Training requirements have gone up over the years, and (the necessary time commitment) deters people."

Firefighter and EMT training fees are covered by the City of Elgin at no cost to interested volunteers. To become a firefighter volunteer, one must train at Firefighter Academy sessions for four weekends, complete task performance at the fire station, then apply for certification through the state, according to Silvernail.

EMT training is a little more involved, the fire chief said. It requires passing five credits of college level EMT classes over two terms and then passing state tests to earn the certification. Because EMT certifications are valid nationally, Silvernail has one stipulation for those who complete it.

"Both trainings are paid for, but for ambu-

lance training, if they move within a year, they have to pay the city (back)," Silvernail said. "With that kind of investment, we'd like some return to the community."

While there is no requirement for the number of calls a firefighter and/or EMT volunteer must respond to, meetings and trainings are mandatory. The ambulance crew meets on the first and third Sundays each month for two hours at the fire station, while the fire department offers training sessions every Tuesday at 7 p.m. at the fire station.

Mayor Duffy said he is eager to answer any questions community members have about volunteering with the fire department and ambulance.

"Public service is a noble thing. I think there are folks out there who may be interested and we're just encouraging people to come check it out," he said. "In a rural community like ours where funding is very limited, we don't have the money to pay for full-time ambulance service — we count on volunteers."

The fire chief also hopes more people will lend a hand. He said he has personally offered his time and skills to the rural fire department for more than 20 years because he cherishes his town and wants to help any way he can.

"If you want to call it a calling... I love giving back to the community," he said. "It's something that's close to my heart." ■

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A SPECIAL THANK YOU to Jennifer Cooney of the Wallowa County Chieftain for organizing the 'PET OF THE WEEK' advertising campaign which greatly helped adopting pets; and for our AD SPONSORS: Double Arrow Veterinary Clinic, Enterprise Animal Hospital, Main Street Motors, Susan Gilstrap CPA, Carpet One, and Les Schwab. THANKS ALSO to the MANY businesses locally, and to ALL those generous individuals who have donated time, money, and assistance in our mission:

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