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Good day to our valued subscriber Diana Bolin of Enterprise

## LG City Council sets course for coming year

### Council members question \$400,000 for business park amid pandemic

By KALEB LAY  
The Observer

LA GRANDE — The city council of La Grande held its annual work retreat, which this year took the form of two nights of hours-long video conferences, to discuss priorities for the coming year.

The first was a session Monday night, Jan. 25, of the council in its role as the Urban Renewal Agency on economic development that also touched on COVID-19 relief. During the second meeting Tuesday evening, the council set the city's goals and priorities for the future.

The council made no decisions during the retreat, but La Grande Mayor Steve Clements said the meetings were key in setting the council's course for the rest of 2021, and councilors made their positions clear on issues from pandemic response and wildfire preparedness to downtown development.

### COVID-19 response and recovery

The city of La Grande already allocated more than \$430,000 in funds toward COVID-19 relief programs for businesses, according to City Manager Robert Strope, and the council largely expressed a reluctance to increase that figure for the time being.

"Currently, we still have quite a bit of money that's available for loans of up to \$10,000 apiece for businesses, and we're still seeing some interest on those," Strope said.

Strope explained he expected the city's role moving forward to be geared more toward serving as a "conduit for information" about federal COVID-19 relief and recovery programs than as a provider of its own such programs.

Councilor David Glabe said he believed the council would be wise to keep some funds set aside to help businesses get across the finish line.

"I like the idea that we've got some money set aside to help businesses, because I think we have to realize that we're still fairly early on in the winter," Glabe said. "For restaurants, as long as they're still having outdoor seating or

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Dick Mason/The Observer

Union High School students walk across the school's campus on Jan. 26, 2021. Union High School had a 100% graduation rate in 2019-20.

## GRAD RATES RISE

### Union, North Powder districts reach 100%; Cove, Imbler see rates drop

By DICK MASON  
The Observer

UNION COUNTY — The COVID-19 pandemic is not proving to be an albatross overall for Union County high schools in terms of graduation rates, according to the Oregon Department of Education.

The ODE's annual graduation report of Jan. 21 paints a bright picture for Union County high schools. It indicates graduation rates for 2019-20 increased or were at 100% in four of its six public high schools and above the state average in all six districts.

Leading the way are Powder Valley and Union high schools, which each had 100% graduation rates. Powder Valley's rate was perfect for the second year in a row.

"We are extremely proud," said North Powder School District Superintendent Lance Dixon.

Union School District Superintendent Carter Wells said the Union High School's perfect graduation rate reflects tireless diligence by his staff.

"Our teachers work before and after school with students who need assistance to make sure that they understand the content being taught in class,"

### LOCAL HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATES

Union	100%
Powder Valley	100%
La Grande High School	89.4%
Imbler	85.7%
Cove	84.2%
Elgin High School	82.8%

Wells said. "They make sure our students make it to the finish line."

La Grande High School had the biggest increase among Union County's high schools, jumping 9.5% to 89.4%. LHS Principal Brett Baxter said the increase was due to his staff's laser focus on helping students get to commencement.

"This just shows that we never give up," Baxter said. "We pull out all the stops."

So many opportunities for help are available to LHS students that Baxter said for a student not to receive a diploma, one almost has "to choose not to graduate."

The principal said at the end of the 2019-20 school year, LHS had seven seniors who had not met graduation requirements. Four of those students completed their necessary course work by the August deadline, allowing them to be counted as 2020

graduates by the state. The other three are now completing their graduation requirements.

Elgin High School's graduation rate also is up, bounding from 75% in 2018-19 to 82.8% in 2019-20. Elgin School District Superintendent Dianne Greif credited the increase to the ability of her staff members to focus on helping students finish graduation requirements despite the enormous distractions the COVID-19 pandemic caused. The state required all Oregon school districts to provide only online instruction the final three months of the 2019-20 school year due to the public health crisis.

"Our staff stayed on top of it," Greif said.

Graduation rates in the Cove and Imbler school districts were down from 2018-19 but still topped the state average of 82.6%. Imbler High School had a graduation rate of 85.7%, down from 100% in 2018-19, and Cove High School had a rate of 84.2%, down from 93.1% the year before.

Cove School District Superintendent Earl Pettit said Cove's status as a charter school district sometimes hurts it in terms of

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## Gyms can partially reopen under new COVID-19 rule

### Local fitness centers weigh in on what it means as Union County remains in extreme risk category

By GARY A. WARNER  
Oregon Capital Bureau

SALEM — Gyms can reopen under tight guidelines to control COVID-19 infections, Gov. Kate Brown announced Tuesday, Jan. 26.

The new rules for "indoor recreation" were included in an update of county risk levels.

Brown's announcement means Mountain Valley Fitness & Health, La Grande, will be able to open again starting Jan. 29, said its executive director, Shayla Hewitt.

Hewitt said on Jan. 27 she started getting calls from members not long after Brown's announcement, and the calls are continuing to come in. She said

anyone who wants to exercise at Mountain Valley should call and make an appointment.

Hewitt said Brown's announcement surprised her because Union County still is in the extreme risk category for COVID-19. Mountain Valley Fitness & Health is part of a center at 2519 Cove Ave. that includes Mountain Valley Therapy, which has been able to operate while fitness gyms have been closed.

There was little movement among counties from their risk levels two weeks ago. Nearly all of the state's most populous counties were among the 26 that remained in the extreme risk category.

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The Observer, File

Mike Wood, a La Grande resident and certified personal trainer at Mountain Valley Fitness & Health, demonstrates the use of a leg press machine in June 2017. Starting Jan. 29, 2021, gyms in Oregon will be allowed to reopen under tight guidelines to control the spread of COVID-19.

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### WEATHER Full forecast on the back of B section

	Tonight		Friday
	33 Low		40/29
	Cloudy, a shower		Rather cloudy

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