

ART

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ative design that speaks to the cultural identity of La Grande and honors its heritage through a cohesive use of materials and visual language. The artwork should reflect the theme, “Honoring the Past, Celebrating the Present; Embracing the Future.”

Stu Spence, director of La Grande Parks & Recreation, explained the arts commission for several years has held what it calls “creative conversations” with members of the art community in Northeast Oregon, except for in 2020, due to the pandemic.

“One of the ideas that came out of that was for a public art display in downtown,” he said.

The arts commission made the project its top priority in 2019 and put together a small committee to determine how to bring this to fruition and where the art display should be placed.

The committee selected the concrete bulkhead at the entrance to Cook Memorial Library at the corner of Fourth Street and Adams Avenue. The bulkhead measures 41 inches tall, 17 inches wide and 36 feet long. Installing the piece there, Spence said, would make it easy to view and highlight the library’s entrance.

The proposal is open to all residents of Union, Baker, Wallowa and Umatilla counties who are 18 and older, and individuals or teams of artists can participate, but the commission is giving preference to those with previous large-scale project experience and/or a connection to La Grande.



Alex Wittwer/The Observer

The large bronze reproduction of “Cast Iron Mary” stands at the entrance to Max Square across from Cook Memorial Library in downtown La Grande, where the city is looking to install a new sculpture in the summer of 2022.

He also said that “the city does not plan on using any general fund dollars for this project.”

While some cities silo funds for public art, Spence said the arts commission will be seeking grants to cover the cost of the project, which also includes paying the artist.

“The idea is to get a design, and then use that to get grant funding,” said

“I feel that public art improves a community image, belonging and identity while simultaneously supporting the arts economy and artists.”

— Darcy Dolge, executive Director Art Center East

Spence, who expressed confidence in the project. “Once the artist is selected and the design is accepted, we’ll write some grants.”

Providers of public art grants, Spence said, want to see a project’s plans before a request for funding. The call for proposals is the first step in seeking grants.

This is different from how the city, for example, budgets for road repairs.

The project is looking to install the art in the summer of 2022.

Darcy Dolge, the executive director of the non-profit Art Center East in La Grande said she was well aware of the call for artists for the project.

“I feel that public art improves a community image, belonging and identity,” she said, “while simultaneously supporting

the arts economy and artists.”

Dolge also referred to the nonprofit Americans for the Arts’ 2017 study “Arts & Economic Prosperity 5,” an economic analysis of the arts and culture. According to the study, nonprofit arts and cultural organizations in Northeast Oregon spent about \$652,000 while audiences spent almost \$557,000 taking in arts and

culture.

The total economic impact of arts and culture in the region produced 39 full-time jobs.

The study shows a population for the region of almost 49,000, which would about equal the combined populations of Union, Wallowa and Baker counties at the time.

Several buildings in and around downtown display murals, and there are a couple of public sculptures on display downtown.

The most recent is from 2015. La Grande Main Street Downtown headed up the project and selected Summerville artist Judd Koehn for an installation of bronze hats on the north side of the 1200 block of Adams Avenue.

And the large bronze reproduction of “Cast Iron Mary” has been standing just shy of 99 years at the entrance to Max Square across from Cook Memorial Library.

The Women’s Christian Temperance Union in 1904 erected the original “Cast Iron Mary,” according to information on the city’s Parks & Recreation website.

“Her purpose was twofold: first to provide good, clean drinking water for people, horses and dogs; and, secondly, to entice the menfolk away from the numerous taverns found in La Grande at the time,” according to the city.

But George Noble, a local bootlegger, was fleeing from police the night of April 22, 1922, and lost control of his automobile and crashed into the fountain.

While Noble escaped unhurt, the city reported, the crash totaled both his automobile and “Cast Iron Mary.”

staff during an April 7 clinic in Salem.

COVID-19 has infected 31.2 million people in the United States and caused over 562,000 deaths, according to the Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center.

Oregon has had one of the lowest infection and death rates in the country, with OHA reporting 171,398 positive cases through Tuesday, and 2,446 deaths.

Infections have been on the rise again over the past few weeks after a long decline following the peak levels of January.

Most of the deaths throughout the pandemic have been in adults 70 and older. About 75 percent of that population in Oregon has now been vaccinated.

The high immunization level of those most vulnerable to severe illness and death from COVID-19 has slowed hospitalizations and

nated will likely latch on to the issue.

“There are some people who are going to decline vaccination regardless,” he said. “If they were thinking vaccinations were harmful anyway, this will give them additional fuel.”

But the pause was actually a way to show the public that serious reactions, no matter how tiny a percentage, will be investigated. He expects the Johnson & Johnson vaccine to be back in use relatively soon. Whatever vaccine is available, he encouraged residents to sign up.

The vaccines are “effective on a disease that has killed a lot of people,” he said.

Gov. Kate Brown was inoculated with the Johnson & Johnson vaccine March 6 to show the state’s confidence in the vaccine. She has reported no side effects. The vaccine was also given to several lawmakers and

fire” and described it as “shortsighted.”

“You want to take out somebody that votes the way you want 99% of the time but on one bill?” he said, describing Girod as a

HANSELL

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Legislature has done — and I don’t, I’m not supporting the bill, I voted no and I’ll vote no every time — they have a chance to raise the signatures and do it.”

Hansell isn’t the only Republican facing recall threats from showing up on March 25.

Senate Minority Leader Fred Girod, who has held the Senate seat since 2008, is facing similar efforts, though recall petitions against state legislators and Gov. Kate Brown in the past few years have fallen short.

Hansell said that Girod facing a recall effort seems like “friendly

plans and redraw 2020 political districts, it is especially important that Republicans show up.

The Oregon Supreme Court on Friday, April 9, ruled unanimously that the Oregon Legislature would have the right to redraw boundaries for the state’s 90 House and Senate seats.

“great leader.”

Hansell added the focus of the opposition should be placed on the bill writers and promoters, rather than Republicans who oppose it.

“The battle is not over yet,” he said. “For us to recall somebody because they chose to stay and fight rather than run and hide on



Alex Wittwer/The Observer

La Grande School District is set to receive significant funding due to the American Rescue Plan, the latest COVID-19 relief package from the federal government.

RESCUE

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line. The money will come from the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief fund within the act.

The La Grande School District is set to receive about \$5 million in stimulus funding, and the remaining smaller eight school districts in Union and Wallowa counties will receive smaller amounts. The following is the estimated school district breakdown: Cove \$389,000; Elgin \$564,000; Enterprise \$698,000; Imbler \$211,000; Joseph \$442,000; North Powder \$561,000; Union \$469,000; and Wallowa \$720,000.

La Grande School District Business Director Chris Panike said the La Grande School District will be able to use its ARPA funding to continue operations while determining the impact of the pandemic.

He explained the district’s enrollment has fallen by 140 students since the pandemic hit in March 2020. The reasons, in part, could be that more students are in homeschool and that others have enrolled in online education outside the district.

“We don’t know if these students are coming back,” Panike said.

Panike said in the interim the school district does not want to make budget reductions because it would not be in a position to absorb the enrollment increase. He said the \$5 million the school district will receive will prevent it from being in such a precarious position.

“We will be able to continue operating until we sort out the impact,” Panike said.

Declining enrollment has a big effect on the budgets of school districts because the state funding they receive is based on the number of students in the district.

Cove School Superintendent Earl Pettit said his district may spend its ARPA funding on remodeling work to create office space for professionals providing

metal health, counseling and nursing services to students. The need of such services has increased because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Pettit said the funding will not put school districts in a position to add additional staff because it will be provided just once, not annually. The Cove superintendent said he does not want his district to add a position or program for which there is not sustainable funding.

Pettit said the American Rescue Plan funding is putting school districts in an unfamiliar position. He explained that normally districts request funding for specific needs. This time, though, school districts are receiving money they did not request or had budgeted for and now must find the best way to spend the money.

Mark Mulvihill, superintendent of the InterMountain Education Service District, said the ARPA funding will help school districts get their students caught up socially and emotionally after enduring the COVID-19 pandemic in their homes taking classes online.

He said the education service district will use a portion of its ARPA funding to offer fifth-quarter summer programs for students, including outdoor school and parks and recreation activities, to get them back to interacting in person with classmates and educators.

Mulvihill said he does not want to see students receive in-person instruction, as many are now beginning to, only to next experience a summer with no activities with peers.

“They would be abruptly stopping after starting,” Mulvihill said.

To prevent this, he said he wants to use ARPA dollars to help schools offer a gentler “glide path slope” for students through which they will get accustomed again to in-person learning. The IMESD will offer academic programs and a credit recovery program for high school students who have fallen behind in the credits they need to graduate.

“If we don’t show up and that committee continues to meet, lines are going to be drawn without any input from people from” places like rural Oregon, he said. “There is just too much at stake to not show up.”

Hansell described the walkout tactic as a “valuable tool in the tool belt” to be used sparingly. He said if the tactic is abused, “you run the risk of being further in the minority” because moderate voters in both parties “don’t feel this is a tactic that should be done.”

“It’s more of your far right, if you will,” Hansell said of people who largely support walkouts. “I suspect if the Democrats were in the minority, it would be more of the far left.”

PAUSE

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during an afternoon press call.

The CDC said the six women were aged 18 to 48. They became ill from one to three weeks after their vaccination. The cause appeared to be a rare blood clot disorder.

The state has given about 82,000 Johnson & Johnson shots, a tiny fraction of the 2.3 million vaccine doses administered since December. OHA said about 212,000 doses are on hand in 225 locations around the state and can be kept in regular refrigeration units for later use when federal officials lift the advisory.

Cieslak said severe symptoms include pain in the legs — which could indicate a blood clot — severe headache and abdominal pain. Anyone experiencing the symptoms should contact their doctor or local public health agency. Information is also available by calling 211.

There have been no reports of any similar severe side effects to the Moderna and Pfizer two-shot vaccines.

Federal health officials will begin meeting Wednesday to look at the data on the severe cases and see if there is a direct connection between the vaccine and the illnesses.

Dr. Janet Woodcock, acting commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration, said Tuesday during a press conference in Washington D.C. that a review of the vaccine would likely be “a matter of days.”

Cieslak said the state would resume using the one-shot vaccine as soon as

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