



Alex Wittwer/EO Media Group, File
Fairgoers walk through the Union County Fairgrounds, La Grande, on Friday, Aug. 6, 2021. Board members are seeking funding to move forward with a plan that would bring running water and sewage back to the fairgrounds.

FAIR

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the bathroom facilities use- less. Not only are the bath- rooms needed for events like the Union County Fair and Eastern Oregon Beer Festival, but the utility is crucial for emergency scenarios.

“For emergency situations, those grounds are very, very useful for us,” Scarfo said. “Especially during COVID, we were able to do drive-thru clinics.”

According to Scarfo, funding negotiations with the state involve the idea that the grounds are an essential location for the whole county on a regular basis.

“The fair is only there for a week, but the rest of the time, we as Union County use those grounds for other functions that we need,” he said. “The grounds are not functional without running water and toilets.”

La Grande-based civil engineering firm Anderson Perry & Associates is assisting in the planning process for the sewer system, which will involve crossing Interstate 84 and the Grande Ronde River. The project is estimated to

be in the \$2 million range.

Mike Lees, an Anderson Perry engineer, noted that additional funding will be needed beyond the planning phases, but “the biggest hurdle right now is finding funds to move forward with the project.”

The plan involves using the current water service on the north side of La Grande as well as an existing sewage conduit under the freeway. Suspended sewage lines across the Second Street overpass would be used to get cross the Grande Ronde River.

According to Lees, the sewer project will be divided into two phases. The infrastructure will need to be established at the fairgrounds, followed by distributing and installing the new infrastructure at the grounds.

Funding for the project is in the planning process. At the Oregon Legislative session, a proposed \$10 million could potentially be distributed to the fairs within all 36 counties and the state fair — the approximately \$270,000 even split would still leave the Union County Fairgrounds well short of the needed quota, though. According to Cornford, the funding is nowhere near what the fair is in need of.

Scarfo said this is not

the first time Union County has sought help from the Legislature to address the sewer system needs at the fairgrounds.

“This has been a project we’ve been working on for years now,” he said. “We really thought it was going to get funded last year in the regular session but it never did.”

Scarfo noted that 100% fully grant-funded projects rarely happen, which is why the county and fair board are looking to invest in the project. This could open the door for potential matching funds.

“That’s an idea of mine, to do some matching partnerships if we can’t get this fully funded through the state or some other ways,” he said. “I would hope that everyone would get on board and bring a little bit to the table.”

A working sewage system at the Union County Fairgrounds will open doors for event-hosting opportunities, as well as improve an essential emergency location.

“With COVID and the need for emergency facilities, the fairgrounds has a large footprint,” Lees said. “Unfortunately, the facility does not currently have the infrastructure to support that.”

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