Wallowa County schools on track with new budgets

By BILL BRADSHAW
Wallowa County Chieftain

WALLOWA COUNTY — The money is in place and the three main school districts in Wallowa County are getting set for a new school year with about $45 million earmarked for education in Enterprise, Joseph and Wallowa for the coming year.

Bill Bradshaw/Wallowa County Chieftain, File
Construction work is ongoing at the Enterprise schools, as was evident Thursday, July 14, 2022.

Enterprise

Some of that budgeting includes construction work, such as the $8 million bond levy approved in November 2020 for the Enterprise school building, largely to replace the leaky roof and upgrade access to Americans with Disabilities Act standards, such as remodeling restrooms and adding ramps and lifts for wheelchair-bound students and removing asbestos flooring.

The $8 million was half the voter-approved levy and half matching funds from an Oregon School Capital Improvement grant from the Oregon Department of Education.

Work began on the school this spring as soon as it let out, although it was slated to begin a year earlier. The delay was caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting difficulties in obtaining building materials.

The overall budget for Enterprise for 2022-23 is $19,275,000, according to Karen Josi, business manager for fiscal services for the Educational Service District. She emphasized that the amount includes the $8 million for construction work.

Tom Crane, Enterprise school superintendent, said he is pleased with the new budget, particularly that the district has completed a collective bargaining agreement for four-year contracts for the teachers.

"I think we're in good shape," he said.

Josi said the only faculty addition is that of a new agriculture teacher for middle school and high school students.

Some noteworthy increases in the budget included cost-of-living allowances and $200,000 in budgeting for increased fuel costs.

Joseph

Joseph Charter School adopted a budget of just over $14 million on June 13, Superintendent Lance Homan said Thursday, July 14.

"It's pretty standard," he said, adding that the coming year's budget is much like the 2021-22 budget.

He said the school is adding a STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics) room for K-6 and has two new teachers coming on board. Cameron Scott will be a new English teacher for the new English language arts program at the college level for junior high and high school students. Also, Hannah Schmidke is a new third-grade teacher.

Homan said JCS can expect a new seismic grant of $2.5 million next year. He said the district has until September 2024 to spend it. It will be used to add structural support and a new roof on the main part of the school building. A new heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) system also will be funded separate from the seismic grant, "but it'll work together," he said.

"That'll be in the budget so you'll see an increase next year," Homan said.

Wallowa

Tammy Jones, superintendent of the Wallowa schools, said the school board there also adopted its budget June 13. Wallowa approved a general fund budget of $4,116,767 that "addresses our district missions and goals," she said.

Wallowa, like Enterprise, is undergoing major construction work, having approved a $7 million bond levy that includes a $4 million OSCIM grant and a $2.3 million seismic grant.

The general budget, she said, was able to pare back a little, eliminating a half-time distance learning teacher that was employed because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the need for some students to attend class from home.

The district is adding new math curriculum for all grade levels, a half-time physical education teacher for K-8 and a new middle school teacher for grades six through eight.

No layoffs have been scheduled, Jones said.

She said enrollment went up just a little, which affects the budgeting the state does every two years. Schools are now entering the second year of the two-year budget cycle.

"In the second year of a biennium, you expect where you are," Jones said. "When you get to the end of it, you wonder where the state is going. … Do I wonder about the year after next? Yes I do."

But Jones isn't worried.

"It will be interesting to see where enrollment goes," she said. "We're tight but always been solid."

DEBATE

Continued from Page A1

long list of progressive priorities including increasing Oregon's minimum wage, providing paid sick leave and raising business taxes to increase funding for schools.

She has raised $3.3 million and has $454,000 on-hand, in part because she has yet to receive large donations from national groups such as the Democratic Governors Association. Separately, a political action committee attacking Johnson called Oregonians for Ethics has raised more than $200,000 including from the Democratic Governors Association, public employee unions and the Oregon League of Conservation Voters.

Drazan, who won the crowded Republican primary in May, was elected to the state House in 2018 and served as House Republican leader from 2019 until she stepped down in 2021 to run for governor. She led House Republicans in a 2020 walkout to protest Democrats' greenhouse gas cap-and-trade bill, which was up for a vote in the Senate, and united her caucus in 2021 to join Democrats in voting to expel fellow Republican Rep. Mike Nearman for his role letting violent demonstrators into the state Capitol in December 2020. She has raised $4.2 million and has $1.3 million on-hand.

With months to go until the general election, polls have shown the three women in a close race with the most recent publicly available poll, paid for by legislative Republicans, showing Drazan and Kotek in a statistical tie and Johnson within striking distance. With three serious candidates on the ballot, the winner will need only a plurality of votes to become governor.

The slate of debates could provide opportunities for the candidates to distinguish themselves on issues including abortion access, homelessness, gun violence and other crimes.

THE OBSERVER TO LIVESTREAM OREGON GUBERNATORIAL DEBATE

LA GRANDE — The three leading candidates in the race to become Oregon's next governor will appear live at a forum Friday, July 29, hosted by the Oregon Newspaper Publishers Association.

Republican nominee Christine Drazan, Democratic nominee Tina Kotek and unaffiliated candidate Betsy Johnson are all scheduled to debate starting at 2 p.m. in Welches.

The forum is moderated by Pamplin Media Group President Mark Garber. Questions will come from editors of newspapers across Oregon.

The debate will be livestreamed on The Observer's website, www.lagrande-observer.com.

— The Observer

Along with the newspaper publishers and KOBI debates, two of the candidates — Johnson and Kotek — have already committed to participate in other various debates.

Johnson plans to participate in a debate hosted by KTVZ, the City Club of Central Oregon and Oregon State University Cascades at an unspecified date, according to Johnson's campaign spokesperson Jennifer Sitton. She wants her opponents to commit to one televised debate or forum in Medford, Portland, Eugene, Bend, Pendleton and Coos Bay.

Kotek does not plan to participate in the Central Oregon debate but has said she will participate in the KGW/The Oregonian debate, which will take place in October, and the OPB and Our Children Oregon debate Oct. 22. Kotek also plans to participate in the City Club of Eugene and City Club of Salem gubernatorial forums, the dates of which are not yet known. She has called for Johnson and Drazan to join her for a forum that would focus specifically on gun safety but "neither Johnson or Drazan have responded," Kotek's spokesperson Katie Wertheimer said in an email.

CATS

Continued from Page A1

"I don't want to throw the county's dollars at something that will not get results," the Union County commissioner said.

20 cats on 10 acres

Girard feels sympathy for homeless cats that have to fend for themselves. They are in a bad situation through no fault of their own, he said.

"The whole reason they were put in this position is because of humans," Girard said.

When someone releases a feral cat on his property Girard begins a three-step process. First, he attempts to capture the feline in a live trap that causes no harm. Once the animal is trapped, he has it spayed or neutered, and after that he releases the cat — unless it is a kitten he might be able to find a home for.

He said that since 2020 he has spent about $2,000 a year on spaying and neutering the cats that have appeared at his farm. He said he can't continue to do this because the 4 acres he owns and a 6-acre connected parcel owned by a neighbor now have a total of 20 feral cats. This is all the feral cats the combined 10-acre area can hold, Girard said.

Dick Mason/The Observer
Mark Girard operates a piece of machinery on his hobby farm in Union on Tuesday, July 26, 2022.

For his daughter

Girard does not describe himself as a cat lover, but he does not have it in him to turn a homeless cat away.

"It would harden my heart to throw them aside," Girard said. "I can't turn any animal away that is suffering."

The Union farmer is inspired to reach out to feral and stray cats by the memory of his daughter Nicole, who died in 2016 at age 26. Nicole was a cat lover who devoted much of her life to reaching out to suffering felines. She would give up her rent money to help a sick cat, Girard said, and once she ran across a four-lane freeway to get to a feline that needed help.

"I'm doing what I do today to keep her passion alive," Girard said.

FIRE

Continued from Page A1

can catch them when the fires start to go extreme," said Johnson, who's a wildland fire technician for the Vale District.

"Any fire that started on your urban interface area, we're just trying to keep it off federal land and vice versa — if we have a fire on federal land, we really don't want to push it onto the urban interface," he said.

Fire breaks are created using tractors with metal disk attachments that remove vegetation and expose bare dirt, which deprives flames of fuel. Workers also mow grass and use herbicides to control grass.

When built near roads, the breaks create a 50-foot buffer — a zone where fire crews have a better chance to stop advancing flames.

Each spring or summer, typically in May or June, BLM workers maintain the firebreaks, Johnson said. They bring in heavy machinery to clear out vegetation in preparation for fire season. Johnson said they completed this year's maintenance on the breaks in the Willowcreek fire area just two weeks before it ignited on a 100-degree day with gusty west winds.

"Being proactive saved us from having a fire twice as big."

— Toby McBride, Vale Rangeland Fire Protection District, talking about how firebreaks helped stop the Willowcreek fire in late June

"We've been maintaining these man-made fuel barriers over the last two decades," said Justin Robinson, fuels technician for the Vale District. "We're making it safer for our firefighters and our communities."

Fire break history

The idea for the firebreaks that helped stop the Willowcreek Fire dates back almost 22 years.

In 2000, the Jackson fire burned about 80,000 acres — twice as many as the Willowcreek Fire — of similar terrain in Malheur County.

That fire prompted local residents and BLM officials to talk about wildfires, and residents created the Malheur County Community Wildfire Protection Plan.

That plan included building firebreaks across public and private land.

Johnson said the system of firebreaks "gives our personnel something to work off of," but it's not guaranteed, because of varied weather patterns, that the breaks will stop a blaze dead in its tracks.

"It's all dependent on fire activity, because you can have fire whirls that bring embers across the road," Johnson said.

But with the Willowcreek Fire, the breaks fulfilled their purpose despite the gusty winds.

"Being proactive saved us from having a fire twice as big," said Toby McBride, a volunteer with the Vale Rangeland Fire Protection District who helps maintain the firebreaks and was on the ground during the Willowcreek Fire. "The wind was blowing pretty good, but the fire burned right up to the lines and went out. I don't think we would've held it at the road without them."

Robinson agreed.

"Fuel breaks helped firefighters contain the Willowcreek Fire without bulldozers or other heavy equipment," he said. "This project's success shows us how important collaboration can be to protect local communities from wildfires."

AT&T internet
FEEL THE SPEED, EVEN AT PEAK TIMES.
Based on wired connection to gateway.
AT&T INTERNET 100 $45/mo^
Get strong, fast Wi-Fi to work and play throughout your home.^
No annual contract.
Power multiple devices at once—everyone can enjoy their own screen.
Number of devices depends on screen size/resolution.
Over 99% reliability.
Excludes DSL. Based on network availability.
Contact your local DIRECTV dealer
IV Support Holdings
888-486-0359
DIRECTV PREFERRED DEALER
INTERNET OFFER: Subj. to change and may be discontinued at any time. Price for Internet 100 for new residential customers & is after $5/mo. autopay & paperless bill discount. Pricing for first 12 months only. After 12 mos., then prevailing rate applies. Autopay & Paperless Bill Discount: Discount off the monthly rate when account is active & enrolled in both. Pay full plan cost until discount starts w/in 2 bill cycles. Must maintain autopay/paperless bill and valid email address to continue discount. Additional Fees & Taxes: AT&T one-time transactional fees, $10/mo. equipment fee, and monthly cost recovery surcharge which are not government-required may apply, as well as taxes. See www.att.com/fees for details. Installation: $99 installation fee full tech install, plus tax where applicable. Credit restrictions apply. Pricing subject to change. Subj. to Internet Terms of Service at att.com/internet-terms. ^AT&T SmartWi-Fi requires installation of a BGW210, 5268AC, or NVG599 Wi-Fi Gateway. Standard with Internet plans (12M or higher). Whole home Wi-Fi connectivity may require AT&T SmartWi-Fi Extender(s) sold separately. ††Internet speed claims represent maximum network service capability speeds and based on wired connection to gateway. Actual customer speeds are not guaranteed and may vary based on several factors. For more information, go to www.att.com/speed101.
©2021 DIRECTV. DIRECTV and all other DIRECTV marks are trademarks of DIRECTV, LLC. AT&T and Globe logo are trademarks of AT&T Intellectual Property.

LeafFilter GUTTER PROTECTION
BACKED BY A YEAR-ROUND CLOG-FREE GUARANTEE
THE NATION'S #1 GUTTER GUARD
EXCLUSIVE LIMITED TIME OFFER!
15% OFF YOUR ENTIRE PURCHASE & 10% OFF SENIORS & MILITARY
+ 5% OFF TO THE FIRST 50 CALLERS ONLY!**
FINANCING THAT FITS YOUR BUDGET!†
Promo Code: 285
†Subject to credit approval. Call for details.
WE INSTALL YEAR-ROUND!
CALL US TODAY FOR A FREE ESTIMATE 1-855-536-8838
Mon-Thurs: 8am-11pm, Fri-Sat: 8am-5pm, Sun: 2pm-8pm EST
For those who qualify. One coupon per household. No obligation estimate valid for 1 year. *Offer valid at time of estimate only. 2The leading consumer reporting agency conducted a 16 month outdoor test of gutter guards in 2010 and recognized LeafFilter as the "#1 rated professionally installed gutter guard system in America." Manufactured in Plainwell, Michigan and processed at LMT Mercer Group in Ohio. See Representative for full warranty details. CSLB# 1035795 DOPL #10283658-5501 License# 7656 License# 50145 License# 41354 License# 99338 License# 128344 License# 218294 WA UBI# 603 233 977 License# 2102212986 License# 2106212946 License# 27051 32153A License# LEAFFNW822JZ License# WV056912 License# WC-29998-H17 Nassau HIC License# H01067000 Registration# 176447 Registration# HIC.0649905 Registration# C127229 Registration# C127230 Registration# 366920918 Registration# PC6475 Registration# IR731804 Registration# 13VH09953900 Registration# PA069383 Suffolk HIC License# 52229-H License# 2705169445 License# 262000022 License# 2620004035 License# 0086990 Registration# H-19114

Prepare for Power Outages & Save Money
GENERAC PWRCELL SOLAR + BATTERY STORAGE SYSTEM
REQUEST A FREE QUOTE!
ACT NOW TO RECEIVE A $300 SPECIAL OFFER!*
(844) 989-2328
*Offer value when purchased at retail. Solar panels sold separately.