

**2022-23 CITY BUDGET PROPOSALS**

**City manager proposals for Urban Renewal Agency budget**  
 General fund: \$1.99 million  
 Debt fund: \$2.3 million  
**City manager proposals for city budget**  
 Police department: \$3.75 million  
 Fire/EMS department: \$3.41 million  
 Parks: \$512,223  
 Street fund: \$2.1 million  
 Total city budget: \$63.2 million

**CITY**

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department-requested total of \$2,101,598, with the city manager's proposed total at \$1,991,290. The La Grande Urban Renewal Agency's call for projects section includes \$81,242 carried over from prior years, related to projects at Travelodge, The Local and Steve's Outdoor Adventures.

The city's proposed general fund outlay totals just over \$800,000, an increase from approximately \$400,000 in the last fiscal year — the new total includes transfers from the general reserve and carried-over funds for vehicle purchases. The proposal includes a software update in the municipal court system, two new police patrol cars, a code enforcement vehicle, a new ambulance and a new vehicle for the parks department.

The city's sewer reserve fund includes a requested and proposed total of \$5.76 million, with project proposals aimed at improving the overall wastewater treatment process. This year's proposed total is a slight increase from last year's fiscal year sewer reserve total of \$5.21 million.

The city's street fund includes a proposed \$2,116,418 — the budget lists numerous objectives, with the overall goal of improving the city's sidewalk, street and road infrastructure.

Following the budget hearings, the final stamp of approval comes from the city council in June.

**LUNCHES**

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advantage of the free and reduced price lunch option, the same one in place long before COVID-19 hit. The reason is families have to fill out applications for free and reduced cost lunches, which require them to reveal their household income.

Some families will not apply because they do not want others to know their economic status, Hislop said. This is unfortunate since there is no reason to be concerned about private information getting out, the superintendent said. He explained that only one person, a school district employee, ever sees the Imbler applications and the names of applicants are never shared with anyone. Income data is sent to the federal government but not the names of the families it applies to.

"My concern is that we will have kids who qualify but because their parents are reluctant to apply the children will go hungry," Hislop said.

Union School District Superintendent Carter Wells agrees that it is hard to get some families to fill out applications for free and reduced price lunches for their children.

"People are very prideful and there is some delicate information they are asked," Wells said.

The Union superintendent said he tries to tactfully get families to complete the applications.

"I encourage them to step out of their comfort zone and fill them out," he said.

**Nutritious meals fuel learning**

Wells said it is critical that students eat nutritious meals when they are in school.

"A student who is hungry cannot focus on what is being presented in the classroom," Wells said.

He said if students are for some reason not able to buy school lunch or bring



The Observer, File

**Kristi Ritchie, right, head cook with La Grande High School, hands out lunches on Tuesday, Oct. 20, 2021. School meals were free for all students during the pandemic, but the federal universal free meals program expires in June 2022.**

their lunches to school after this academic year, the Union School District's staff will step forward to assist.

"We will do everything we can to get properly cooked meals in front of students," Wells said.

**Helping school districts get funding**

Families who submit completed applications for free and reduced price lunches and breakfasts are helping not only their children but also their school districts.

Hislop explained that the amount of federal money school districts are eligible to receive for academic programs is determined in part by the percentage of students who are from families that qualify for free and reduced price lunches.

**Lunches will stay free in La Grande School District**

The looming expiration of the universal free lunch program will have no impact on the La Grande School District where free

lunches and breakfasts will continue to be available to all students, according to Michelle Glover, the La Grande School District's budget director. The reason, she said, is that the school district is part of the Community Eligibility Provision program and will remain so at least through the 2024-25 school year.

The Community Eligibility Provision is a non-pricing meal service option for schools and school districts in low-income areas. CEP allows schools and districts to serve breakfast and lunch at no cost to all enrolled students without collecting household applications, Glover said. Instead, schools that adopt CEP are reimbursed using a formula supported by the percentage of students eligible for free meals based on their participation in other specific means-tested programs, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and Temporary Assistance for

Needy Families, according to Glover.

**Converting brown baggers**

Cove School District Superintendent Earl Pettit said that there may be a small drop in the number of students eating meals served by his school district. However, he also thinks the number of students eating school lunches may be higher than before the pandemic. Pettit explained this may occur because a number of students who had brought sack lunches to school before the pandemic began eating the free midday meals served at school after the pandemic began.

"They started eating lunch at school and liked

it. It was a culture change. They got used to it after packing lunches to school," Pettit said.

The Cove superintendent is glad the federal government provided free school lunches to students because it reduced the red tape they had to deal with during the pandemic.

"It was a good decision," Pettit said.

Mark Mulvihill, superintendent of the InterMountain Education Service District, which serves Union, Umatilla and Morrow counties, also said the government's decision to provide free meals during the pandemic was a big plus.

"It was a key part of the COVID-19 recovery," Mulvihill said. "It stabilized families."



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