

BMCC board postpones decision on faculty layoffs, budget

By JOHN TILLMAN
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — The Blue Mountain Community College Board of Education at its meeting Wednesday, June 1, postponed action on a 2022-23 budget proposing faculty layoffs.

The board's reading of state law requiring seven day public notice was responsible for the delay, BMCC President Mark Browning explained.

The board plans to reconvene in a special meeting June 6 to consider approval of the budget. The budget committee agreed to the BMCC Faculty Association's request to resume talks on teacher layoffs June 3.

"I don't ever want to close that door," Browning said. "We have a plan, but of course (the administration) is willing to listen. The (BMFA) came up with some good ideas before talks broke down."

Before the final decision to delay the budget vote, the faculty union went ahead with its rally outside Pioneer Hall. The demonstration of support for teachers attracted about



Kathy Aney/East Oregonian

About 100 Blue Mountain Community College faculty, students and community members gather Wednesday, June 1, 2022, on the Pendleton campus to protest the college administration's budget proposal that would cut several teaching positions.

120 attendees, according to new BMFA President Sascha McKeon. She has been on the union executive team for two years and a biology instructor for 10.

"The other faculty and I are grateful for the extraordinary support we have had from our students, alumni and the community

at large," she read in a statement to the board. "As of this afternoon, our petition to save BMCC faculty has garnered over 1,900 signatures between our Google sheet and Change.org."

The event featured sign-carrying union supporters in blue T-shirts emblazoned with "Save

BMCC" in yellow. Public speakers' comments began at 5 p.m.

The first speakers were Roy Barron, Hermiston city councilor and educator, and Enrique Farrera of Clackamas, vice president of the Oregon Education Association, the union that represents the faculty association. Paul Keefer, Boardman mayor, 1987 BMCC grad and sixth grade teacher, next addressed attendees, followed by Hermiston educator Tammy Fisher. Umatilla teacher Chris Early, president of Columbia River UniServ, which supports OEA locals in the region, rounded out the list.

Speakers sounded themes of unity and solidarity, and emphasized the value of full-time teachers to students and the community. Two urged administrators to "figure it out."

"A budget says a lot," McKeon added. "Students don't come for a snazzy website or pretty campus. They come for good faculty. Diversity of courses and quality of instruction will get them where

they want to go in life."

Faculty supporters formed up outside the doors of Pioneer Hall, but found them locked. McKeon produced a key, and the crowd marched into the hallway outside the conference room. Part-time philosophy teacher Nicholas Nash led the way.

The crowd waited in the hall until invited into the conference room.

Faculty supporters opposed to layoffs marched into the room. Rice allowed 30 minutes for public comments of a maximum three minutes each. About 15 community members, present and past BMCC faculty and students spoke.

"We recognize that the board has a fiduciary responsibility to pass a balanced budget," McKeon said as faculty association president, "but propose you have an equally great responsibility to advocate for the community's needs. Well, they are (here), speaking loud and clear — discretionary cuts to faculty and student scholarships should come from other line items."

Former gamer aims to shake up John Day as city manager

A new Grant County resident, 29-year-old Corum Ketchum promoted to city manager

By ANTONIO SIERRA
Oregon Public Broadcasting

JOHN DAY — Corum Ketchum graduated from his master's program and less than a year later is running a city of 1,600 people and managing a 14-person staff.

The John Day City Council appointed Ketchum as an interim city manager Tuesday, May 10. Should both Ketchum and the city council remain satisfied with the arrangement, he'll be made the city's CEO in six months.



Ketchum

For a 29-year-old who once considered a career as a pro gamer, the sudden upswing in his career wasn't expected. Running John Day wasn't a part of Ketchum's original plans. He attended the University of Oregon as an undergraduate so he could become a public planner.

His career outlook changed after he joined AmeriCorps' Rural Assistance for Rural Environments program. He spent two years in Veneta, a town of 5,000 people west of Eugene, working with the city administrator on economic development projects.

Ketchum learned to enjoy working in a smaller community, where trying to get things done wasn't as difficult as it was in larger and more "calcified" cities.

"The bureaucracy is always much thicker, where if you spend time in a rural community, you get to meet the couple dozen people who are really excited about investing in their place," he said.

He returned to the University of Oregon to get his master's in public administration but another passion almost took him down another path.

Ketchum grew up playing video games and was good enough at games like Overwatch and Team Fortress that he helped form an e-sports team. The team was competitive if not exactly lucrative.

"We never really made any money," he said. "If we placed low on a tournament, we'd get paid like 100 bucks as a team, and then I'd divvy that six ways."

As Ketchum wrapped up his master's degree in 2021, the University of Oregon was starting its own official e-sports team and was looking for someone to manage it. He didn't get



Blue Mountain Eagle, File

The John Day City Council appointed Corum Ketchum as an interim city manager on Tuesday, May 10, 2022. Should both Ketchum and the city council remain satisfied with the arrangement, he'll be made the CEO in six months.

the job after applying, but a university administrator encouraged him to think bigger.

It was around this time that Ketchum read a John Day investment plan focused on a project to build a water reclamation facility that would repurpose the city's wastewater for other uses like agriculture. The city was looking for a community development director and Ketchum felt like it was a good match for him based on his work in Veneta.

"It seemed like a really natural fit for my skill set and who I really am, and more or less a calling for me to come out here and fill that gap," he said.

Ketchum grew up in Eugene but he has family ties to Grant County. His grandfather was a ranger for the U.S. Forest Service and worked in the Prairie City district. During that time, his grandmother taught at Grant Union High School and his father learned to swim at the pool in John Day. His grandfather eventually transferred to a different district, but Ketchum said he still has family in Eastern Oregon.

In March, Ketchum started work under City Manager Nick Green, who had built a reputation on introducing novel ideas to John Day, like building 3-D printed houses and the water reclamation project. Ketchum wanted to absorb as much knowledge from Green as possible since Green was already planning his exit.

Ketchum had only been working for the city a few months when Green entered his office. Green told him the city could spend thousands of dollars on a search firm, but he had a feeling they wouldn't find a better candidate than Ketchum. The city council agreed and gave Ketchum the top job.

As the city manager, Ketchum said he wants to continue Green's initiatives, while also offering more "short-term wins" for John Day, like more community events, downtown investments and outdoor trails.

Housing is also a concern. Although Grant County was the only county

in the state to lose population in the 2020 Census, Ketchum said John Day has a less than 1% vacancy rate in its housing market.

Anticipating growth fueled by Boise to the east and Bend to the west, Ketchum said the city is working toward making more of its land developable for future housing. After decades of stagnancy, Ketchum said 40 houses will be built this summer and another 70 in the fall.

Ketchum brought only a few years of experience to the job by the time he became city manager and he's now a part of a profession where most of his peers are 40 and older. But Ketchum said his youth is a good match for the town.

"I think my youth is a real asset," he said. "My demographic is the exact kind of person that we want to be seeing more of out here in John Day. People my age going into their 40s, the prime earners, the people that have families, the people that start businesses and are really in the rocket years as professionals."

Commuter airline lands new deal

By JOHN TILLMAN
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — The U.S. Department of Transportation has increased Boutique Air's Essential Air Service contract for Pendleton and renewed it through May 31, 2024.

Boutique had asked to renegotiate the terms of its Essential Air Service subsidy to serve Pendleton's Eastern Oregon Regional Airport due to many changes, including the cost of fuel and a workforce crisis.

Boutique filed a form in February requesting to terminate its EAS contract beginning Thursday, May 12. The subsidy for the fourth year of its agreement was almost \$2.69 million. The DOT then countered, prohibiting Boutique from ending its service and calling for it and other air carriers to issue proposals for the contract.

Only Boutique responded, and the fed-



Charly Hotchkiss/East Oregonian, File

An Eastern Oregon Regional Airport employee helps prepare the afternoon Boutique Air flight for takeoff Thursday, April 14, 2022, in Pendleton. The airline won a new two-year contract through May 31, 2024, from the U.S. Department of Transportation to provide air service to Pendleton.

eral government accepted its two-year proposal.

The new annual subsidy rate for the first year of service is more than \$3.87 million. The second year of the service will see a subsidy of almost \$3.95 million. The contract requires Boutique to provide 21 nonstop, round trips a week to and from Portland International Airport, using an eight- or nine-seat Pilatus PC-12 aircraft.

"I think the increase is absolutely justified," said John Honemann, airport manager, "given their

unprecedented costs."

Honemann considered the new contract to be not at all out of line compared to other EAS subsidies. He said he felt the two-year term is warranted, since a longer period might not allow Boutique to keep up with changes in the economy.

"I think it's a great deal," Honemann continued. "(Air service) is critical infrastructure. Our region needed a tie to Portland and Salem. I've been fighting and working for it."

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