

# BUILDING

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to the structure.

The sheriff wants to determine exactly what options are available for the one-story public safety building, which was constructed in 1979. For example, he wants to know for certain whether the building could withstand the addition of a second story. To find out, Bowen is proposing that an architecture and design firm, Mackenzie, which has offices in Portland and Seattle, be brought in to evaluate the condition of the current public safety building.

“We would be hoping to get some concrete answers,” Bowen said.

Mackenzie’s staff would also look at how space could be used more efficiently and provide cost estimates after doing a 10-week examination of the building.

Mackenzie’s evaluation of the building would cost just under \$40,000,



Davis Carbaugh/The Observer

**A Union County Sheriff’s Office vehicle sits on Sixth Street outside of the county’s law enforcement building on Tuesday, April 26, 2022, in La Grande.**

according to a proposal it has prepared.

“This would be a crucial step to keep the ball rolling

in a way that would not be as expensive,” Bowen said.

The sheriff may come before the board of com-

missioners later and request funding for the study by Mackenzie.

Paul Anderes, a member

of the Union County Board of Commissioners, sup-

ports Bowen’s plan. “This will be a great

way to separate facts from opinion,” he said.

Anderes said the poor condition of Union County’s law enforcement building has been a concern of his for some time.

“It has been a priority for me since our last sheriff was in. It is a significant issue,” he said.

Union County Commissioner Matt Scarfo also likes Bowen’s proposal, noting that it would provide an information base about the building that would be welcome.

“The more information we have the better,” Scarfo said.

Bowen said that renovating and adding to the current building based on recommendations by Mackenzie would be anything but a temporary Band-Aid approach.

“We would want to see if it could suffice for the next 50 years,” Bowen said.



Scarfo

# ANDERES

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## Reelection goals

Projects Anderes wants to help complete include improvements at the La Grande/Union County Airport, where extensive repaving of its runway was conducted in 2021. Anderes is now leading an effort to help the airport make \$1.4 million worth of additional improvements.

These improvements would include adding a 10,000-gallon fuel storage tank. Anderes said more storage capacity is needed now in part because an increasing number of jet aircraft are now used to fight wildfires.

“Jets use a lot more fuel,” he said.

Other improvements the \$1.4 million package would cover include the purchase of a generator so that fuel can still be pumped when the electricity goes out, an additional hangar for fire-fighting aircraft and a new building for equipment storage.

A second project Anderes wants to help see through involves the Blue Mountains Forest Plan, which will guide the U.S. Forest Service in managing the Wallowa-Whitman, Umatilla and Malheur national forests. Anderes is chair of a committee overseeing a study of the socioeconomic status of the people living in area of these national forests, those who reside in Eastern Oregon’s Union, Wallowa, Baker, Umatilla, Malheur, Grant and Harney counties and Southeastern Washington’s Walla Walla, Columbia, Garfield and Asotin counties.

The results of the study, being conducted by Eastern Oregon University’s Rural Engagement and Vitality Center, will be released in June. The study’s findings will reveal how federal policies affect local economies. Anderes, as chair of the committee overseeing the study, hopes to help the Forest Service use the results of the study as a guide when the agency writes the Blue Mountains Forest Plan.

A third project Anderes will continue focusing on if reelected is helping the Union County Public



The Observer, File

**A LifeFlight and an Ameriflight plane sit on the apron in front of Runway 16-34 Monday, June 29, 2020, at the La Grande/Union County Airport.**

### PAUL ANDERES

Anderes, 60, lives in La Grande and is former teacher at La Grande High School, where he taught agricultural science, forestry and firefighting for 23 years. He was elected to a four-year term on the Union County Board of Commissioners in 2018. Anderes is a graduate of Oregon State University.

Works Department modernize its equipment.

“The public works department has a lot of very old vehicles,” Anderes said.

### Accessible meetings

The commissioner said he is enjoying the opportunity to again participate in meetings open to the public now that the COVID pandemic has subsided. He much prefers talking to people in person rather than virtually, something he had to do almost exclusively at meetings during the pandemic.

“I like to be able to see the body language of people when I’m talking to them,” he said.

The Union County Board of Commissioners was able to resume in-person meetings in March. Before then, the public could listen and participate only online or by phone. Union County has continued to offer people the option of participating virtually even after personal attendance was allowed. Anderes said he wants people to continue having the online and phone options.

“This allows more people to take part in meetings,” Anderes said.

He also said he would also like to see the county begin conducting meetings outside La Grande and in the evening to make it

easier for more people in outlying areas to attend.

“There will be logistical issues but I think it is a good idea,” Anderes said.

He noted that a June 8 meeting of the county commission, which will be conducted to discuss the Greater Idaho issue, will be held in the evening, beginning at 6 p.m. in La Grande.

### MERA management

Anderes, when discussing the Mount Emily Recreation Area and steps being taken to manage it so that it is less vulnerable to wildfires, said he feels good about the two-year management plan put in place by the county. The first phase of management work was completed earlier this year.

“We are striking a good balance for multiple uses. We are getting to the place where we are protecting it and making it more resilient to wildfire in the long run and improving forest health,” Anderes said.



### MORE ELECTION INFORMATION

**What:** Election for Position 1 on the Union County Board of Commissioners.

**When:** Ballots for May 17 mail election are now in the process of being delivered to registered voters in Union County.

**Deadline:** Election ballots must be returned to the Union County Clerk’s Office by 8 p.m. Tuesday, May 17.

# HILL

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experience to good use as a county commissioner.

“I want to help all of our businesses prosper and experience success,” Hill said.

## Business background

Hill, who grew up in La Grande, is a graduate of La Grande High School and Western Business College in Portland. She left La Grande in the early 1970s and moved to the Portland area where she worked for the Oregon Department of Transportation for three years. Later she worked for two real estate development firms for a total of five years in Seattle, Washington, and then was employed in the mortgage banking business for five years in Southern California.

Hill returned to La Grande in 1991. Her experience in Union County, in addition to her private business work, includes a second stint with ODOT from 2010 to 2018, where she served in an executive support role for the agency’s District 5 and Area 5 managers.

The candidate believes that through her experience with ODOT she developed skills that would guide her as a county commissioner. She explained that during her tenure with ODOT she helped inter-governmental agencies and the business sector come together and complete projects that benefited communities, businesses, agriculture and schools.

Hill said she filed to run for a position on the Union County Board of Commissioners not only because she believes she has the necessary background and skills but also because there is a need for community members to lead.

“I believe that in the times we are living in it is important to step up, help where I can, and use my strengths to benefit my community,” she said.

### Accessible meetings

Hill wants to make it easier for people to attend meetings of the Union County Board of Commissioners. She said if elected she would strive to have



The Observer, File

**Mature ponderosa pines epitomize the wild beauty of the Mount Emily Recreation Area, outside La Grande, on Wednesday, Nov. 10, 2021.**

### LISA HILL

Hill, 68, is a La Grande resident and a business owner. Her recent work experience includes an eight-year stint with the Oregon Department of Transportation in La Grande. She is a graduate of Western Business College.

the board conduct one of its two regular monthly meetings in the evening. Presently both of the county’s twice-a-month meetings begin at 9 a.m. on Wednesday in the Joseph Building in La Grande.

Hill would also like to see the board conduct one of its meetings every three months in a Union County town outside La Grande, to make the board even more accessible to the public.

### MERA management

When asked about steps being taken to manage the Mount Emily Recreation Area so that it is less vulnerable to wildfires, Hill said she supports MERA and appreciates the benefit it provides to the community. The candidate said she can understand why wild fire is a concern because of the dry weather the region has experienced and because MERA is surrounded by

timber and homes.

Hill said that she doesn’t want to comment further on the MERA management plan, which caused controversy in 2021, because she does not have firsthand information on how the decision to put it in place was made.

### Election goals

The candidate said if elected one of her goals would be to expand the board of commissioners’ efforts to make Union County a more popular place for tourists to visit.

Hill noted that Umatilla County is known for the Pendleton Round-Up, Baker County for the Geiser Grand Hotel in Baker City, and Wallowa County for Wallowa Lake, arts and chocolate — but Union County does not have a signature drawing card.

“We need something that will get people passing by La Grande to think twice and consistently pull off the freeway,” Hill said.

She said her fondness for the Grande Ronde Valley runs deep, and she wants more people to experience it.

“I love this valley, it is home,” she said. “There is something about this valley that hooks you.”

# WYDEN

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also pushed for a middle-income housing tax credit (MIHTC).

“We’re going at every single level of this,” he said.

In La Grande’s Housing Needs Analysis report, single-family homes were pointed out as the most vital form of housing needed in the coming years. According to the 2019 analysis, La Grande will experience a projected growth of 1,392 new residents in the next 20 years — 800 new units will be needed to com-

pensate for the growth.

In La Grande, roughly 25% of households are under severe rent burden due to spending over 50% of household income on housing — these totals qualify the city for a housing crisis. Furthermore, the study showed that renters in La Grande are nearly twice as likely to be cost burdened as homeowners.

La Grande is currently looking at ways to ease these burdens, with the Housing Production Strategy in place through the city’s planning commission. Several areas of focus include lowering minimum lot sizes for single-family detached

homes and reducing barriers to developing cottage-style housing and accessory dwelling units.

Similarly, the planning commission and La Grande Economic Development Department both have future plans in place to emphasize the use of underutilized buildings in downtown La Grande for housing and retail opportunities.

Wyden emphasized the Decent, Affordable, Safe Housing for All Act, a bill he introduced in 2021, as a means to combat housing affordability. The bill aims to house homeless individuals within five years through housing

*“There’s not a nook or cranny in the state from Portland to the valley or throughout the rural part of the state where people aren’t asking about housing.”*

— U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden

vouchers, expand services to assist families in climbing out of housing poverty, increase production of affordable housing for families through investments into LIHTC and MIHTC, increase investment in homeownership in underserved communities and for low-income Americans, and encourage development strategies that are environmentally conscious.

“Obviously, you aren’t going to get decent, affordable, safe housing for all in the next 15 minutes. What we’ve been doing is pulling out pieces that touch on shelter beds, the warming stations, housing vouchers and incentives for new construction,” Wyden said. “Every day I look for ways to help us with respect to getting more shelter.”