

STATION

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The city council will have greater flexibility in what path it ultimately pursues if it is granted a straight deed for the ranger station by the federal government. The present deed has many restrictions that make it difficult for the city to do even basic maintenance work.

City Administrator Doug Wiggins noted before windows can be replaced the city must send a request for permission to do this to the National Parks Service, which has 45 days to respond. Quick responses are rare.

"Anytime you do something, there is a 45-day delay," Wiggins said. "Such delays hinder maintenance of the buildings."

Wiggins, at the request of the council, wrote a letter to the National Parks Service in January requesting a

straight deed. The National Parks Service has not yet responded to the letter.

Wiggins said the ranger station is becoming a financial liability for the city, since the cost of maintaining it is greater than the money it brings in. The only revenue it generates is rent from its homes. The cost of upkeep is expensive because it must retain "historic building standards" according to its deed.

The city council has discussed a number of options for the ranger station at previous meetings, including converting the three houses into vacation rentals and adding sites for RVs. The council has also discussed creating a small business startup at the site. The ranger station buildings could be rented temporarily to those who need a place to open a new business before they can afford to move to another site.

"It could be a business incubator," Wiggins said.

Converting the ranger station into a community center is still another option councilors have expressed interest in. Wiggins said it could be renovated to serve as a site for family reunions or other gatherings and possibly include a commercial grade kitchen.

The committee's members will include a city councilor, a member of the Union Chamber of Commerce and a member of the city's history commission.

Also on Monday, the city council had a preliminary discussion on developing a fence ordinance. Presently the city has limited fencing restrictions. The council agreed the ordinance should require all fences to be structurally sound, safe and accessible in the event of emergencies.

Mayor Leonard Flint said consideration should be

given to requiring fences to be a safe distance from roadways. Flint said he is worried that fences too close to roads pose a hazard to people riding bicycles who might fall into them.

Union has only about two fence regulations. One prevents fences from blocking views of traffic and another requires that people with junk in their yard have a fence blocking the public from seeing it.

Wiggins said there is not a limit on how tall a fence can be in Union. Buildings cannot be taller than 35 feet, and Wiggins noted "a fence could be 35 feet and technically within the law."

Proposed ordinances discussed by the council would apply only to new or restored fences, Wiggins said. The fences now in place would be allowed to remain as they would be under a grandfather clause. ■

BANK

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reflect how dedicated the credit union is to serving the people of Union.

"The credit union is all about local folks," said Ken Olson, CEO and president of Old West Federal Credit Union.

Credit unions are not-for-profit organizations that exist to serve their members. Like banks, credit unions accept deposits, make loans and provide a wide array of other financial services. Olson said that because credit unions are not for profit, they can charge lower rates than traditional banks.

Old West Federal Credit Union also has branches in La Grande, Baker City, Pendleton, Hermiston, John Day, Prairie City and Burns.

The services provided by the Union branch include a drive-through teller, safety deposit boxes, an after-hours deposit station and an automated teller machine.

People in the Union business community who are excited about the new credit union include Stacey Dixon, office manager for Union Market. Dixon said that after the town's last bank closed, Union Market staff had to make one or two trips to La Grande a week to deposit money. Those days are now gone.

"This will be a huge, huge, convenience," she said.

Dixon said the presence of the credit union will also help Union Market because it will mean fewer people will be coming to the store to cash checks since they can now do it at Old West.

"We were becoming known as the First National Bank of Union," Dixon said.

Walt Brookshire, owner of Union Drug Co., is also encouraged by the opening of Old West Federal Credit Union.

"It is a step in the right direction," he said.

A Union City Councilor, Brookshire said the credit union will boost the city's economy by reducing the trips residents make to La Grande, where they not only bank but likely buy groceries and do other shopping. He believes having Old West in Union will mean residents will do more of their shopping in town. Brookshire said, though, it may take time for many residents to get back into the habit of shopping and banking in Union.

Dustin Deckert, an employee at Union Market, noted another plus to having a bank in town is it will make it easier for businesses to have change on hand.

Old West Federal Credit Union made its interest in Union public on May 17, 2018, when it conducted a town hall meeting. One of the issues Old West's Olson addressed at the meeting was his concern about the availability of enough fiber optic bandwidth for the credit union's computer system.

"We are a bandwidth monster," Olson said on Monday while recalling the 2018 meeting.

Fortunately, Old West determined that enough bandwidth is available for the operation of a credit union branch. In early September, the credit union announced it would definitely be establishing a branch in Union after acquiring the old Community Bank building.

Olson said Old West is bucking a trend by opening a branch in Union. The CEO said banks and credit unions have been pulling out of rural towns, but he hopes this is the start of a reversal of this movement.

"It is a pilot project," Olson said, adding that even in today's technological age, it is critical for banking institutions to have a brick-and-mortar presence in communities.

"How can you serve main street but not be on main street?" Olson said. ■



Courtesy photo

Volunteers from the Spring 2017 tree planting event in La Grande pose together for a group photo.

TREES

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University is holding its own tree planting event Friday to celebrate its third year as a Tree Campus USA. People will gather on University Boulevard beneath the Tree Campus USA flag at 10 a.m. to plant a tree, according to an EOU press release.

David Yoder, campus grounds crew member and certified arborist, said this year they've chosen to plant a Friendship Tree, which grew from a ginkgo seed that survived the nuclear bombing in Hiroshima.

"He'll join fellow committee members at the Arbor Day celebration

to raise the Tree Campus USA flag and give a brief State of the Campus Trees Address," the press release stated. "Then the group will plant the Friendship Tree near Inlow Hall."

Yoder spoke highly of the Friendship Tree's symbolic value in the press release.

"The parent tree survived the blast, and as a sign of peace and friendship, this tree will grow on our soil," he said.

In Elgin, the local Lions Club purchased 10 flowering crabapple and pear trees to donate to businesses in the city's downtown area, according to Everett Grandeen, a Lions Club member.

Grandeen said while the club plant-

ed all 10 trees Thursday, they are also planning to put 10 more trees in the ground around the Elgin Community Center, Elgin High School and HuNa-Ha RV Park.

"Everybody needs to be planting trees," Kathy Oliver, president of the Elgin Lions Club chapter, said. "It's going to save the planet."

For more information on the La Grande Urban Forestry Division's tree planting event this Saturday or to purchase a tree, call Teresa Gustafson at 541-663-1952 or visit www.cityoflagrande.org and click on the Urban Forestry page under the Parks & Recreation tab within the City Offices menu bar item. ■

CHAMBER

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Advisory Committee are exploring the possibility of allocating funds for "specific marketing and program enhancement," according to a packet provided by the executive director.

Although the funds for hiring a marketing consulting agency and a design firm were allocated for the 2018-2019 fiscal year, turnover at the chamber has setback spending. Moore-Hemann said the plan is to carry this funding forward to the upcoming fiscal year, which begins July 1, while starting marketing research efforts beforehand.

"We'd like to partner with a marketing agency to go over all of the current things we have like our ads, and really work with us to develop a cohesive, comprehensive marketing plan to maximize the effectiveness of our dollars," she said at the meeting.

In regards to the Blue Mountain Conference Center, Moore-Hemann

said the chamber is looking to continue its partnership, largely based on the premise that there is no other space available in the area that can hold large-scale events.

"We're also looking at hopefully expanding and increasing the number of events (at BMCC)," she said. "We're looking for creative ways to find events that want to use that space."

La Grande Mayor Steve Clements praised Moore-Hemann for her efforts so far, as the executive director was only hired in January.

"I like this redirecting the way you're using the money, and the outline of this plan is very clear," the mayor

said to Moore-Hemann. "You jumped in, you've been here for three months, and you're right now in the prime tourism period and I think that's a rational way to go, to pull back a little bit and then let it build."

The city council and the chamber's executive director also reviewed an updated draft of the joint memorandum agreement between the two entities at Monday's work session, although they did not put it up for a vote. Councilors generally approved of the edits, and La Grande City Manager Robert Strope mentioned the chamber also felt the revised memorandum was agreeable. ■

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