

# THE OBSERVER

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## Transient lodging tax may be in place by July 1

At least 75% of the revenue from the tax will be used to promote tourism in Union

By **DICK MASON**  
The Observer

UNION — Charlie Morden isn't a fan of a new transient lodging tax the city of Union approved in March.

The city approved a 5% tax to be collected anywhere people are charged to stay for less than 30 days, such as hotels, recreational vehicle parks and bed-and-breakfasts.

Morden, the owner of the city's lone hotel, the Union Hotel, and the adjacent RV park, said his room rates, which start at \$118 a night, are among the lowest in the region but still are high in the minds of travelers.

"There is resistance by the public to pay more," said Morden, who has not raised his rates in three years.

Morden said the tax will limit how much he can raise his rates, while attempting to keep up with inflation. Morden also said the tax will ultimately reduce how much money people coming to Union have to spend in the community. He said, for example, that some lodgers may be less likely to go downtown and buy a meal in a restaurant.

"There is only so much money that people have to spend," he said. "You can't keep raising prices. Folks have a limit."

City leaders are making arrangements with the Oregon Department of Revenue to have the state agency collect the city's 5% tax. The city is trying to finalize that by July 1, the earliest it can start collecting, according to Union City Administrator Doug Wiggins.

"The state has a system set up," he said. "We will be integrating with it."

State law will allow Union to use up to 5% of the tax's revenue to cover collection costs. Seventy-five percent of the revenue from the tax will have to be spent on promoting tourism under state law, Wiggins said. Wiggins said the money could be used to pay for additions designed to draw in tourists, including the building of bike paths or a welcoming center. It also could be spent on building improvements at sites that attract tourists, including the Union County Museum and the Union Hotel.

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Morden



Wiggins



Alex Wittwer/EO Media Group

Firefighter Luke Lucero's turnout coat hangs on a utility door of a La Grande Fire Department ambulance inside the engine bay in La Grande on Thursday, April 14, 2022. The city of La Grande has adjusted hiring practices in order to help the department fill firefighter/paramedic positions.

## Filling shortages

Fire department, law enforcement aim to address openings during difficult hiring period

By **DAVIS CARBAUGH** • The Observer

LA GRANDE — Like nearly any local entity struggling to hire a full staff, the public safety sectors within the city of La Grande have faced similar challenges.

While the city's police and fire departments both have faced staff shortages during the pandemic, hiring incentives and altered training programs have provided a positive trend in getting back to full staff.

"I'm excited that we have some new candidates," La Grande Fire Chief Emmitt Cornford said. "It looks like some good ones based on the applications, so if we can hire one or two that would be great."

The La Grande City Council emphasized the issue of recruiting and retaining employees in the public safety roles at its 2022 council retreat in January. In the council's April meeting, a professional compensation survey was approved to address this issue moving forward.

Cornford and La Grande Police Chief Gary Bell both spoke at the La Grande City Council meeting earlier this month detailing the current status of openings in the departments.

The police department is



Alex Wittwer/EO Media Group, File

Firefighters with the La Grande Fire Department respond to a structure fire in the Oregon Department of Transportation sign shop the morning of Monday, March 29, 2021.

currently down three officer positions, but is in the process of selecting new hires. Bell stated the department has made one conditional

offer to a candidate and is in the late stages with a few other candidates.

One new officer is currently in the police academy

and was due to graduate April 14.

"We've had successes in

See, **Hiring/Page A7**

### ELECTION 2022

## State officials strive to rebuild trust in elections

Survey shows Oregonians are sharply divided over how to describe January 2021 attack on U.S. Capitol

By **JULIA SHUMWAY**  
Oregon Capital Chronicle

SALEM — About one in five Oregon voters, including about half of Republicans, believe voter fraud changed the results of the 2020 election.

That's one result of a February survey from the Oregon Values and Beliefs Center, a nonpartisan public opinion research organization, which also found that Oregonians are sharply divided over how to describe an attack on the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021.

While a majority of Democrats describe the incident as an "attempted coup or insurrection," a plurality of Republicans called it a "riot out of control" and voters unaffiliated with either party were split between those options.

Nearly a quarter of Republicans endorsed the false claim that the violence was perpetrated by political opponents of former President Donald Trump, and 16% of Republicans and 10% of other voters claimed it was a reasonable protest.

Respondents were similarly divided along partisan lines when it came to questions about fraud in the 2020 presidential election. About 86% of Democrats surveyed in Oregon agreed that there was virtually no fraud or very little fraud with no impact on the

results, and a slim majority of independents and other voters felt the same way. Less than a third of Republicans agreed with those statements.

Instead, 49% of Republicans said major fraudulent voting changed the outcome of the election. These survey results resemble research that Reed College conducted at the behest of the Oregon Secretary of State's Office in 2020, which found a majority of

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Tonight  
24 LOW  
Cold



Sunday  
46/37  
Mostly cloudy

### CONTACT US

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