

Waste ... Continued from A-1

“What’s needed is a viable funding proposal to construct a new facility with enough capacity,” Brandes said. “We’re seeking a long-term solution that provides the cheapest and most reliable service for both the schools and the industrial park.”

The school district pays around \$50,000 a year to run the existing plant. While constructing a new plant represents substantial upfront costs, Brandes says the annual maintenance would be reduced to around \$15,000.

Back in 1970s, the North Valley General Service District was formed by the county for the purpose of managing future sewers in the area, but the district was never activated.

“One thought now is to pull this district out of mothballs and utilize it to apply for grants to construct a new facility,” Brandes said. “Both agencies could strike out on their own, with the county constructing a new plant to serve the industrial facility and the school either rehabilitating or building a new plant. But I hope the partnership will continue. It’d be better economically for all involved.”

For their part, school district officials and board members say constructing a new plant could take three to five years while they must keep treating waste water right now.

The situation is urgent. The Fleming plant has been in violation of Department of Environmental

Quality (DEQ) standards for a long time, prompting the agency to issue a “Mandated Action Order,” requiring the district to submit a plan detailing necessary improvements to comply with state and federal pollution standards. It’s unknown how much damage has been caused to local water resources from the plant.

“The county is spending a lot of dollars on numerous studies while the school district is paying DEQ fines... I wish they’d send some of that money our way to help deal with the current situation,” said school district board member Ron Lengwin. “The schools are part of the community too. There’s a lot of politics involved and politics is a strange animal. It seems like there’s a lot of

different motives.”

“There’s a lot of money involved, it’s big business,” said school district superintendent Dave Holmes. “Once grants are secured and the county consortium comes to us with something that makes sense dollar-wise and service-wise, the board will consider their proposals, but right now, there’s too many unknowns.”

“I appreciate how the county wants to find long-term solutions for North Valley’s waste water treatment issues in general,” Holmes said. “But we’re currently replacing elements in our existing plant. We can’t wait.”

“That facility is as close to the edge as I’ve ever seen,” said Illinois Valley resident Mike Bollweg,

owner of Southern Oregon Water Technology, who has been contracted to guide improvements and upgrades to the plant. “It’ll take a lot of money and work to come into compliance and protect the water in the area.”

Current improvements are two-fold, Bollweg explained. A smaller unused plant is being rehabilitated to provide a backup for the main plant and also treat waste water while the main plant undergoes repairs.

“I’m confident we can accomplish this,” Bollweg said. “It’s the only reasonable plan. Our result will be good.”

Watershed ... Continued from A-1

City Recorder Ryan Nolan has addressed some of these issues in the past.

“The water and wastewater systems, while overlooked by most people, are really the main purpose of our city government,” Nolan said. “We are required to follow the state’s Safe Water Drinking Plan and work with the State of Oregon Health Authority and the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality. Luckily we have some really good crew members operating the plants. The city staff takes their responsibility to provide quality services to our citizens and to be good stewards of our environment seriously.”

The city has recently completed the Water Master Plan

Update, a project funded with Community Development Block Grant funds from the Oregon Business Development Department.

This SMU legal protection may well prove crucial in the years ahead, especially if the unprecedented drought conditions persist in the Western United States. California is currently the most impacted, especially in the Central Valley region, widely considered the bread basket for the entire country.

The latest media reports indicate that some 14 communities are now on the verge of running completely dry according to the California Water Resources Control Board. Fourteen others have come up with temporary fixes, including Montague,

just east of Yreka, which was able to construct a new irrigation ditch to transport water from a lake 25 miles away, replacing a ditch that ran dry in April.

Underground aquifers and other backup sources are also running dry in California. According to the journal *Science*, the entire Western United States has lost 240 gigatons of water since 2013, an amount equivalent to one billion tons of water, or enough to fill 75,000 football stadiums. This loss has caused mountains in some areas throughout the state to rise. Some 37 million people are affected by the drought.

Jail ... Continued from A-1

Gilbertson says the county needs a larger holding facility, so judges can decide if some inmates should be allowed to post bonds for release while awaiting their court dates or not.

“The last thing we want to do is turn people loose who are a potential threat to the community,” he said.

The county jail can hold people up to a year. Then, once the court adjudicates those charged with crimes, they go to prison or get released.

“My job is to take what we’re given to work with and do the best that we can,” Gilbertson said. “We have saved the county at least \$16 million since 2007. We generate \$2 million yearly through jail fees and a variety of other programs within the jail. And overall in public safety, we’ve initiated over 160 programs to cut costs and save money. We’re doing the very best anyone could do on this shoestring budget.”

Gilbertson added that right now his top priorities are patrols and to respond to calls for help from the public.

Commissioners ... From A-1

Part of the meeting discussion also covered recent public transit developments. Commuter buses now offer round trips between Grants Pass and Medford. Commissioner Keith Heck mentioned that there are more bus commuters traveling from Medford to Grants Pass for work, a fact that surprised county officials.

In answer to a question, Hare stated that the planning department is trying to add bike lanes to appropriate thoroughfares, but that some county roads have too many blind spots and other design issues, which makes adding bike lanes more of a problem than a transportation solution.

Guild to hold ornament class

Holiday preparations at the Southern Oregon Guild start with a special class in making Crystal Snowflake Ornaments at the Guild Gallery, Saturday, November 1 from 1 - 3 p.m.

You will learn techniques for making a beautiful heritage piece of art. These glistening snowflakes are excellent for tree decorations, for adorning a special package, for catching the sun in a bright window, for small hostess gifts... and many other imaginative uses. See examples at <http://southernoreonguild.org>

In the class, you will first learn to make your snowflake with a pre-selected group of materials. Then you can pick from a wide variety of crystals to experiment with making your own designs. Class fee is \$20 including materials for one ornament. Additional ornaments are \$2.50 each for materials. Children eight and over are welcome with an adult.

The class will be held at the Guild Gallery & Art Center located on the RCC Kerby Campus, 24353 Redwood Highway, Kerby, OR.



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