



LG council mulls roads, poverty, wildfires

Retreat Tuesday is for council to set priorities, dig into budget, major issues

By KALEB LAY
The Observer
LA GRANDE — The La Grande City Council is set to discuss a wide array of pressing issues, from potentially raising ambulance fees or implementing a new gas tax to addressing housing issues and upgrading wildfire emergency plans during its annual retreat Tuesday, Jan. 26.

There are 11 items on the council’s wide-ranging agenda, several of which relate to funding issues. During the meeting, the council plans to discuss and establish budget priorities for the coming year.

Major issues include on the retreat agenda include the possibility of raising ambulance fee rates, which have not been raised for several years and do not cover ambulance service costs, addressing concerns over street conditions and the need for a larger facility for the La Grande Police Department and Union County Sheriff’s Office.

“We’ve been talking about a new police station for years,” said La Grande Mayor Stephen Clements. “The question is: does the city undertake a new building on their own, or do they work collaboratively with the county to build a different facility?”

City Councillor Nicole Howard did not mince words about the state of La Grande’s street network.

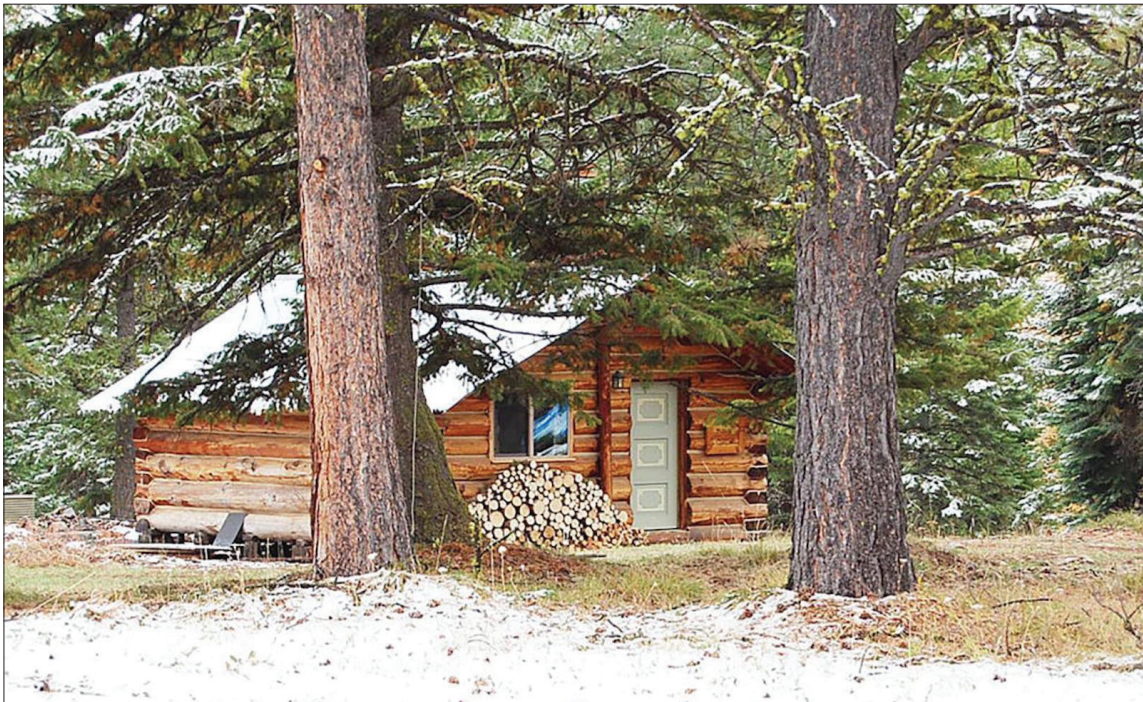
“Our roads are really bad,” said Howard. “What’s clear is that our current public works budget is not in a place and cannot get to a place where it can do the city improvements that we need.”

The La Grande Public Works Department has developed a five-year plan to make improvements and maintain the city’s current road network with current resource levels, but as is stated in the meeting agenda: “it does not solve the situation.”

WHERE TO WATCH

• The La Grande City Council meets Tuesday, Jan. 26, starting at 6 p.m., for its annual retreat. You can view the discussion on the city’s Facebook page at facebook.com/cityoflagrande.

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Wallowa County Chieftain, File

Moose Manor is one of five log cabins at Divide Camp between Big and Little Sheep creeks east of Joseph. The camp is intended for post-9/11 combat veterans as a place to experience the beneficial qualities of spending time in nature.

Divide Camp brings healing, restoration

By ANN BLOOM

For the Wallowa County Chieftain

WALLOWA COUNTY — To an outsider, Divide Camp may appear to be just a cluster of rustic wooden cabins, nestled in the wilderness of the Wallowa Mountains. To those who know it best, it is much more.

Divide Camp is a place where skills are built and confidence is restored. It is a place where broken hearts are mended and damaged souls are restored.

The camp is specifically intended for post-9/11 combat veterans as a place to experience the beneficial qualities of spending time in nature. This is accomplished through backpacking, fishing and activities taking place at the camp, where veteran guests are able to rebuild their confidence, calm anxious emotions, boost self-esteem and challenge their physical abilities.

“We have a trauma-recovery and suicide-prevention mission; we’re not simply a hunting camp,” said Julie Wheeler, its executive director.

Participation in the camp is for the purpose of healing, not solely recreation. Most veterans who apply to participate have



Wallowa County Chieftain, File

Former Navy SEAL Colin Field kneels in prayer in October 2018 before the 6x7 bull elk he harvested during Divide Camp’s first Tyrone Woods Memorial Hunt. Woods was one of two former SEALs killed in the Benghazi attack of 2012.

post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury, and many have amputations. She said most veterans come away from the experience totally changed as individuals with greater hope for their future.

One thing she stressed is that, while people may refer to Divide Camp as a wounded warrior camp, there is no relationship with the Wounded Warrior

Project. The two are distinctly different organizations with no connection.

Two local, experienced guides — Jim Soares and Andy Marcum — organize the hunts. Soares lives in Wallowa and Marcum lives in Enterprise. Both have been guiding for Divide Camp for several years.

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Union City Council eyes fire department merger

By DICK MASON

The Observer

UNION — The city of Union Fire Department and the Union Rural Fire Department may become one within several years.

The Union City Council agreed via consensus on Saturday, Jan. 23, to make helping the two volunteer fire departments continue their efforts to merge. The merger has been a topic of discussion for years and is one of several goals the city council informally set for 2021 at a work session. The council will vote on officially establishing its 2021 goals at its Feb. 8 meeting, said Union City Administrator Doug Wiggins.

The city of Union funds and operates the Union Fire Department. The Union Rural Fire Department, however, receives its funding from its taxing district

and operates under the guidance of the district’s elected board.

Still, the two departments share one building and many of the same vehicles and pieces of equipment, but they have different chiefs. The Union FD responds to calls within the city limits and the Union Rural FD to calls within its district, which is outside the city limits but for the most part within the Union ZIP code.

The merger would remove the Union FD out from the umbrella of the city. Rather than city funds, the department would receive money from a new taxing district along with what is now the Union Rural FD. Voters living in what would be the new fire protection district would elect a new board to control the merged fire departments.

The district, which Union



Dick Mason/The Observer

The Union Fire Department and the Union Rural Fire Department share this building. The two departments could merge, a change that would require voters to approve a new taxing district.

voters would have to approve, would encompass the combined area the Union and the Union Rural fire departments now serve.

The city of Union attaches a \$10 monthly fee to utilities bills for households in the city limits to fund the Union Fire Department.

Thus most Union households within the city limits pay \$120 a year for fire protection and ambulance service.

Wiggins said if the merger happens, that fee would go away

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WEATHER

Full forecast on the back of B section



Tonight
30 LOW
Snowy late, 1-2"



Wednesday
39/35
A bit of snow

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Email story ideas to news@lagrandeobserver.com.
More contact info on Page 4A.



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