

GRANT

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The district chose the Cougar Dome, constructed in 1949, for the project's seismic retrofit rather than the century-old, brick high school. A seismic retrofit of the more vulnerable high school was estimated at \$8.1 million, far above the grant program's \$2.5 million limit. The Cougar Dome also was deemed a place where the community could shelter in any emergency, seismic or otherwise.

"We're underway with the evaluation work," school Superintendent Tammy Jones said. "Right now, we are into schematic design."

The project is expected to include roof, wall and floor/foundation strengthening and construction, Jones said.

But actual construction won't proceed until next summer.

"We could be full-bore and do the construction for the seismic this summer and be done," Jones said. "But the work doesn't have to be done until September of 2022. We are waiting to hear on the bond because combining the seismic work and the bond-funded renovations on the gym could have some cost savings."

Gathering data on exactly what underlies the Cougar Dome foundations is a first step toward design and eventual construction.

On Tuesday, March 16, geotechnical engineer Michael Remboldt, of K.A. Engineering out of Coburg, was onsite to take cores on the south, west and north sides of the building. The track-mounted geotechnical drill that Remboldt and his wife, Marvis Remboldt, used for the work reached bedrock at about 11-12 feet deep in all three holes. The material they found was mostly a gravelly substrate, Marvis Remboldt said, which is a piece of good news for the building's seismic risk.

Their preliminary



Ellen Morris Bishop/For the Wallowa County Chieftain

Geotechnical drillers Michael Remboldt and Marvis Remboldt examine a core sample they drilled on the west side of the Wallowa High School Cougar Dome on Tuesday, March 16, 2021. The work is part of the Wallowa School District's grant-funded \$2.3 million project to outfit the high school's Cougar Dome so it can withstand an earthquake.

observations mean that liquefaction — the collapse of the ground that supports the building due to earthquake shaking — is probably not a major issue, Michael Remboldt said.

In November, the district awarded the engineering contract for the seismic retrofit to ZCS Engineering and Architecture. The Klamath Falls/Oregon City-based firm has completed seismic retrofit projects for the Baker School District and Grant County School District, as well as larger gym retrofits for schools in Roseburg, Klamath Falls and Toledo, Jones said.

"We awarded the contract to them because of their experience with seismic rehabilitation work. They really understood what needed to happen," she said.

"They've done more than any other contractor. And they've done some local seismic retrofits in similar districts, including Baker and Imbler."

"They also have a great record of being on time and on budget," Jones added. "And they have done 118 similar retrofit projects across the state in the past five years."

In addition, ZCS provided some seismic evaluation information for parts of the whole facility plan.

The work will be done using a contract management/general contractor

methodology. That means that the general contractors work closely with the engineering firm during the design phase of the project, Jones said.

Some of the work that is likely, Jones said, includes building a new, reinforced wall in the gym weight room where the existing wall, built of a wood portion set on concrete blocks and not tied together, is susceptible to failure during earthquake shaking.

"I was with them when they did their first walk-through," Jones said. "What they showed me is that, for example, in the weight room there's a concrete block that wood beams rest on. There's nothing that ties it all together. So that's a 'hinge point.' And so in an earthquake, that would 'hinge.' What they were thinking about is building another wall that would be reinforced and go all the way down and all the way up and be tied into the existing wall. And they'd insulate the space in between, too."

The grant may be used for added work.

"Other renovations funded by the seismic grant will likely include the Cougar Dome's ceiling, roof and reinforcement of walls. But they are still in the design phase," Jones said. "They will keep the same shape, and it will be seismically safe when they are done."

CURBS

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Union and Enterprise last summer as part of a pilot project.

Crews put in 150 new curb ramps in Union alone. Strandberg said the pilot project taught lessons the larger work is applying now statewide.

"This will help the work get done faster," he said.

The upgrades ODOT is making are not only reducing the slope of ramps, but also adding texture panels so people with vision impairments can detect them with canes or their feet.

ODOT expects to wrap up the work in Imbler by

the end of May. ODOT's schedule also calls for 11 curb ramps in La Grande, 43 in Island City and 22 in Cove. The work in Cove is set to start in April and continue through June.

Curb ramp replacement in La Grande, Elgin and Island City will begin in late spring or early summer and be finished by October, Strandberg said.

Wildish Construction Co. of Eugene is the general contractor for the ramp replacement work in Union County.

ODOT is undertaking the upgrade work because of a lawsuit filed against it in February 2016 by the Association of Oregon Centers for Independent Living, a statewide orga-

nization promoting accessibility for all Oregonians who have mobility issues.

Oregon Centers for Independent Living claimed in its lawsuit that many curb ramps in Oregon did not meet federal standards.

The organization and ODOT settled out of court in November 2016 after the transportation agency agreed to upgrade curb ramps on highways throughout the state. ODOT has until 2032 to do this under terms of the settlement.

Strandberg said the public response to the project has been encouraging.

"People recognize that it is a positive thing to do," he said.

EVENTS

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return on the second Saturday of August because COVID-19 infection rates in Union County are declining.

The Grassroots Festival traditionally has been conducted the second Saturday of August and the Eastern Oregon Beer Festival has been held in late June. The beer festival, though, was moved to Aug. 14 this year in the hope the COVID-19 infection rate will be lower by mid-August, said Mary Ann Miesner, co-chair of the beer festival, who noted this would make it easier to meet social distancing standards.

The Eastern Oregon Beer Festival will start at noon at the Union County Fairgrounds, La Grande, when those who purchased VIP passes will be able to taste all beers. The event will open to the general public at 1 p.m. and

continue to 9 p.m., said Miesner, who also is a La Grande city councilor.

A new twist this year will be an event for those with VIP passes on Aug. 13. The event and its location will be announced later.

Miesner said three to four breweries have already committed to coming and she is confident about nine breweries will be represented, the same number normally present at the festival. She also said the festival will have other beers in addition to those from breweries that participate.

"We want to select beers that are new to people and showcase them," Miesner said.

La Grande Main Street Downtown once again is shepherding the Eastern Oregon Beer Festival. For additional information, call La Grande Main Street at 541-963-1223 or Miesner at 541-910-9725.

Features at the Grassroots Festival again will

include a car show, a plastic duck race in Catherine Creek, vendors, live music, a street dance with a disc jockey, a library book and bake sale, and a citywide yard sale. Beverage said in past years there have been about 40 yard sales in Union running in conjunction with the Grassroots Festival.

All activities at the Union event will be outdoors, which Beverage said will make it much easier to meet COVID-19 social distancing guidelines.

The annual Union event launched about 25 years ago as Main Street Madness. It was renamed the Grassroots Festival about 15 years ago. Beverage said she is delighted the event is returning after last year's shutdown.

"We are excited to move forward," she said.

Anyone who would like to assist with the event or serve as a vendor should email grassroots@eoni.com or call 541-786-1492.

BILLS

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last items to come before the Legislature as lawmakers wait until after a state revenue forecast in May.

The requirement to read bills in full is in the Oregon constitution, but traditionally it is waived and only the two- to three-sentence title of legislation is read out loud.

It takes two-thirds of the House — 40 votes — to override an objection to the waiver. Democrats have 37 seats.

While the tactic has been employed in prior sessions on specific pieces of controversial legislation, Drazan has used it on all bills. The pace of legislation in the House has become glacial.

The refusal to allow just the title to be announced leads to marathon readings of bills that take hours.

On March 30, the House used a computer program to read the bills in place of the clerks. First up was a 170-page bill that changed the name of the Oregon Liquor Control Commission to the Oregon Liquor and Cannabis Commission.

Drazan's statement on the budget bills is the first crack in Republicans' strategy.

Danny Moran, spokesman for House Speaker Tina Kotek, D-Portland, said on March 30 the budget bill promise would not change the overall dynamics of House votes.

"House Republican leadership is still holding up critical funding for summer learning, child care, homeless shelters and wildfire recovery," Moran said.

Kotek said Monday, March 29, that the slowdown could cause a pileup that would bump up against the constitutional clock. March 30 was the 70th day of the 160-day session that began Jan. 19.

"We do run into the challenge of getting bills to the Senate," Kotek said Monday. "It gets complicated."

The session ran into problems immediately after it started in January. The House recessed because of security concerns over Oregon State Police warnings of possible violent demonstrations timed to the inauguration of President Joe Biden. No demonstrations occurred at that time.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Legislature held remote hearings for much of the first two months. However, the constitution requires that lawmakers come to the Oregon Capitol for the final passage of bills.

Two cases of COVID-19 linked to floor activity briefly shut the House over the past month.

In response to the slowdown, Kotek has scheduled day and evening sessions for every day this week.

The schedule brings the lawmakers to the Capitol, which has been closed since March 2020 because

of the COVID-19 outbreak. The ZIP code where the Capitol is located has had the most cases of COVID-19 in the state.

Both sides blame the other for having to spend so much time in the Capitol. Republicans say too much time is being spent on bills that aren't directly related to the COVID-19, economic slowdown and wildfire relief. An estimated 4,000 pieces of legislation have been introduced, the most in a decade.

"That would be too much in a normal year and this is not a normal year," said Andrew Fromm, spokesman for the House Republican Caucus.

Democrats want to address police reform, affordable housing, environmental initiatives, taxes, health care and gun control, along with other issues. They say Republicans are using a desperate tactic to force the will of a small minority onto the majority who say they were elected to pass the kind of legislation on the agenda.

Rep. Rachel Prusak, D-Tualatin, tweeted on March 30 the slowdown was tempting a health crisis.

"They're also putting the health of all legislators, staff and their families at risk as we're still fighting a global pandemic," she wrote.

So far, no lawmaker has tested positive, making Oregon one of only four states to have its Legislature virus-free over the past 13 months.

Union County will begin their roadside spraying program to control vegetation and noxious weeds that are encroaching on county road shoulders and right-of-ways. In most locations, spraying will extend four to eight feet from pavement edges. Property owners who do not want herbicides applied near their property must sign an "Owner Will Maintain" agreement with the county which must be updated annually. The county will provide signs for the owners participating. Property owners wishing to participate can sign up for the "Owner Will Maintain" program at the Union County Public Works Department located at 10513 N. McAlister Road in Island City. Any questions, please call Brian Clapp 541-805-5399 or email bclapp@union-county.org.

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