

THE OBSERVER

SERVING UNION AND WALLOWA COUNTIES SINCE 1896

May 25, 2021

TUESDAY EDITION

\$1.50

Joseph officials to name names

City council may recommend sanctions in staff harassment case

By **BILL BRADSHAW**
Wallowa County Chieftain

JOSEPH — Officials with the city of Joseph announced they will identify which members of the city council are on the receiving end of harassment allegations as well as recommendations for discipline.

The Joseph City Council meets Thursday, May 27, for another emergency session that comes in the wake of multiple allegations of council members harassing city employees.

City hall sent out an agenda for the meeting that includes open and executive sessions. The regular meeting will begin at 5:30 p.m. at the Joseph Community Events Center, following an open budget hearing.

During the executive session, city attorney Wyatt Baum and interim City Administrator Brock Eckstein will discuss the allegations and make recommendations for discipline of councilors deemed guilty. An open session follows the closed-door meeting where the council can take action of the recommendations.

“By next Thursday, names will be released and recommendations for punishment will come from myself and the city attorney in open session,” Eckstein said during an interview with the Wallowa County Chieftain Thursday, May 20. “I can guarantee that for Thursday.”

The allegations of harassment came to a head April 16 when former City Administrator/Recorder Larry Braden submitted his resignation citing “constant harassment by members of the current city council.” That came on top of a similar allegation in March by

See, **Joseph/Page 5A**

La Grande eyes solutions to housing shortage

By **DAVIS CARBAUGH**
The Observer

LA GRANDE — The city of La Grande and its planning commission continue to deal with the shortage of affordable housing in the city.

The La Grande City Council/Planning Commission Joint Work Session on April 12, 2021, looked at various solutions to the looming crisis.

According to the Housing Needs Analysis in 2019, La Grande is in need of 800 new units within the next 20 years to compensate for a projected growth of 1,392 new residents. That’s about 40 new units every year to meet the prediction.

The HNA found single-family homes will be the most vital form of housing in coming years,

despite accounting for a smaller percentage of new housing units than the current housing stock.

“We predominantly have contractors that build custom homes, one or two at a time,” Community Development Director Mike Boquist said. “We don’t generally have a large inventory of houses that are available for sale that are constantly under con-

struction like they do in larger cities.”

As it stands, about 25% of households in La Grande are under severe rent burden, meaning residents spend more than 50% of their income on housing. This also qualifies as a housing crisis. Further, affordable apartments and houses for rent are hard to come by in La Grande. According to the La

Grande Housing Production Strategy Open House and Survey on Feb. 26, renters in La Grande are twice as likely to be cost burdened than homeowners, which is a telling sign.

“We have a lot of land in our inventory here that’s available for construction, but just not a lot of vacant homes,” Boquist said.

See, **Housing/Page 5A**

Finding shelter at MERA

By **DICK MASON**
The Observer

UNION COUNTY — Exhausted hikers and mountain bikers at the Mount Emily Recreation Area now can recharge in a new building at the edge of Caffeine Trail.

The structure is not a coffee shop but a large lean-to type of building that provides protection from the sun and rain. Forrest Warren of Summerville constructed the structure. He is a retired educator, a farmer and the Imbler Rural Fire Department’s assistant chief.

“I thought this might be a nice addition,” Warren said. “It seemed like something was needed, so I said ‘Lets give this a try.’”

The wooden structure is 12 feet by 16 feet with a metal roof 10 feet high at its top point. Warren said it is designed so visitors will receive shade in the summer because of a hillside to the west and much sun exposure in the winter because it faces south.

“It will provide summer shade and winter sun,” Warren said.

The shelter also is positioned so people looking south receive an excellent view of La Grande.

Warren received funding help for the project from the Blue Mountain Singletrack Trails Club.

“Its support was great. It made it happen,” he said.

The shelter is 2 miles by trail from the Owsley Canyon Trailhead and where the Caffeine and MERA Loop trails connect. Warren chose the location because it is in the middle of MERA’s trail network for non-motorized uses.

“It is super centralized,” Warren said.

Jeff Crews, who helped deposit bark chips in the shelter on Saturday, May 22, agreed.

“It is in the middle of everything,” Crews said.

Warren said he spent “a long six days” constructing the shelter.



Dick Mason/The Observer

Left to right, volunteers Jeff Crews, Jonah Lindeman and Forrest Warren work Saturday, May 22, 2021, to complete a shelter at the Mount Emily Recreation Area near La Grande. The shelter will provide a place to have a picnic, get out of bad weather or rest and take in the scenic view.



Dick Mason/The Observer

Jeff Crews, left, Jonah Lindeman, center, and Forrest Warren move wood chips Saturday, May 22, 2021, to the floor of a new shelter at the Mount Emily Recreation Area near La Grande.

He said the help from several volunteers — Bart Barlow, Dave Larman, Micha Anderson, Tom Guthrie, Steve Stanhope, Dusty Fitzgerald and Ed Mosiman — played a big role in the completion of the project.

The shelter has a first aid kit that includes splints and slings. Warren asks those who use the kit to call him so he can replace materials.

“I have been an EMT for 21 years,” he said. “I am an avid believer in being prepared. First aid is huge.”

Warren used live-edge siding on the structure so that it would look natural. Live-edge boards are cut to leave one side with the natural curves of the tree. The shelter’s wood slab seats, which

See, **MERA/Page 5A**

Many work to help children in foster care

Volunteers, donations are part of crucial programs supporting foster children

By **LISA BRITTON**
EO Media Group

Editor’s Note

This is the third of a three-part series on foster care needs in Baker, Union and Wallowa counties. The previous parts ran in the Thursday, May 20, and Saturday, May 22, editions of The Observer.

There are nearly 6,000 children in foster care across Oregon, and several programs in Eastern Oregon support those children, and provide ways for the community to help, too.

Every Child Oregon

Every Child Oregon is a statewide initiative that

partners with the Oregon Department of Human Services to “aid children in foster care and to support foster families.”

Wallowa, Union and Baker counties are part of DHS District 13. Every Child Northeast Oregon, with Erin Taggart as program director, started serving this area in March 2020.

The goals of Every Child include foster family

recruitment, and working in the communities to support volunteer projects.

One project is My Neighbor. Taggart said this provides a place for caseworkers, foster parents, children and CASAs — court-appointed special advocates — to specify a need, such as bunk beds, clothing, shoes or sports clothes.

Community members who register with My

Neighbor can log in and find needs to fulfill.

A recent project by Every Child updated DHS visitation rooms with new furniture.

“To make it a little more home-like,” Taggart said.

Every Child, she said, offers community engagement either by accepting donations or with volunteer opportunities. Both offer

See, **Foster/Page 5A**

INDEX

Classified.....3B	Home.....1B	Obituaries.....3A
Comics.....7B	Horoscope.....3B	Opinion.....4A
Crossword.....4B	Letters.....4A	Sports.....7A, 8A
Dear Abby.....8B	Lottery.....3A	State.....6A

WEATHER

Full forecast on the back of B section



Tonight
40 LOW
Partly cloudy



Wednesday
72/47
Sunny and warmer

CONTACT US

541-963-3161

Issue 60
2 sections, 16 pages
La Grande, Oregon

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



8 51153 00100 6

THURSDAY

UNION COUNTY BUDGET HEARINGS

Online at lagrandeobserver.com