

Deputies restrain man from jumping off Bridge of the Gods

■ By Kirby Neumann-Rea
Columbia Gorge News

At 6:52 p.m. Jan. 2, Hood River County Sheriff's Deputy Caitlin Please was on regular patrol in Cascade Locks when she received a dispatch call that a man was believed to be preparing to jump from the Bridge of the Gods, which spans the Columbia at the west end of the city.

What transpired for Please and fellow deputies was a tense scene that resulted

in physically restraining a Cascade Locks man in his 40s who said he wanted to jump as he stood on the rail, with the Cascade Locks shore some 100 feet below.

The bridge was closed to vehicle traffic for about 20 minutes during the incident. Backing up Please was Skamania County deputy Chris Helton. Hood River County Deputy Chris Guertin arrived from Hood River to transport the man to Mid-Columbia Center For Living

for treatment.

When Please arrived at the bridge in her vehicle, the man was walking north on the bridge, and she pulled farther north to head him off before he was over the river.

"He kept saying 'I want to go into the water,'" Please recalls.

The man then reached the rail and straddled it, while Please, standing about six feet away, asked him to talk to her.

"He was not wanting me to

get closer," she said. Helton joined her a few minutes later. After about 10 minutes they were able to grab the man and pull him onto the bridge deck and help him into Guertin's car. "We were able to get close enough and one of us got hold of his arms and we tried to get him off the rail," said Please, who said she does not remember much besides holding the man by his arm. "He was not wanting to let go of the rail, We just wanted to make sure

he stayed safe, and we stayed safe.

"If he jumped, most likely it would have been a fatality," said Please.

"I'm just so glad everyone is safe and he's gotten the help he needs. It was a good outcome," Please said. "I hope people who might be considering something like this know there are plenty of places available and numbers to call and talk. Any law enforcement officer, you can call and we are happy just to

talk."

She said she has dealt with reports of people wanting to jump and interceding to prevent it, but this was the first time she was involved in physically restraining someone on the bridge rail. (Please said she had previously spoken with Deputy Helton via phone but they had never met before the incident.)

FACILITY Residents call for slow-down

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proposal that was proffered on Jan. 11. City staff have issued a proposal with Plan A — city-only — and Plan B — city-county — funding and design options and could include a municipal parking structure. Current plans are for the facility to built on the western half of the Fifth and Columbia parking lot, owned by the city. "Rough estimate" costs range from an \$8 to \$14 million city-only project to a \$36 to \$66 million city-county project. Any financing for a facility would depend on passage of a levy renewal by city voters of the existing bond passed 15 years ago to pay for the city fire station, meaning no tax increase for city residents; if the county joined in, county voters would need to approve a tax increase.

Zanmiller agreed that conversations are in order with other partners, including the County Health and Prevention.

Two community members urged a wider, slower look at what local agencies would use the facility and what would be its scope of service



Councilor Gladys Rivera, bottom center, takes oath of office in English and Spanish from Municipal Judge Ruben Cleaveland.

— starting with police and a range of justice-related offices but possibly including mental health programs and other agencies. (SafePlaceCAC, formerly Mid-Columbia Children's Advocacy Center, has asked to place its offices in a new downtown facility.)

MariRuth Pretzing, Hood River, said, "The city seems poised to move forward to do a decision led by an architectural firm, with the foregone conclusion of a bond campaign." Pretzing, an immigration rights attorney, told the council during public comment Jan. 11 that instead of building a new facility specifically for police use, "You need to have a conversation now with the community. No one asked for input from policed communities, such

as people with mental health issues, the disabled, immigrants, domestic violence victims or those impacted by economic inequity and racism."

Peter Fink of Hood River told the council, "Instead of considering this building, consider the other aspects of keeping the community safe," including better transportation and services for the homeless.

"I was flabbergasted when I learned (of the RFP plan), and yet unsurprised as well just because 2020 was a year of economic downturn and lack of accountability of police and racial injustice and yet fact the city considering a multi-million project just to spruce up police offices seemed like a little bit of a

slap in the face," Fink said.

The City and County of Hood River are both operating their public safety functions in inadequate facilities that need to be replaced, according to a report to the council from Assistant City Manager Will Norris.

Hood River County Courthouse and sheriff's office are seismically unstable and severely outdated, said Norris' report. Hood River Police Department has never been in a purpose-built facility and is currently located in the 4,700-square-foot converted fire engine bay in the basement of the 100-year-old City Hall.

Both the city and county have engaged in separate public safety capital facilities planning activities dating back to at least the 1990s but neither have moved past the programming phase.

Next step in the slowed-down RFP process is for Mayor Kate McBride to engage with County Board Chair Mike Oates and other community partners. The County Board of Commissioners was scheduled to discuss the pending partnership in its meeting at 5 p.m. Jan. 19, after presstime.

McBride said the city and any other agency involved in the proposal have plenty of work ahead to convince voter approval.

"The city and county together, I agree it's best but I think the ask that would need to be made would not pass right now," McBride said. "If we do the work, it might pass in a couple of years. If you look at the demographics for the county (2019-21 budget) vote, the city passed it, the city was the bulk of the votes." On a facility bond levy, McBride added, "You need the county too, but if you go full county, it will be a big push to get the whole thing done county-wide. All those things would have to be looked at in-depth. But we'll have more people on our side ... all of us will have to do more meetings, dedicating ourselves to do more work, and it is worth it but know that is what we are asking ourselves to do."

Norris said, "It sounds like this will now be at the elected level, and whatever the next steps are we will be there to support you."

SHERIFF Jump Fr Hed

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also important, however, to acknowledge the 'and more' alluded to above. A tireless leader within the community, Sheriff English works above and beyond to serve Hood River County."

English worked with NW Natural to provide blankets and heaters to residents affected by the natural gas outage that occurred the week before Christmas 2020.

"While seemingly small, it is representative of the way that English never places himself above even the simplest of tasks in service of the people of Hood River County," said the release.

HR Schools stay the distance-learning course

■ By Kirby Neumann-Rea
Columbia Gorge News

Hood River County School Board will not act on a change to in-person learning prior to its Jan. 27 meeting. New state metrics, statistics on COVID-19 positivity cases, were scheduled to be issued Jan. 19.

In his Jan. 13 message to school board, Superintendent Rich Polkinghorn suggested that in-house learning is not certain but could take place at some point in the 2020-21 school year.

Polkinghorn also emphasized extreme caution in planning a broad change from distance learning anytime soon, despite Gov. Kate Brown's recent easing of requirements allowing schools to plan their own in-person

learning timelines.

"This spring can happen," Polkinghorn said, with younger grades. "It will be tougher for secondary, but conceivably we will not have 6-12 on campus this year."

"But I do think at some point this school year we will have some students on campus, if we can get out of red and into yellow or green, and follow the guidelines," he said, referring to the high risk (red) and medium (yellow) and low (green) metric rankings.

"Conditions won't go away just because people have the vaccine," Polkinghorn said. In his remarks, he said the proposal that schools do in-house coronavirus testing on students and staff was likely unworkable.

Polkinghorn expressed reservations about the

"We have to pay attention to the health implications for everyone."

Rich Truax,
Board chair

governor's revised standards, saying school districts remain at legal risk despite recently-passed legislation intended to reduced district's liability for virus transmission.

He said the keys to addressing a return to in-person learning and monitoring a potential date for that are two-fold: Continue to work with the County Health Department to gauge the metrics, and residents keeping up their coronavirus guards.

"A second surge is

expected," Polkinghorn stressed. "If people feel they are sick they need to take precautions, to stay home."

"People are not super-sick so think they have a cold or cough, but those are the symptoms of COVID and they are often ignored because the sensationalized version is 'you're on a ventilator.' The disease has different forms and manifests differently for different people."

Board Chair Rich Truax said, "I definitely support following the health department and metrics. Nice to have her (Brown) say, 'You can do this,' but we have to pay attention to the health implications for everyone."

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TRASH TALK

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