COUNCIL

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"Some have doubled their footprint downtown," Howard said.

She said many talk of drawing in new businesses as the best way to boost the local economy, but she believes helping the businesses already here to thrive is an equally effective way to help make downtown more vibrant.

Wheeler

Howard

Howard also is running because she wants to put to good use the experience she has gained over the past four years.

"Having that first term behind me would be a real advantage," Howard said.

In a second term, Howard said she would focus some of her efforts on ensuring the city's plan for responding to potentially massive wildfires in the region in upcoming years is as strong as it can be. She said it may be just a matter of time until wildfires such as the ones that devastated portions of Western Oregon in September hit Northeast Oregon. She said she wants to make sure the best possible evacuation routes and emergency communication systems are in place.

Howard works as a history professor at Eastern Oregon University. She said her position at Eastern provides her with a sense of the needs of the university students and that helps her in working to strengthen the relationship between EOU and the city. She said she has learned during her first term that much of a city council's service involves making small thoughtful decisions that add up to major differences over time. Howard said this makes her role as a councilor sometime tedious but also rewarding.

"I am just as proud of the small improvements as the big ones," Howard said.

Howard, who is married to David Moyal, a candidate for vacant Position 6 on the city council, said La Grande also has a lot to be proud of, especially in terms of services offered to the public.

"Our parks and recreation department and library are what you see in towns three or four times our size," Howard said.

Howard said she does not believe partisan party politics should influence city council races. She pointed out the city council's positions are all nonpartisan and decisions councilors make are not based on ideology. She said there does not "seem to be a real place for partisanship" on the city council.

Wheeler, however, supports partisanship at the city council level and said many cities are making their council races more partisan because this assists voters in making more informed decisions.

"I believe it is important to get as much information to voters as possible. It also helps voters to determine who will represent their similar values. Nonpartisan elections tend to confuse voters. Most voters just guess who to vote for in local elections unless they know the person personally or get information from somebody who knows the candidate. Because of the lack of information, most local nonpartisan elections unfairly favor incumbents," Wheeler said.

She said a city council meeting in 2019 inspired her to run for a position on the legislative body.

Wheeler explained she was upset when she heard the council discuss the pros and cons of allowing the sale of recreational marijuana in La Grande. She said it seemed members of the council had not done much research on the topic or looked closely at the impact the legalization of recreational marijuana sales had had on cities of comparable sizes. She contended crime rose in cities that legalized recreational marijuana.

Wheeler said she also is concerned about La Grande's economy, which she claimed has grown at a much slower rate over the past 10 years than others of comparable size.

"We need to reexamine the restrictions, put in place by the city, that have been inhibiting our growth. The city council needs to support area businesses and encourage new businesses to move in. They could do this by offering incentives and easing of restrictions," Wheeler said.

Housing is another issue Wheeler would tackle.

"La Grande has a shortage of housing, especially affordable units. When we moved here, 18 years ago, there were only two choices when it came to four-bedroom homes. We need to have more housing for all economic levels. The city must promote the construction of additional housing units wherever possible for families with a variety of income ranges. The city should seek advice from property developers on barriers to building new housing units to make construction easier," she said.

Wheeler, her husband Kenn and their children moved to La Grande in 2002. Since moving here, Denise has worked with the Eastern Oregon University theater department, where she has directed, costumed and choreographed productions. She also directs, costumes and choreographs musical theater productions at La Grande High School and works at Grande Ronde Retirement as a life enrichment assistant.

VOTING

Continued from Page 1A

voter turnout. The 2020 election has doubled voter turnout at 10.62% as of Monday.

Cook Memorial Library Director Kip Roberson said he turned in his ballot the evening he received it in the mail.

"While I do find a bit of satisfaction in actually turning in my ballot on election day, this year's election is one I've been waiting for for the past four years," Roberson said. "So many issues important to me and those I care about will be determined by the outcome of this election. As I walked my ballot over to the courthouse, I truly felt the heft and importance of my vote this time around. I wanted to know without a doubt that my vote was going to be received and counted."

La Grande resident Zach Spoehr-Labutta said he is planning to vote early but has not submitted his ballot because he wants to look over the voter pamphlet.

"It is convenient around your own time and schedule," Spoehr-Labutta said. "Actually, since being a legal voter, I've only been to the polls once. Voting early allows me to fulfill my civic duty as well as my work schedule."

Church said despite this option many voters still may wait for Election Day, Nov. 3, to cast their ballot.

"One thing that I have noticed over the years is that people will tend to wait to cast their ballot if there is a hot measure or race that tends to be very controversial — so they wait to see what might come out next," Church said. "I know from experience that I, several times, have cast my ballot and then some news will come out that if I had not already cast my ballot, I would have voted differently."

Voters can drop off their ballots in drop boxes at the Union County Clerk's Office or a local city hall by 8 p.m. on election night. Church said it is important to put your ballot in the signed envelope when dropping off or mailing your ballot, otherwise it will not be counted if it is only in the white secrecy envelope.

BOISE

Continued from Page 1A

judicial review.

DEQ spokeswoman Susan Mills said the department is working toward a settlement with Boise Cascade.

"Oregon DEQ became aware of contamination in leachate runoff from Boise Cascade Elgin's landfill and established limits to protect the environment and public health," Mills' statement said. "Those requirements are now the subject of a lawsuit filed by the company. We are working diligently and in good faith toward a settlement with BCE. We are not able to comment in more detail because this is a matter of ongoing litigation. Oregon DEQ's mission is to protect public health from environmental contamination."

Boise Cascade in the court documents contended DEQ knew the water the Elgin mill would use contained dioxins as reported in a fact sheet provided to the Department of Environmental Quality.

"Thus, DEQ issued the 2018 WPCF Permit knowing the dioxin-containing leachate would be transferred to the ponds and then used in and around the Elgin Mill," according to the petition.

The Elgin facility cannot operate without the use of a state-approved wastewater system. Because of the DEQ's notice about dioxins and requirements for a new plan for water usage, Chapman said the mill in Elgin may need to close while Boise Cascade works through the litigation and determines a solution.

"We are not sure yet what the resolution will be," Chapman said. "We should know by December if we will have to cut back hours or fully close the plant for a while, but we will give the employees in Elgin plenty of notice."

The Observer, File

The Boise Cascade Company reports it could shut down its plywood mill in Elgin in 2021, shown here in a 2018 file photo, due to a lack of logs because of wildfires and an order from the Oregon DEQ regarding wastewater use.

LIBRARY

Continued from Page 1A

"In recommending that EOU rename Pierce library, the committee believes this is an opportunity for our university to take a symbolic but deeply significant step toward becoming a great university — Oregon's Rural University, interconnected with the world in the twenty-first century and genuinely committed to empowering itself and its students with a knowledge of history and the courage to move beyond it," the report concluded.

EOU will consider testimony until Nov. 9 at https://www.eou.edu/pierce-library-renaming. The report is available on the university's website.

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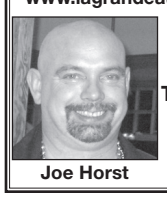
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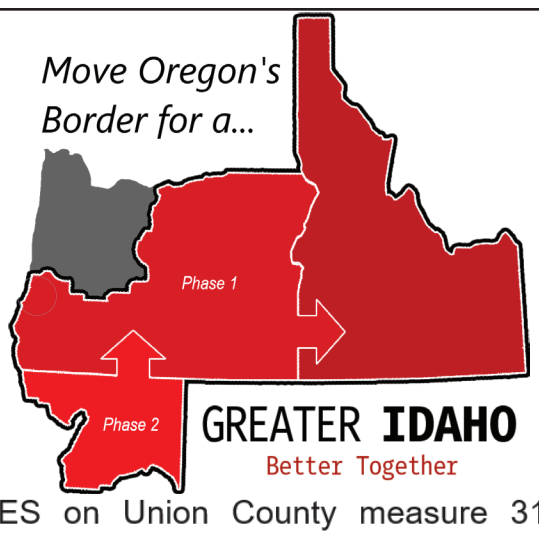

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