

CHURCH

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to see it become a community program,” Williams said.

The cost to purchase the property, which includes the house next door, is approximately \$275,000. The non-profit had the donations to make an earnest payment on the complex and is continuing to fundraise through grant writing and community support.

The fate of the house on the property remains unclear. The nonprofit could rent it out to help with the cost.

The organization has numerous ideas for using the space as a community center, including offering classes on home living, cooking and life skills, renting out the chapel and adjoining spaces for weddings and funerals, serving senior lunches and the possibility of a small clinic to get your blood pressure checked or flu shots.

“You can’t go anywhere in Union to get your blood pressure checked without making an appointment,” board member LaVon Hall said.

Friends of the Historic Union Community Hall does not have cost estimates for the classes and the rest, but Richter said any profit will go back into the community center.

Board member and secretary Sherie Kausler said there is not really a place in Union that is fully committed to holding and hosting events for the community. While the group recognizes there are a few parks and buildings to host events, Richter said it is important to have a centralized place to do so.

“We haven’t had a true community



Staff photo by Sabrina Thompson

This two-story house sits next to the United Methodist Church in Union. The nonprofit Friends of the Historic Union Community Hall is working to buy the property and make the church a community center but has not decided what it could do with the house.

center since the 1980s,” Williams said. “We don’t have something for all ages here anymore.”

However, the group is looking to the community to determine what the community center will ultimately look like. Richter said for this to be successful there has to be community buy-in and as much community involvement as possible. She hopes by having a nonprofit purchase the building rather than the city, more locals will be inclined to support and donate to the effort.

“The community has a say in what

this will become,” Richter said.

The group is hosting a pizza dinner as a chance to inform the community about the transition and purchase, and get feedback about what people would like to see the community center do and become. The event is Thursday beginning at 6:30 p.m. at the S.E. Miller Gym at Union Elementary School.

“We don’t want to see this place become an apartment complex or be leveled to the ground,” Williams said. “There is a lot of history here, and people who care about the fate of this building.”

HISTORIC

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with presentations on historic properties, woodworking and repairs, and brickwork and masonry. Those in attendance included contractors, Realtors and history buffs. The goal, Hibbert said, was to give people an understanding of the special care historic buildings require.

However, she doesn’t think of preservation as keeping a building exactly as it was when it was first constructed.

“You have to let buildings grow and evolve so that they can continue to be used,” Hibbert said. “A building that is used and vibrant is the best building. An empty pretty building is not very helpful. So it’s learning how to work with the historic means and methods of our historic buildings, but also learning how to modify them in a sensitive way so that we maintain the architecture and the look and feel and specialness of them.”

She said preservation pro-



Staff photo by Sabrina Thompson

Risa Davis, a principal broker from Portland, presents basic information on the value of preserving historical properties Friday during a workshop in La Grande.

vides the additional benefit of environmental sustainability. Using the materials present and maintaining the structure and all its components, Hibbert explained, means there is less of an effect on the environment.

Hibbert said preservation often is about problem solving and finding a way to fix any issues a building may have while still maintaining its historical elements. Often

older buildings lack today’s construction requirements, for example, so the idea is to find a balance between bringing them up to code for safety standards and accessibility while preserving the building’s aesthetic details.

Tom Stenson is the deputy legal director for Disability Rights Oregon, a Portland-based nonprofit law firm providing protection and advocacy to individuals

with disabilities. He said it is more common than not that historical buildings are able to become ADA compliant without destroying the historical value.

“The American Disabilities Act is there to make building more accessible for people with disabilities, not tear down the history that building provides,” Stenson said. “Consider very old buildings like the (Oregon) Capitol, or the White House. Those buildings have been made accessible without compromising their history.”

Stenson said the way to help provide this balance is with additions, rather than replacements. Rather than tearing down century-old steps, you can add a ramp to the side of a building, or if there is no way to change a bathroom in the interior of a historical site, adding a wheelchair accessible one in the back is an option.

“(We) have an obligation to make it more accessible without destroying the historical integrity of the building,” he said.

SHELTER

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this year, which would match the total the warming station had for the winter of 2018-19, when it was on Willow Street. The warming station had 100 volunteers during the winter of 2017-18, its first season of operation when it was on Fourth Street.

The station not only needs people to cover shifts, which will run from about 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., but also to clean and cook meals at other times.

“We love our volunteers, we are so thankful for them,” Miller said.

Additional information on the training sessions is available at ucwarmingstation.org.

The warming station will open months after the La Grande City Council in December denied an appeal that sought to shut down the operation. Just when it opens depends on the completion of renovation work to meet safety and security requirements and wheelchair access at the new location.



Staff photo by Dick Mason

Cory Coates of Better Homes Construction does renovation work Monday at the new home of the Union County Warming Station in La Grande.

DRIVE

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Hall, 976; and Pierce Library, 620. In addition, Eastern’s residence halls and the town of Union together contributed 250 pounds.

Eastern during the past 12 years has collected the equivalent of more than 160,000 pounds for local food banks.

Many of the EOU students assisting with food drive were members of their school’s

sociology 420 class.

The late Gov. Vic Atiyeh started the annual food drive in 1982. Atiyeh called on every state agency to sponsor a food drive “to reduce the suffering of those without adequate food resources” and “to show that true Oregonians believe that we can and do help our friends and neighbors in need,” according to the website oregon.gov.

The 2019 food drive collected the equivalent of \$3.1 million pounds of food statewide.



Sam Stites/Oregon Capital Bureau

Sen. Lynn Findley, R-Vale, (left) asks his colleagues whether \$5 million is truly enough to fund the state’s response to the ongoing outbreak of COVID-19.

BOARD

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preparedness programs.

They acted a day after the 2020 Legislature adjourned automatically. The absence of Republican legislators in the days before the adjournment prevented any votes on funding needs or other legislation.

But at Monday’s Emergency Board meeting, all seven Republicans were present and engaged.

The \$11.5 million for flood relief includes \$2 million for new affordable housing units for Umatilla County flood victims and \$1.5 million for rapid rehousing and rental assistance to flood victims. Another \$4 million would be used for replacing damaged housing and infrastructure.

The Oregon Business Development Department will receive \$3.2 million for business cleanup and to help Pendleton repair its levee.

The committee approved the COVID-19 funding without specifying how it would be used.

Sen. Lynn Findley, R-Vale, pointed out that Washington state had requested an estimated \$100 million to bolster its response to the virus. He also said he spoke with several county health officials in his vast district covering much of Eastern Oregon and they asked him whether there would be any assistance for them.

“They’re on the front lines, and they need some help,” Findley said.

Sen. Elizabeth Steiner Hayward, D-Portland, said that one advantage of Gov. Kate Brown’s emergency declaration over the weekend was that it allows the state to mobilize emergency physician corps, particularly in rural counties, who are able to help local health departments.

“I’ve had extensive conversations with the Health Authority over the weekend and the reason we’re able to unschedule some of this money for the moment is that they do feel comfortable with the amount,” Steiner Hayward said. “And we do have the ability to move funds around administratively through executive order, and we do have the ability to call the Emergency Board back at any moment should this prove to be insufficient.”

Senate President Peter Courtney added that the Emergency Board could definitely be back again to

allocate more money.

“We simply don’t know,” he said. “This thing is very dynamic and we may be back for more.”

The Emergency Board also approved by 12-8 vote — with all Democrats except Sen. Betsy Johnson, D-Scappoose, voting yes — to give \$5 million to the state Department of Environmental Quality to establish 10 new positions to start drafting rules to implement the expected executive order by Gov. Kate Brown aimed at reducing Oregon’s greenhouse gas emissions.

Senate Republican Leader Herman Baertschiger, Jr., said he opposed the allocation because he feels the move by the governor opens up the state to more costly lawsuits such as the \$1.06 billion 13 counties won against the state for losses associated with timber harvests.

“Where I’m probably most concerned is not so much with the issue, but the process,” Baertschiger said. “I think it’s going to initiate lawsuits right from the beginning. Given the lack of success with the last lawsuit the governor just lost, which is costing the taxpayer \$262,000 in interest every single day, I would think we’d want to try to do anything to not get us in another lawsuit.”

Other Republicans didn’t see the emergency requiring the immediate funding.

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