

FIGHT

Continued from Page 1A

at \$1,200, a 1991 Dodge pickup valued at \$1,000 and the home at 61307 Conley Road, Cove. Court documents peg the market value at \$264,840 for the three-bedroom two-bath 1,863-square-foot manufactured home built in 2003 that sits on 4.77 acres of land.

The home was a point of contention in Williams and Lee's divorce, according to evidence presented at Lee's bail hearing in the murder case. Williams' sister Peggy Titus and her lawyer, Glenn Null, filed motions Oct. 10 in civil court to keep Lee from receiving any benefits from the sale of Williams' estate, which was scheduled for Oct. 13.

Williams filed for divorce from Lee in July of 2018 due to irreconcilable differences. Because Williams died before the divorce was finalized, and therefore the couple's assets were not yet divided, there is a question of who rightfully owns the property in Cove.

According to court documents regarding the divorce and the Union County Assessor's office, Williams owned the house. Divorce records also state Williams and Lee would equitably divide the benefits from the sale of the house once the divorce was finalized.

Null also filed a motion requesting the court to declare Lee as Williams' "slayer" and thus acknowledge he is "a person who, with felonious intent, takes

on or procures the taking of life of a decedent." That declaration would guarantee Lee would not receive any of the benefits from the estate.

Attorney Floyd Vaughn, who represents Lee in the estate matter, filed an objection, arguing it would be unjust to declare Lee the slayer as his guilt is still a matter for the criminal trial.

Lee's RV repair shop, where Lee worked and lived at the time of Williams' death, is another asset under consideration. Vaughn objected to the inclusion of the business in the sale because Lee owned the property before marrying Williams. The dissolution of marriage documents confirm Lee's ownership of the business and his right to the

proceeds from its sale.

Lee, through Vaughn, on Oct. 22 filed an objection to the asking price of \$299,000 for the Cove house, claiming it was more than 10% lower than the listing price of \$335,000, and that after other deductions, the sales commission and other debts, the offer is too small to entertain. The house remains for sale.

Circuit Judge Thomas Powers is presiding in the estate matter and the murder case. The court set Nov. 26 for a hearing on the money from any sale of the estate and objections to offers.

The next proceeding in Lee's murder case is a pre-trial conference March 9, 2020. The trial remains on the docket for the month of April.

PROCESS

Continued from Page 1A

"When the legislature has control off the process, they often gerrymander the districts so they are not competitive or don't represent the communities of interest," Turrill said. "The incumbents then have almost no ability to be replaced. The shape of the district does not matter. It's the votes for the politician."

The group met for nearly a year before reporting to the Legislature. Lawmakers wouldn't even hold a hearing on proposed legislation, according to Turrill.

With that 2017 failure, a few task force members hope to ask the state's 2.7 million voters to put the independent process in place and change how redistricting has worked for the past 160 years.

Last week, a political action committee, "People Not Politicians," filed a petition to put the matter on the 2020 ballot. The measure would create the Citizens Redistricting Commission comprised of four Democratic voters, four Republican voters and four voters who identify with a third party or are nonaffiliated.

The ballot effort has drawn together an unusual constellation of Oregon groups.

Included are groups ranging from Common Cause Oregon and Oregon Student Public Interest Research Group to the Oregon Farm Bureau and the Taxpayer Association of Oregon.

Also on board are the NAACP of Eugene/Springfield, the American Association of University Women and the League of Women Voters of Oregon. The Independent Party and Progressive Party have also signed on.

To get before voters in November 2020, the groups need to submit 1,000 signatures backing the proposed ballot title. Once the measure language is approved, they will need 149,360 voter signatures to earn a spot on the ballot.

The measure comes at a time when redistricting is coming under scrutiny across the country. Earlier this year, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled it couldn't stop legislators from creating districts that give their own party an edge in voter registration.

Eric Holder, former attorney general in the Obama administration, has launched a campaign aimed at the issue and

several states are considering reforms.

Most such efforts target states like Wisconsin, Pennsylvania and North Carolina, where Republicans have been accused of using redistricting to give their party lopsided legislative victories.

While few claim that Oregon's redistricting process is so partisan, critics say it leaves some Oregonians without a voice.

It's also not clear how the Democratic Party, which has dominant command of state government, will respond. Molly Woon, spokeswoman for the Democratic Party of Oregon, said the party is neutral on the idea but may take a stance next year.

The Oregon Republican Party didn't respond to a request for comment. Evan Ridley, political director of the Senate Republicans' campaign arm, said in an email that a "balanced citizen-driven commission made up of Oregonians from across the state would provide a better opportunity for transparency and fair representation for all Oregonians, especially those who tend to be underrepresented in the Legislature like rural Oregonians and seniors."

The process of reshaping boundaries of the districts served by senators and representatives happens every 10 years following the latest census.

The U.S. Census Bureau is gearing up for the 2020 count, which could produce another congressional seat for Oregon.

"The stakes are super high," said Julie Parrish, a former Republican state representative who supports the initiative. She pointed out that after the last redistricting in 2010, the House's 30-30 party split changed. She worries that Democrats will seek a tighter grip on state government in the next process.

She said it could put some Democrats who've publicly supported redistricting reform in an awkward position. She already expects the state's powerful unions, a key constituency of the Democratic Party, to challenge the initiative.

CAMERA

Continued from Page 1A

The towers stand on 2 acres of land deeded to the ODF by what was then the Bowman-Hicks Lumber Co. for the purpose of establishing a lookout. Also there is communications equipment serving the ODF, state and county agencies powered by a line from Pacific Power and Light, Howard said.

The ACTi i96 PTZ camera completes a full rotation in about 15 minutes. If smoke is detected, an alert is sent via a microwave signal west to Mount Emily and down to La Grande, where the signal is relayed to the Central Oregon Interagency Dispatch Center in Prineville. Once notified of an alert, the center views the image sent by the camera and then contacts the appropriate response units to check it out.

Howard said that since the camera was installed in July, there have been several alerts but all have proven to be legal burns.

Although the state-of-the-art camera is the latest technology, it's by no means a "silver bullet" and they won't replace human eyes, he said.

"We just like having it in our tool box of different tools" for detecting fires, Howard said.

That "tool box" includes a partnership the ODF has developed with the U.S. Forest Service, Wallowa County and other state agencies.

Paul Karvoski, fire chief for the county and the city of Enterprise, works



Bill Bradshaw/EO Media Group

Matt Howard, unit forester for the Oregon Department of Forestry's Wallowa Unit, looks at a view transmitted from the fire-detection camera on Howard Butte on a computer in his office in Wallowa.

closely with the ODF and hopes to see additional cameras located in the county.

"I can't say enough about it," he said on the one on Howard Butte. "I'd like to get three or four more in the county."

In particular, he'd like to see one established on Courtney Butte overlooking Troy, which was nearly destroyed by the Grizzly Fire in August 2015.

Nathan Goodrich, U.S. Forest Service fire management officer for the Wallowa Valley Ranger District of the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest based in Joseph, said there are no such cameras in his area. Although there are

lookout towers, they are lacking in basic infrastructure required for a camera, such as power lines, cables, hardware and line-of-sight connections to which the microwave dishes can transmit.

"We've been looking at those (cameras) for some time now, but they're pretty spendy to get into," he said. "They've shown to be pretty successful."

But Goodrich is relatively satisfied with his lookout towers that are manned during the peak fire season from June to October.

"They're invaluable," he said. "You can't talk to a camera and get more information."

UNION

Continued from Page 1A

including roof, step repair and flooring work, are needed because of the age of the school district's buildings. Its high school was built in 1912 and the J.F. Hutchinson building was constructed in the late 1920s or early 1930s. The S.E. Miller building and the high school gym were built in the 1950s.

Projects the school board will be rating in terms of prioritization include handicapped accessibility improvements at the high school and its gym. Wells said presently it is hard for people with mobility issues to get into the high school because it does not have an elevator, and steps must be climbed once inside since it has three levels.

The gym is also difficult to reach for those with health issues because of steps that need to be climbed to get into its foyer and then into the bleachers. Wells said making the gym handicapped accessible is critical because so many people go there for high school graduation, the annual Christmas and spring concerts and the annual FFA banquet.

"We draw our biggest crowds for these events each year," he said.

Many of those coming are



Dick Mason/The Observer

Bond funds will pay for major renovation work on Union High School's gym.

parents and grandparents and great-grandparents, Wells said, some of whom have mobility issues.

Possible improvements to boost handicapped accessibility in the gym include expanding the foyer of the gym's main entrance and placing a ramp within it. A further step might involve installing a ramp in the bleachers.

Among the other work the bond council will be considering is repairing portions of the roadway separating the high school from the high school gym and Union Elementary School's S.E. Miller building.

Wells said steam from the high school's furnace was once pumped via a pipes

under a portion of the roadway to heat its gym. The pipes needed to be repaired a number of times, which meant the asphalt over it had to be torn up and replaced each time. This has taken a toll on the roadway, Wells said. The superintendent also noted that the steam that escaped from the tunnel to the gym eroded the roadway's asphalt. This underground steam is no longer an issue because the high school gym received its own heating system several

years ago.

Another project the school will be taking input on involves the windows for classrooms in the S.E. Miller building. Wells said they need to be replaced for safety reasons. The current windows are only 2.5 feet above the ground, making it easy for people to see inside.

Some of the issues the school district will address with the \$8 million are ones related to the outdated design of the buildings. Wells noted that when the high school was built in 1912, it was designed so that heat leaving the building would be funneled to its roof to melt snow. The space under the roof was thus not insulated.

Unfortunately, correcting this loss of heat will not be as simple as installing insulation. Wells explained that architects have told him that if insulation was installed under the roof it would cause it to collapse under the weight of snow, which instead of melting would accumulate. The superintendent said he hopes that an affordable solution to this issue can be developed.

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