

# THE OBSERVER

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## District offers look at possible future athletic-academic center

Artistic renderings of multi-use building released ahead of May vote on proposed bond

By **DICK MASON**  
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Less imagination is now needed to visualize a major addition proposed in the La Grande School District.

The La Grande School District has released artistic renderings of how the exterior and interior of a proposed new ath-

letic and academic center on the grounds of La Grande Middle School would appear if voters approve a \$4.845 million bond in May for its construction. The structure would replace the current Annex building, which was built more than eight decades ago, and the adjacent maintenance facility.

Joe Justice, a member of the bond's political action committee, Citizens for School Renovation, said the renderings will give its campaign a boost.

"People are visual," he said, noting that a "picture helps people understand" what is being proposed.



This artist's rendering, released in February 2022, shows what the proposed new multi-use building at La Grande Middle School would look like.

The new building, according to preliminary plans, would have two full-size gyms, locker

rooms and two classrooms. The current Annex building has a single full-size gym as its pri-

mary feature, one used by middle school physical education classes plus other classes and the community.

"That gym has gotten a lot of use. A lot of kids have benefited from the facility. However, we need a more modern building for the future," Justice said, adding that the current building would not be torn down until the new one was built because it is used so much by the middle school.

Preliminary plans call for the new multi-use building to be near the middle school's greenhouses.

See, **Bond**/Page A7

## Oregon could be 'masks off' by March 20

By **GARY A. WARNER**  
Oregon Capital Bureau

SALEM — The first day of spring could be a new beginning in the COVID-19 pandemic, with the likely lifting of indoor-mask mandates, a state report forecast on Thursday, Feb. 17.

The drop in daily hospitalizations from the omicron wave of the coronavirus is accelerating and is expected to fall below 400 per day by March 20, according to the latest forecast by Oregon Health & Science University.

Gov. Kate Brown said Feb. 17 that she would lift the state's indoor-mask mandate when hospitalizations fell below 400 or no later than March 31. At the time, the OHSU forecast put the hospitalization goal at the far end of the timeline.

But the incredibly rapid rise of the omicron variant to record numbers of cases is now being matched by its decline.

"Oregonians are doing the right thing, and it's paying off," said Dr. Peter Graven, OHSU's lead forecaster.

Brown had not yet commented on the new forecast as of Feb. 17. The forecast was released late in the afternoon.

The OHSU report cautioned Oregonians to not get ahead of current public health recommendations. The new forecast date is still more than a month away, not today.

"It will be important to keep it up if we're going to have a more manageable impact on our health system," Graven said.

Dropping safeguards early could slow the decline of omicron and push the end of the mask mandate closer to the March 31 date.

"This doesn't mean that we're out of the woods," Graven said.

See, **Masks**/Page A7

## 2022 STARTED WET, BUT DROUGHT WORRIES LINGER

By **KATY NESBITT**  
For EO Media Group

PENDLETON — December and January storms set up the winter of 2022 to be cold and wet, but several weeks without significant snow or rain are creating concerns of another drought year.

Northeastern Oregon is faring better than Central and Southern Oregon, with cold temperatures preventing the early January snowfall from melting. Snow in the last few days has helped inch up snowpack and snow water equivalent levels for the Blue and Wallowa mountains.

According to the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service website, monthly streamflow and reservoir conditions for January in the Umatilla-Walla Walla-Willow Basin were above average. Two bodies of water in the southern region of the basin near Heppner are considerably higher than the rest of the basin: Willow Creek is at 187% and Rhea Creek is at 142% of the 30-year median.

See, **Drought**/Page A7

### Dry January aggravates dry conditions across Northeastern Oregon

Weeks of subfreezing temperatures have held snow in the higher elevations of Northeastern Oregon, as is evident in this February 2022 photo of the Wallowa Mountains. Despite reasonable snowpack levels in the high country, however, most of the region is still facing severe drought conditions.

Katy Nesbitt/For EO Media Group



## Campus food drive aims to combat local food insecurity

EOU students and faculty unite to collect food and financial donations

By **DAVIS CARBAUGH**  
The Observer

LA GRANDE — The Eastern Oregon University community is doing its part to make sure those in need have food on the table.

The university is halfway into its month-long annual campus food drive, which is on pace to reach its donation goals. The food drive is aimed

to not only help the local community but students and faculty on campus.

"It all goes back here," said Kate Gekeler, administrative program assistant in EOU's Office of Regional Outreach and Innovation. "We are one of the biggest places that goes out and really tries to rally the troops and build up that supply."

Gekeler, who is in her

first year as the food drive's director, helped organize the event alongside eight regularly volunteering students and others looking to get involved on campus. The food drive, which has occurred for more than 20 consecutive years, began Thursday, Feb. 3, and concludes March 2.

Prior to Gekeler, Bill Grigsby served as the food drive's campus coordinator for roughly 15 years and helped pass the torch to the next wave of campus leadership and students. What



Gekeler

started as an assignment in an upper-division anthropology and sociology class has evolved into a campus-wide effort.

"Our campus community has been very generous over the years," Grigsby said. "We always find building coordinators and our shipping department helps us get the food loaded and sent out to the local food banks in a

timely manner. It has been a pleasure to be part of this cause and work with other like-minded folk."

### All hands on deck

In this year's rendition of the campus food drive, the university set the goal of collecting 1,000 pounds of goods and \$5,000 in funds. According to Gekeler, the food drive at the halfway mark has reached 95% of the food goal and 68% of the

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### WEATHER Full forecast on the back of B section

	<b>Tonight</b> 34 LOW Bit of rain, snow		<b>Sunday</b> 37/27 A little snow
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### CONTACT US

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