

QUARRY

Continued from Page 1A

addressed concerns from the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, he said, and the forest stewardship allows the harvesting of timber only for the health of the timber stand, such as to control pests.

“There will not be any commercial clear-cuts, there will not be any commercial timber activity,” Smejkal said.

Shuck added the total conservation easement would be 4,700 acres, far larger than the quarry.

But numerous people who called in still expressed their opposition, leading off with David Moyal of La Grande, who said he was doing community organizing against the project and submitted 45 pages of specific objections to the application. That included a dispute on whether the railroad crossing at Robbs Hill Road was a public right-of-way.

County Planning Director Scott Hartell explained the county’s legal counsel is reviewing that



Alex Wittwer/The Observer

Dried thistle seedpods cast shadows against a boulder Tuesday, March 2, 2021, at the site of a proposed rock quarry on Robbs Hill Road near Perry. The Union County Planning Commission on March 22 will deliver its decision on whether or not to allow the quarry.

and is in talks with Union Pacific Railroad. He said it appears in 1958 when the state transferred the land to the railroad there was an error in designating it as private and not public.

That should get sorted out before the project moves forward, Moyal said, and

the application lacks a comprehensive site plan. Without that, he asked, how can the commission know what it’s looking at? He said these grounds alone are enough to deny the plan. But, he said, another factor also looms.

“Finally, I would like

to say, the application is hugely unpopular,” Moyal said.

The stream of voices that followed Moyal almost universally agreed with him. They said the quarry would harm the quality of life in the valley, disturb the Grande Ronde River’s

prime steelhead habitat, end huckleberry picking and mushroom hunting at the site and mar the view.

Kathy Webb (callers did not spell their names) of La Grande contended the project “is going to ruin our lovely corridor,” sending the wrong message to people coming into the valley and harming recreational tourism.

Amy and Zachary Sherrod, who said they are leaving Los Angeles at the end of the month to return to their hometown of La Grande, said a quarry would harm the area’s natural beauty, which fuels the local economy.

“We don’t want an industrial scar as the welcome mat to the valley,” Zachary Sherrod said.

Six of the eight planning commissioners attended the hearing, according to the county planning department: Chair Joel Hasse, Pete Caldwell, Mat Barber, Silas Kelty, Joe Kresse and Randy McKinnis. Commissioners Mace Cadwell and Chuck Sarrett did not attend.

After taking the testimony, Caldwell moved to

table the vote to the March 22 meeting. He said that would give the commission time to read the new written testimony it received before the hearing.

No one gave a second right away but instead debated the matter.

One commissioner — they tended not to identify themselves when speaking during the phone-in only hearing — said the new material might help the commission to make a balanced decision rather than one based only on the view of the applicant. Another referred to Hartell’s staff report, which stated the planning commission must base its decision for a land use plan on the applicant’s ability to meet several criteria, including community attitudes and the consideration of comparable, alternative sites for the quarry. One commissioner said “it’s a fairly incomplete application in a lot of areas.”

Caldwell’s motion finally received its second, and the commission voted to make a final decision on the quarry application on March 22.

WARMING

Continued from Page 1A

officers have escorted guests to the warming station several times. A number of these instances involved people who police found in the cold after the warming station’s 10:30 p.m. deadline to sign in. The station’s policy allows guests to sign in after hours when they are escorted by the police or someone from the Center for Human Development.

Warming station guests have had to follow COVID-19 protocol throughout their stays. All must wear masks except when they are eating and sleeping and cannot come closer than 6 feet with anyone other than family members. In addition, when sleeping in rooms with people other than family members their heads must be at least 6 feet apart and be next to a canvas divider.

Gould said the guests have been great about following all rules including those involving masks.

She said the only time she has to remind guests to put on masks is in the morning not long after they have gotten up.

“They are very gracious about it,” Gould said.

Checkout time at the warming station is 7:30 a.m. each day. Gould, on mornings she has a shift, begins gently giving wakeup door knocks at 6:30 a.m. and tells guests breakfast is ready.

“I feel like a camp counselor,” she said.

Guests this winter included only two youths, both middle school age teenagers, far fewer than the number the warming station had when it operated in 2018-19 and



Alex Wittwer/The Observer

Hand-knit hats given by community members of La Grande are ready to add to the warmth at the Union County Warming Station on Tuesday, March 9, 2021.

2017-18. Gould said she believes this may be because of state regulations that took effect during the COVID-19 pandemic to prevent evictions.

Conversations with guests and staff at the Union County Warming Station have been limited this winter season in part because of the COVID-19 masks and social distancing requirements.

Gould said even without such limitations she doubted there would be extensive social interaction because guests are so tired when they come in. She said many eat dinner and go right to bed.

Guests often are so fatigued that even the caffeine from the multiple cups of coffee many drink after coming in to warm up does not keep them up at night.

Warming station guests not only have a taste for coffee but also the pizza from a local restaurant.

“Pizza is the easiest food for us to prepare and the most popular,” Gould said.

Some 60 volunteers prepare food for warming station guests, with stir fry and casseroles being popular entrees.

“We have incredible

volunteers,” Gould said, marveling at their energy and dedication. She said the station would not be able to operate without them.

Gould also said directing the warming station has been an illuminating experience.

“I feel that I know my neighbors better now. There are a lot of homeless people in Union County, but they are well hidden,” she said. And getting to know the guests has been a delight.

“Once you earn their trust they will look out for you,” Gould said.

She added that many are compassionate and give a lot to the people around them, and seeing how close-knit the homeless community is has been powerful.

“It is such a beautiful thing,” Gould said.

HEARINGS

Continued from Page 1A

First up was the 1st Congressional District in northwest Oregon on Tuesday, March 9, then the 2nd Congressional District that covered all of Oregon east of the Cascades was on Wednesday, March 10.

The COVID-19 pandemic has upended the once-a-decade redrawing of legislative and congressional districts. The U.S. Census Bureau has said the pandemic made collection of population data difficult or impossible at times.

The data was required by federal law to be sent to the states by April 1 to begin drawing maps. Now it will not arrive until Sept. 30.

The unprecedented delay has set off a constitutional crisis in Oregon and at least 23 other states.

The autumn delivery date will be well beyond all of Oregon’s constitutional and statutory deadlines for submitting maps. Both the Legislature and the secretary of state, which have authority to draw maps at different points during the usual process, are shut out by the drawn-out timeline.

The fate of 60 House, 30 Senate and five or six congressional districts is headed to the Oregon Supreme Court.

The Legislature has decided to go ahead with

the 10 legally mandated hearings. Though two are focused on each congressional district, they also deal with legislative boundaries as well.

“We will be proceeding as if we’ll get an extension from the Oregon Supreme Court or whatever else it takes to get the job done,” said Sen. Michael Dembrow, D-Portland, a senior Democratic lawmaker.

The pandemic also has turned the every-10-year “road show” of hearings in into a series of virtual hearings.

Democrats and Republicans in the Legislature are uniting to ask the Oregon Supreme Court to reset the clock on delays and give the Legislature a shot at drawing the maps for the 2022 election. If the block-by-block data needed to create districts that meet

federal and state civil rights laws becomes available Sept. 30, lawmakers want up to 60 days to draw the maps and submit them to the governor for approval.

House Speaker Tina Kotek, D-Portland, said last week if the courts agree, the Legislature would return in the fall for a special session to handle redistricting.

The request to send the mapping back to lawmakers has bipartisan support.

Democrats have the upper hand in shaping the district maps to their liking. The biggest prize is the sixth congressional district that Oregon is expected to receive, it’s first in 40 years. The U.S. Census Bureau has said it will officially notify states of their gain or loss in the 435-member U.S. House by April 30.

Over 60 or have a disability?
We can help.
 ADRC (1-855-673-2372)
 1-855-ORE-ADRC
 ADRCofOregon.org

An Independent Insurance Agency
Reed & ASSOCIATES
 Trusted Insurance Help Since 1994
 We have helped thousands of seniors navigate their Medicare coverage options and we can help you.. call today
 Medicare
 Nicole Cathey
 10106 North C St. • Island City
 541-975-1364 • Toll Free 1-866-282-1925
 www.reed-insurance.net

LeafFilter GUTTER PROTECTION
 NO MORE GUTTER CLEANING, OR YOUR MONEY BACK GUARANTEED!
 CALL US TODAY FOR A FREE ESTIMATE 1-855-536-8838
 15% OFF YOUR ENTIRE PURCHASE AND! 10% OFF SENIOR & MILITARY DISCOUNTS + 5% OFF TO THE FIRST 50 CALLERS!
 Promo Number: 285 Mon-Thurs: 8am-11pm, Fri-Sat: 8am-5pm, Sun: 2pm-9pm EST
*For those who qualify. One coupon per household. No obligation estimate valid for 1 year. **Offer valid at estimate only. CS28 1025715. DPL #1078808-001 License# 7055 License# 50145 License# 41354 License# 89038 License# 12834 License# 218294 License# 603 233 977 License# 210221286 License# 21021 2946 License# 2705132153A License# LEAFTRN8222 License# W0756912 License# WC-2998-817 Nassau HIC License# H01067000 Registration# 176447 Registration# HIC1646990 Registration# C127229 Registration# C127230 Registration# 36502016 Registration# RC6475 Registration# W713184 Registration# 13401952003 Registration# PA60583 Suffolk HIC License# 52229H

Working with Amy is like working with more than a partner.
 She understands the needs and challenges of the Chamber and ensures our Members are highlighted and their marketing campaigns are a success. Her commitment to the Chamber, our Members and our community are what continually make us comfortable with new advertising opportunities - it’s a dream come true to have Amy and The Observer there working for us and committed to our success.
 Suzannah Moore-Hemann Executive Director, Union County Chamber of Commerce
 Gain Exposure.
 Drive More Bbusiness.
 Find New Customers.
THE OBSERVER
 Marketing assistance from the print and digital experts. Talk to our customer success team today.
 541.963.3161