



Justin Davis/Blue Mountain Eagle

The city-owned greenhouse in John Day sits empty on Wednesday, April 20, 2022. City Manager Nick Green said he plans to propose that a private corporation run the greenhouse, which lost \$122,000 in 2020-21, due in part to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Greenhouse ‘not a failure’ despite \$122K loss last year

John Day may turn facility over to private managers

By JUSTIN DAVIS
Blue Mountain Eagle

JOHN DAY — After losing \$122,000, the city-owned greenhouse in John Day could soon be under new management.

City Manager Nick Green said he plans to propose that a private corporation run the greenhouse at the Tuesday, May 10, city council meeting. Green declined to disclose the name of the company but said that information will be made public at the meeting.

The greenhouse cost the city \$155,000 to operate in fiscal year 2020-21 and produced \$33,000 in revenue. Green said the coronavirus pandemic put a lot of the plans the city had for the greenhouse on hold, contributing to the \$122,000 deficit for the fiscal year.

There are currently no plans to recover the funds lost on the greenhouse, but Green said the greenhouse played an integral part in securing some of the grant funding for the city’s planned \$17.5 million wastewater treatment plant.

“It was a proof of concept to show that we could grow hydroponic crops in the valley,” Green said. “And (as a) result of having that and having economic value-added traded-sector industry that can benefit from the reclaimed water,

we gained about \$6 million in grants for the water treatment plant.”

When asked if the greenhouse is a failure, Green said he doesn’t see it that way at all.

“Next month we’ll be announcing the \$3 million award for the reclaimed water system, which is going to give us all the purple pipe and the storage capability to provide water to the greenhouse, golf course, Malheur Lumber and our parks,” he said. “I’m not counting that with the \$6 million we’ve already gotten. This is \$3 million on top of that.”

Green said the firm taking over the greenhouse will benefit from the purple pipe and water treatment facilities as well as provide private sector jobs and sell produce locally.

“The greenhouse is absolutely not a failure,” Green insisted. “It did exactly what we intended it to do. I would do it again. I think we should do it again, probably with a private partner out of the gate this time, but we didn’t have that luxury in 2017. Nobody was growing anything hydroponically in the valley four years ago.”

Green added that the plan was always to take the greenhouse private or move to a co-op arrangement because the facility wasn’t ever going to work with government labor.

“We knew that up front,” he said. “What we didn’t know was COVID. So we lost time having to adapt to a very dynamic marketplace with changing

customer preferences and needs as a result of that pandemic. That happened to every enterprise.”

The COVID-19 pandemic probably accelerated the timeline for moving the greenhouse to private ownership, according to Green.

“We probably would’ve kept growing had the pandemic not happened. At the end of the day we’re not worse off for it,” he said.

“It brought our timeline forward a bit, but having a private operator who is less constrained about what they can grow, where they can sell, who they employ and at what prices — I don’t have much choice. I have to pay all government employees PERS and public benefits. They don’t have that restriction.”

Despite the monetary loss, Green said it would have been “highly unlikely” that the city would have gotten as much grant funding as it did for the wastewater treatment plant if the greenhouse had not been tied to the proposal.

“What is the story without it?” he said. “We’re building a wastewater treatment plant, so give us money?”

Green added that he thinks the new owners of the greenhouse will be successful if the council approves the proposal to transfer operations.

“They’ve got a turnkey facility, the staff is ready to roll, they’ve got the seeds,” he said. “We’re going to partition the facility off into its own lot, lease the lot with the buildings and let them roll.”

have outweighed the potential for decreased demand prompted by a COVID-19-related economic downturn in China.

Nationally, Oregon’s prices remain fifth-highest in the nation, behind California, Hawaii, Nevada and Washington.

Locally, gas prices per gallon have hovered just below the \$4.70 mark in Union County. The average price of gas as of May 4 stood at \$4.67, while Walla Walla County’s average gas price per gallon was \$4.82.

In Umatilla County, the average price per gallon was \$4.45 as of May 4. Baker County saw an average price point of \$4.66.

In Central Oregon, the average price per gallon was \$4.70 in Crook and Deschutes counties and \$4.51 in Jefferson County, according to AAA.

Prices in Oregon remain highest in Curry County, where an average per gallon price hit \$4.97. Harney County was at \$4.91 and Josephine County at \$4.86.

REGION BRIEFS

East Umatilla Fire & Rescue frees driver from crashed pickup

WESTON — Rescuers freed the driver of a pickup Tuesday, May 3, after it ran off the road near Weston and crashed.

East Umatilla Fire & Rescue in a news release reported it responded to a call at 7:52 a.m. on Highway 204 for a pickup that ran off the road and ended up with the driver’s side door against a tree.

Highway 204 was slightly icy and the weather was foggy, according to the news release. The fire district’s personnel arrived to find a pickup nose down in snow with the rear several feet off the ground and stuck on a tree. Airbags in the cab had opened.

A crew freed the driver through the front windshield. The person suffered minor injuries and was taken by East Umatilla Fire & Rescue to a local hospital.

Baker City man in critical after motorcycle crash

BAKER CITY — A Baker City man sustained serious injuries when the motorcycle he was driving went off Highway 86 along the Powder River Wednesday, May 4, and plunged down a 25-foot embankment.

Terris Blain Webb, 50, was reported to be in critical condition on May 5 at Saint Alphonsus Medical Center in Boise, hospital spokesperson Mark Snider said.

Oregon State Police responded to the crash at 4:47 p.m., according to a police report.

Webb was riding east on the highway through the Powder River Canyon, about 27 miles east of Baker City and 13 miles west of Richland. He rode off the highway on a curve,



Mark Woodbright/East Umatilla Fire & Rescue

East Umatilla Fire & Rescue on the morning of Tuesday, May 3, 2022, freed the driver of this crashed pickup on Highway 204.

according to the report.

Police found Webb a short distance from the Honda motorcycle. A Life-Flight helicopter brought Webb to the Boise hospital.

Child sex abuse trial delayed for Baker County man

BAKER CITY — The trial of a Baker County man accused of sexually abusing a child has been moved from next week to late November 2022, almost three years after he was arrested.

Bill David Gonyer, 75, is being treated for cancer, and he suffered a heart attack in March 2022, according to an April 27 motion from his Baker City attorney, Damien Yervasi.

“During this chemotherapy regime, moving forward with the trial undermines his treatment and could cause prejudicial harm to his health,” Yervasi wrote in

the motion. “It also forces him to choose between going to trial and forgoing a potentially lifesaving treatment or failing to appear and facing the legal consequences.”

Gonyer, who is accused of 15 separate crimes that carry mandatory minimum prison sentences were he convicted, was scheduled to go to trial May 9 in Baker County Circuit Court.

Baker County District Attorney Greg Baxter said on Monday, May 2, he was prepared for trial but that he understands Gonyer’s health problems.

In an April 27 motion in response to Yervasi’s motion, Baxter wrote that although he did not object to the motion to delay the trial, “the victim, her family, law enforcement, and I all wish that this case could go to trial in May. I have reviewed Mr. Yervasi’s motion. I believe that he has satisfied the Court’s parameters to get a continuance.”



Gonyer

—EO Media Group

Gas rises 2 cents a gallon statewide

By JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN
The Oregonian

SALEM — Average gas prices statewide went up 2 cents, according to AAA Oregon/Idaho, while nationally, prices are climbing even faster, jumping 7 cents this week to \$4.20 per gallon of regular unleaded.

AAA reported \$4.71 per gallon as the average price in Bend, up from \$4.67 a week ago. Statewide, the average was \$4.69 a gallon. Portland-area motorists are paying \$4.77 a gallon, close to the all-time high of \$4.79, reached on March 27.

AAA spokesperson Marie Dodds said consumers shouldn’t expect much relief for gas prices this summer, as crude oil prices remain around \$100 a barrel.

“As long as the supply remains tight, crude oil prices are not likely to fall, which means consumers will continue to face elevated prices at the pump,” she said. “It now costs drivers in the U.S. about \$23 more to fill up than a year ago.”

Crude oil prices have risen as the U.S. and other countries placed strict sanctions on Russia, one of the world’s largest oil producers, in response to its invasion of Ukraine. The effects of that price increase

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