

SART

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 combination of these services, no matter what the individual chooses, SART advocates, SANes and law enforcement will back the decision.

“We want to put it out there that the whole purpose of us providing advocacy is to support a survivor in whatever choices they want to make,” she said. “We respect their autonomy and we respect our survivors to make their decisions on their own.”

Survivors themselves, or friends and family members of a survivor, can call or text the SART crisis hotline at 541-963-9261 any time to discuss their situation with an advocate. Even outside of Shelter From the Storm’s business hours, a victim advocate from the Union County District Attorney’s Office is on call.

Valerie Schlichting, victim assistance program director at the DA’s office, said SART advocates try their best to respond quickly to calls regardless of the hour.

“We’ll get up in the middle of the night and go to Shelter From the Storm, open it up, and sometimes the victims meet us there,” she said. “We’re involved as much as (victims) want us to be.... Really, it’s educating them and making sure they’re aware of every option that they have and then helping them make that choice.”

In addition to being on call after hours, Schlichting said the DA’s office is responsible for generally overseeing the coalition and holding monthly meetings with representatives from each participating entity. Whereas Shelter From the Storm leads most of SART’s work with survivors and services, the DA’s office focuses its energy on education,

sexual assault awareness and providing survivors with information on their rights and options when handling a case. Schlichting said the opportunity to have a variety of organizations come together to help sexual assault survivors is helpful in more ways than one.

“We can put our heads together and decide what resources we need to reach out to, what this person might need, and make sure that they are covered,” she said. “If you don’t have that, then you have someone who’s going to each different place to get their services... so having a group of people who are looking out for their interests and providing resources really is the best approach.”

When asked about the importance of the relationship between the organizations involved with SART, Evans had a similar response.

“I think any time you have a coordinated response between community members, it provides us an opportunity to build a strong foundation and communicate well with each other and streamline processes,” Evans said. “Survivors don’t have to wait hours for things to get coordinated. Our response can be relatively quick depending on survivors’ wants and needs.”

“With it being such a rural community, being able to have these services accessible to everyone is really important because not every county has a resource like this.”

— **Rianna Bridge, victim advocate at Union County District Attorney’s office**

SART isn’t unique to Union County, however. The National Sexual Violence Resource Center developed a toolkit in 2011 to help communities across the U.S. and U.S. territories customize their SART outreach and expand services, according to the organization’s website at www.nsvrc.org.



Amanda Weisbrod/The Observer

Krista Evans, Shelter From the Storm crisis response advocate, stands in the on-site exam room at the Shelter From the Storm center, 10901 Island Ave, Island City.

The NSVRC website defines SARTs as “multi-disciplinary, interagency teams that promote collaboration to support victims of sexual assault and hold offenders accountable,” and traces their formation in the U.S. to more than 30 years ago.

“By nature, SARTs are unique to their local circumstances but share three core goals: supporting victims, holding offenders accountable, and increasing community safety,” the website states. “Over time, most SARTs face challenges and identify gaps in services

that require working to change systems. The most successful SARTs work to improve systems toward these three common goals.”

Rianna Bridge, a victim advocate at the Union County District Attorney’s office, said she thinks it’s very important Union and Wallowa counties have their own localized SART services to give survivors a chance to come forward and heal if they so choose.

“With it being such a rural community, being able to have these services accessible to everyone is really important because not every county has a resource like this,” Bridge said. “If we didn’t have this service, people would be traveling to Baker County or Pendleton.”

Shelter From the Storm is in a unique position as it holds the only in-house

victim examination room in the state, according to Evans. She said by doing the exams in the office, Shelter From the Storm hopes “it’ll be less traumatic and more survivor centered.”

Schlichting agrees having an exam room on site allows Shelter From the Storm to provide wrap-around care to victims of sexual assault, making their healing process as void of trauma as possible.

“The biggest thing for victims is that they be able to have somewhere that’s safe to them, and it’s not necessarily an institutionalized place like a hospital,” she said. “Victims who come forward have just been through a really traumatic thing in their life, and they want to feel safe and supported and surrounded in services — that’s what Shelter From

the Storm provides.”

While resources, advocacy and education are the tangible benefits survivors can access if they choose to activate SART, Schlichting, Bridge and Evans agree the most valuable recompense is the empowerment returned to survivors by the ability to approach their healing however they like.

“In sexual assault, all the power has been taken away from the victim, and (SART) is just our way of being able to give back some of that power and let them really run how things are going to go and what they want to have done,” Schlichting said. “We support them in their decisions, what they want to do, and then we make sure that there’s follow through and advocate on their behalf of what they want.” ■

GRANTS

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 be used for a fire suppression system and restoration of the theater’s facade.

Michael Jaeger, board president of the Liberty Theatre Foundation, said construction on the facade is already underway and the grant from Oregon Main Street is a big step forward.

“This grant will really help us complete (the facade) as well as the fire retarding system in the building,” he said. “This will help immensely take care of something that we didn’t have cash in the bank to pay for.”

According to Jaeger, the theater lost its historical entrance way when it was converted into retail space in 1962. The plan is to restore the facade to its 1930s look and convert the Putnam Building into “a space that would be supportive of the Liberty.”

“They’re both historic buildings and Dale Mammen purchased the Putnam Building for the purpose of refurbishing it back to its original style and grandeur of the day,” Jaeger said.

He continued by describing Mammen’s vision of establishing a restaurant and concessions stand in the Putnam Building so theater-goers can eventually enjoy entertainment and a bite to eat in the same space.

The Liberty Theatre Foundation Board president also credited Mammen for bringing the two buildings to the city’s attention in the first place.

“Dale got us all interested in the theater, so he’s the visionary and the person behind the Liberty Theatre and the Putnam Building,” he said.

Wednesday night, the Urban Renewal Agency, composed of La Grande City Council members, voted to extend the Liberty Theatre project’s deadline from August 20, 2018, to June 1, 2021, but Jaeger said he estimates the theater should be operational sometime in 2020.

“I think we’ll be done before then, but it gives us a little bit of breathing room,” he said.

In the same round as the Liberty Theatre grant, Oregon Main Street awarded funding to 30 projects across the state, adding up to more than \$5.4 million. Out of these, Baker, Umatilla, Union and Wallowa counties received a total of \$800,000.

“I was so impressed to see there were four projects just in Union, Baker, Wallowa and Umatilla counties,” Risteen said. “It’s a great program for rural areas especially.” ■

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LGCC

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 reserved pavilions this summer.

“The reason this is before you today is because when summer heats up and pavilion rentals are going strong and they book them for next year, we’ll have a new structure in place,” he said, addressing the council, which passed the amendment unanimously.

La Grande Public Works Director Kyle Carpenter then stepped up to the podium to discuss the 2018 final study and report for the City-Wide Voluntary Sidewalk Local Improvement District with the council.

Last year, the total cost of projects repaired under the LID was more than \$20,000 with approximately 1,500 square feet of repairs throughout the city. The packet provided by the city notes a LID “offers property owners a way to improve their property and maintain existing sidewalks.”

Carpenter then proposed to establish a new LID for 2019 that would focus on Area Nine, which covers the eastern side of the city bordered to the north by Island Avenue and the south by the railroad tracks. According to the provided packet, this area was last evaluated in 2008.

“Our staff goes out, we do the inspections of the side-

walk infrastructure in that area, (then) we send out letters inviting those to participate who have areas with problems,” the public works director said, adding anyone living outside of Area Nine who wants to participate in the program can still “take advantage of the prices, (but at this time we won’t) actively pursue any areas other than Area Nine.”

The council approved Carpenter’s proposal unanimously.

Later in the meeting, Councilor Gary Lillard delivered a proclamation to declare May 2019 as Older Americans Month in order to acknowledge the growing number of older adults in the community and appreciate their “many valuable contributions to society.”

“We urge every resident to take time during this month to recognize older adults and the people who serve them as essential and valuable members of our community,” Lillard said. The council unanimously passed the proclamation.

The La Grande City Council will meet at 6 p.m.

Monday in the Community Room of Cook Memorial Library to begin budget hearings for the 2019-2020 fiscal year.

Urban Renewal Agency

Following the city council meeting Wednesday night, the Urban Renewal Agency, composed of La Grande City Council members, considered moving the deadline for the completion of the historic Liberty Theatre building renovations to June 1, 2021, giving the Liberty Theatre Foundation Board an extra two years to get the project up and running. The former deadline was Aug. 20, 2018.

Councilors Justin Rock and Jim Whitbeck raised concerns about the extended deadline, suggesting the URA propose an agreement with “more teeth.”

“When do we stop if they don’t meet this deadline?” Rock asked. “When is enough enough?”

After a long debate, the agency agreed to approve the extended deadline, but with one caveat: If the

Liberty Theatre Foundation Board does not complete its project by June 1, 2021, the board would be required to repay the \$150,000 loan it received from the URA.

The URA loaned this \$150,000 to the Liberty Theatre Foundation Board in two installments of \$75,000, the first paid in 2011 and the second in 2013, according to the Liberty Theatre Foundation grant tracking spreadsheet provided by the city. The agency previously decided to grant forgiveness for this loan, but will require payment if the project isn’t completed on time.

The members of the URA also decided to deny any further extensions on this project, although the future URA members of 2021 could choose to amend that decision if they wish.

“I think (this agreement) also provides some flexibility in terms of any kind of punitive action the next agency should choose to implement,” La Grande Mayor Steve Clements said. ■

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