

# THE OBSERVER

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## Enrollment loss effects La Grande schools budget

2022-23 budget calls for position cuts, but no layoffs in La Grande School District

By **DICK MASON**  
The Observer

LA GRANDE — The La Grande School Board, responding to declining enrollment, has voted to adopt a 2022-23 budget that will cut nine positions but not call for any layoffs.

The school board voted on Wednesday, June 22, to adopt a 2022-23 general fund budget of \$29.65 million. The budget calls for three teaching and six staff positions to be eliminated because of falling enrollment.

However, adoption of the budget will not result in any layoffs since reductions would be made through attrition. The positions that will be cut are either currently not filled, will be vacated due to retirement and the like, or the employee will be moved to another position within the district.

“The budget is conservative but it will allow the school district to continue to provide great service,” school board member Joe Justice said.

Removing the three teaching positions will save almost \$299,000 and trimming the six classified positions would save more than \$236,000. Classified positions include cooks, custodians and maintenance staff, La Grande School District Superintendent George Mendoza told the board earlier this month.

In addition to the nine position cuts, the budget calls for an assistant principal position to be reduced to a dean of students position, saving nearly \$13,800.

The \$29.65 million general fund budget is up \$2.58 million from the present budget. Much of the increase reflects a higher than anticipated boost in what the state will be paying school districts per student in 2022-23. Mendoza said it had been anticipated the state would be paying school districts \$8,700 per student but instead districts will be receiving \$9,400 per student.

The main reason for the increase is that enrollment in Oregon’s schools has dropped about 30,000 over the past year, Mendoza said, but the amount of money allotted by the state for school districts in 2022-23 has not changed, meaning the state has more money available per student. Mendoza said the school district also has a significant amount of COVID-19 relief funds for the next two

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Justice



Mendoza



Isabella Crowley/The Observer

A crowd gathers at the corner of B Avenue and Walnut Street, La Grande, hoping to witness the unearthing of a time capsule from 1906 on Thursday, June 23, 2022. The Oregon Trail marker — placed by famous pioneer Ezra Meeker — had a special cavity chiseled out so that a time capsule could be placed inside. Unfortunately, it was revealed that the cavity was empty.

## A MYSTERY OF HISTORY

Ezra Meeker 1906 time capsule turns out to be empty

By **DICK MASON**  
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Dale Counsell had his hammers and chisels ready to help him retrieve a 116-year old message from the past.

Unfortunately, the Union County historian didn’t need these tools on Thursday, June 23, for the past proved to be elusive in southwest La Grande when a time capsule was opened and turned out to be empty.

Counsell was among about 200 people gathered at 110 Walnut St. for the opening of a time capsule reputed to be in the stone Oregon Trail marker put up by frontiersman Ezra Meeker, the famous pioneer who spent the later part of his life memorializing the Oregon Trail. The marker, installed in 1906, was removed from its base



Isabella Crowley/The Observer

Dale Counsell collects rock samples from inside an Oregon Trail marker at the corner of B Avenue and Walnut Street, La Grande, on Thursday, June 23, 2022. The samples will be sent off to Washington State University for analysis in an effort to determine the marker’s original placement.

by a backhoe with assistance from the La Grande Parks and Recreation Department.

Dennis Larsen, the author of several books about Meeker, then examined the stone marker and found a space for a time capsule.

“I’ve looked at it and unfortunately it is empty,” Larsen told the crowd.

The author, who lives in Lacy, Washington, said he was not surprised that the time capsule was empty because a number of people have reported that the marker was moved

several times in the Walnut Street area after it was installed in 1906. The marker is now in the front yard of Jack and Jennifer Boyd.

Jack Boyd noted that the empty time capsule may give rise to a new mystery as people try to find out what happened to its contents.

“This is something that could be put into a Steven Spielberg movie,” he said.

Larsen is happy that the time capsule, though empty, gave rise to a

See, *Capsule/Page A8*

## Drifts continue to block Elkhorn Drive, other roads

By **JAYSON JACOBY**  
Baker City Herald

ANTHONY LAKES — Dan Story didn’t figure a Harley-Davidson motorcycle was a fitting substitute for a snowmobile.

But as the rumble of the distant engine materialized into a visible vehicle, Story had to concede that it was indeed a Harley rolling through a slushy snowdrift on the highest paved road in Northeastern Oregon.

That incongruous sight, along the Elkhorn Drive Scenic Byway on Wednesday, June 22, was perhaps appropriate in what’s been an abnormal season for the

byway and for other forest roads, said Story, road manager for the Whitman District on the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest.

The drifts aren’t solely the remnants of winter blizzards that delighted skiers and snowboarders, though.

Starting in early April and continuing into the middle of June, a persistent weather pattern brought a series of unseasonably chilly storms into the region. Snow, in some cases many inches of snow, has accumulated at higher elevations, including sections of the byway.



Dan Story/Contributed Photo

Snowdrifts linger on the Elkhorn Drive Scenic Byway near the upper Crawfish Basin trailhead on Wednesday, June 22, 2022.

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### WEATHER Full forecast on the back of B section



Tonight  
52 LOW  
Clear



Sunday  
86/55  
Sunny

### CONTACT US

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