

# STRATEGY

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of the COVID-19 pandemic.

“We really are still in a recovery mode, trying to move back toward a more resilient economy,” Bishop said. “Finding that balance between retention, resiliency and recruitment is really the balancing point.”

## Noticeable emphasis

Another similar balance the city is working to achieve is recruiting new business into the area while also continuing to promote local entrepreneurship. One of the goals of the strategic plan details efforts to support local organizations in developing a skilled workforce — the partnerships include the La Grande School District, Eastern Oregon University, Blue Mountain Community College and WorkSource Oregon.

Bishop noted that the city is aiming to create the tools and resources necessary to foster a skilled workforce, while adjusting to how the pandemic has shifted employee-employer relationships and workplace environments.

A noticeable emphasis in the



Alex Wittwer/EO Media Group, File

**A man rides down Adams Avenue on a one-wheeled skateboard during Crazy Days in La Grande on Saturday, July 17, 2021. The La Grande 2022-24 economic development strategy emphasizes several key points, including promoting increased foot traffic in the downtown area to benefit local retailers.**

economic development strategy is recruiting small-scale manufacturing to La Grande, utilizing the infrastructure and space available in the city. Bishop stated that small-scale manufacturers are a good match with La Grande’s current assets.

The plan stresses small-scale manufacturing over large-scale for several reasons, such as incen-

tives available, infrastructure and workforce absorption. Incentives through the city’s urban renewal district and business park could be much more impactful for a small-scale manufacturer with roughly 10 employees, as opposed to larger-scale manufacturers typically locating in larger cities with more monetary incentives available.

## TRANSPARENCY

The full economic development strategy can be viewed on the city’s website, [www.cityoflagrande.org](http://www.cityoflagrande.org) (posted in the April 6 agenda of both the city council and the Urban Renewal Agency). Upon garnering approval at the April council meeting, councilors agreed upon updates from the La Grande Economic Development Department at least once every six months to track the progress of the strategy.

A larger manufacturer coming to La Grande would also likely pull employees from other local entities to the new company, weakening the overall local workforce. On the other hand, if a large-scale manufacturer were to relocate its workers to La Grande, challenges with housing availability would come into play. Bishop also noted that local small-scale manufacturing can stabilize and reduce supply chain issues.

Another emphasis of the plan as a whole is making use of underutilized space throughout the city. Small-scale manufacturers are capable of utilizing already available space and the existing infrastructure.

“We think there are more folks

that need perhaps 2,500 square feet rather than 25,000 square feet,” Bishop said. “That allows us to focus our energy at the business park and some of those large-lotted parcels for a business that really does need a larger space, but allows us to still be active in recruiting and identifying new opportunities by focusing on tenants that can potentially re-purpose and re-use some of these smaller existing spaces. That produces a more infrastructure-efficient approach.”

With the utilization of spaces throughout La Grande comes the idea of fostering a productive, bustling downtown area, which continues to be a focus of the city’s economic development plans. The 2022-24 economic development plan emphasizes creating more retail opportunities to encourage increased foot traffic in downtown La Grande.

“There certainly is a desire stated in this economic development plan and within La Grande Main Street to really see downtown become more of a retail hub,” Bishop said. “Some of that includes continued efforts to look at downtown housing, creating a 24/7 downtown experience.”

# HIV

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national physician groups recommend that everyone be tested for HIV at least once. But most adult Oregonians have never been tested for HIV. People in more rural parts of the state are even less likely than people living in urban areas to be tested in a timely manner.

Toombs said testing and awareness are especially important because of the increase in positive cases in Eastern Oregon.

“It’s almost quadrupled,” he said. “Even though the numbers are low, we’ve gone from

## MORE INFORMATION

For more information about HIV testing, prevention and treatment in Oregon, visit [www.endhivoregon.org](http://www.endhivoregon.org).

three cases to almost, I believe, 12 cases. And so that’s quite a bit, and that’s definitely made us take a look at what needs to happen around raising awareness and making tools available.”

The campaign will utilize radio ads, billboards and newspaper ads to raise awareness about testing. Toombs said testing already is available, but awareness has been lacking.

“We have the tools available, but

I think what was missing is that we needed to make people aware that they’re available,” he said.

One of the major points of the campaign is to highlight that everyone has an HIV status, whether they’ve been tested or not.

“We all have an HIV status, and we should all be tested for HIV at least once, if not more frequently,” said Joseph Fiumara, director for Umatilla County Public Health, in a press release. “I’m thrilled to see this campaign launch here to continue building healthier communities in our part of the state.”

EOCIL provides HIV prevention and case management services in Baker, Gilliam, Grant, Harney, Umatilla, Union, Wallowa, Wasco

and Wheeler counties. Among those counties, 222 people are living with HIV, according to the EOCIL press release.

As well as raising awareness with the intent of improving the number of tests administered in rural Eastern Oregon, Toombs said reducing stigma associated with the virus is paramount, and advances in medicine and technology have made living with the virus easier.

“It’s night and day from 30 years ago,” he said. “We’re coming up on the anniversary of the passing of Ryan White (Comprehensive AIDS Resources Emergency Act), and so it makes us look back at where we were 30

years ago, and where we are now. Science is just amazing, and (with) the medical care that people are getting now — we’re living longer and healthier lives.”

Those medical advances include PrEP, a prophylactic drug that reduces HIV transmission rates by 99%, according to medical studies. Therapy drugs HIV-positive individuals use also can completely eliminate the transmission of HIV if the virus is undetectable by tests, through a process called Undetectable = Untransmittable.

“We shouldn’t have to fear having an HIV test or getting treatment,” Toombs said, “or having access to prevention tools that are available to us.”

# STEM

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The kits contain STEM projects, materials, instructions in both English and Spanish, snacks and giveaways. Students received catapults kits, engineering kits and gravity racer kits. The organization partnered with Sodexo food services to include two snack items per box.

The STEM kit event came about last year during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, when at-home learning was at the forefront for students. The GO STEM Hub upped the total number of kits from 2,000 to 2,300, making adjustments to this year’s kit based on teacher feedback.

“We learned a lot from last year,” Melville said. “We really liked the idea of it and just wanted to keep doing it.”

## ‘Pivotal point’

The GO STEM Hub works with students as well as providing resources for teachers, taking their input and needs into high consideration.

“Working in this position, we see that it means a lot to teachers when their voices are heard,” GO STEM Hub Program Director Stefanie Holloway said.

During last year’s event, the organization targeted fourth grade students after their age range and older were sent home for at-home learning due to the pandemic.

“It’s a pretty pivotal point,” Melville said of fourth grade. “It’s a great point in time where students transition from learning to read to then having the opportunity to learn and find their own interests.”

This year’s kits included several upgrades and alterations, such as paper straws

for the gravity racer kit. Another new element was a partnership with Amazon Web Services. Amazon’s philanthropic branch covered the \$46,000 project in its efforts to reach young learners in rural counties.

The kits were funded by Oregon Community Foundation last year, through a grant specific to COVID-19 relief. Organizers at the GO STEM Hub were thrilled to partner with Amazon, utilizing their resources to help spread STEM education in Eastern Oregon.

“The folks at Amazon Web Services are very passionate about investing in education in Eastern Oregon,” Holloway said. “They’re very innovative and forward thinking.”

## Growing footprint

The partnership has spawned numerous future possibilities, including a mobile maker space that is in the works — the vehicle would serve as a STEM classroom on wheels, allowing the GO STEM Hub to bring resources to schools around the region.

“That’s kind of our answer to the regional spread dilemma, because we can bring the STEM classroom all over the region,” Holloway said. “We’re hoping to identify our smallest communities that are lacking in resources to bring these opportunities to them.”

The GO STEM Hub hopes to continue providing learning opportunities for rural students, some of whom may not have access to STEM education. Another big point of emphasis is providing teachers with resources necessary to provide STEM education, as well as offering professional development opportunities.

The organization houses a free lending library, which teachers from around the

region can utilize to acquire supplies for experiments and activities. The library includes a catalog which teachers can order from and have the items shipped directly to their schools.

As the GO STEM Hub looks to further grow its footprint and encompass more students and teachers in Eastern Oregon, the to-go

STEM kits served as a productive way to bring STEM opportunities to young learners.

“We serve seven counties, so we want to make sure everyone knows who we are and what we can offer,” Holloway said. “We’re able to visit the schools by sending them things like this.”

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