

New bi-state bridge entity emerging

■ By Gail Oberst
For Columbia Gorge News

The progress of the Bi-State Working Group had Port of Hood River Board of Commissioners in a self-congratulatory mood June 1.

The two groups are working together to establish an Oregon-Washington ownership of the new bridge that will one day replace the 100-year-old Hood River-White Salmon Bridge, now owned by the Port of Hood River.

The year-old Bi-State Working Group (BSWG) is made up of collaborators from Oregon and Washington including representatives from Klickitat and Hood River counties, the cities of Bingen, Hood River, and White Salmon, and the Port of Hood River.

June 1, port commissioners adopted bridge strategies endorsed by the BSWG. That step, along with \$50,000 from the state of Washington's transportation funds, will move the group closer to creating a standalone, bi-state entity for the financing and operations of the replacement bridge, according to Kevin Greenwood, Port of Hood River Bridge Replacement project director.

Although the port is the current bridge's owner, the group is working to create a different owner for the new bridge, most likely a bi-state authority that evolves from the BSWG. The recent Washington State grant helps pay for legal work to create that authority so that it can issue bonds for bridge construction, collect tolls, and seek state and federal grants and loans. The Joint Transportation Committee in the Washington Legislature is expected to consider that possibility in September, and later, a similar Oregon legislative committee will do the same.

Visiting lobbyists from Washington and Oregon states, and Washington D.C., applauded the BSWG's work to bring the north and south shores of the proposed



Progress is being made to establish an Oregon-Washington ownership of a new bridge over the Columbia River in Hood River, replacing the existing bridge, above, which is 100 years old.

Mark B. Gibson photo

bridge together. The three lobbyists reported June 1 on their efforts so far to raise money for the bridge at the state and federal levels.

"It's an amazing working relationship," said Brian Boswell, a consultant from Washington State.

"It's helpful at the federal level that both states are contributing," added Hal Hiemstra, a D.C. strategist.

Dan Bates, lobbying for the bridge in the Oregon Legislature, said that Hood River's state Legislators, Sen. Chuck Thompson (R-Dist. 26) and Rep. Anna Williams (D-Dist. 52) have been "great champions."

Estimates to remove and replace the century-old bridge are currently at \$400 million. Work began in earnest three years ago with a \$5 million Oregon transportation grant, followed by another \$5 million each from the Washington State Legislature and a federal BUILD grant. The Port of Hood River has also committed \$1.25 million to the project.

Enthusiasm for the Bi-State Working Group has increased as the organization has grown from an October 2020 Memo of Understanding, establishing how the members would work together with the port, to June 1's adopted "Strategy Principles," summarized below.

The BSWG currently includes Betty Barnes, mayor, City of Bingen; John Everitt,

commissioner, Port of Hood River; Marla Keethler, mayor, City of White Salmon; Kate McBride, mayor, City of Hood River; Jake Anderson, commissioner, Klickitat County; and Bob Benton, commissioner, Hood River County. That membership may change in July, as some members are not returning to their previous political positions, but the position descriptions will remain the same.

The Bi-State Working Group and the Port's strategies governing the bridge replacement are summarized as follows:

- Continue collaboration with the Bi-State Working Group
- Increase community, state and federal support
- Demonstrate project readiness
- Assemble a highly-experienced project team
- Prepare transition of leadership from the Port of Hood River to another entity
- Evaluate project options and recommend the best approach

The Port of Hood River's five-member Board of Commissioners next meets June 22, the last meeting for John Everitt (Position 2), David Meriwether (Position 3), neither of whom ran for re-election. Commissioners in July will swear in two new members — Heather Gearing to Position 2, Mike Fox to Position 3, and Benjamin Sheppard, who was reelected to Position 1.

The show goes on for TDHS drama department

■ By Kelsie Cowart
Columbia Gorge News

As distance learning became the norm for the 2020-21 school year, many extracurricular activities — from sports to robotics, culinary and other clubs — had to get creative in order to operate at all. The Dalles High School Theater Department did just that.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the TDHS theater department was unable to put on productions as they would have traditionally.

Not only were they not allowed to perform inside the auditorium, students would have had to stand at least eight feet apart if they wanted to perform unmasked, according to Lowry Browning, TDHS English and theater teacher. Browning, who has been directing plays and musicals at the high school for the last 14 years, had to think outside the box — not only to put on a production, but to get as many students participating as possible. "I have many wonderful students in the theater department," she said. "I really wanted more students involved."

This led to the decision to film this year's productions. Browning said that she and her long-time theater department choral director, Corin Parker, spent the better part of this last year coming up with ways to put on a musical while still abiding by the COVID guidelines at the time, which included all students wearing masks while filming.

This led Parker to reach out to Mark Steighner, the artistic director of the Columbia Gorge Orchestra Association, about composing a musical tailored to their needs. According to Browning, Steighner had personal interest in the history of The Dalles and its historical figures, and in February 2021, brought to



A screen shot from "Young Ben Snipes." Pictured are, left to right, Asher Young, Zora Richardson, Shaelyn R. Scott, Rowan Bierwirth, Alex Rector, Taylor Beeks, Lexi Irving, Izabella Marlinga, Avery Winwood, Emma Lawson, Kate Ferguson and Wesley Parker.

them a draft of the musical "Young Ben Snipes," a historical period composition based on the life of Ben "the Cattle King" Snipes, a famed cattle rancher and business owner who lived in The Dalles in the late 1800s.

Due to the subject of the musical, rather than be restricted to filming on a stage, the Theater Department had the freedom to film at different locations throughout town. This opportunity offered major advantages such as complete safety in following COVID-19 guidelines, though there was a learning curve to the experience as well. "It was very different directing for film than onstage," Browning shared, "filming, you have to look at the scenes in a different way. I'd never done anything like this before."

TDHS Senior Taylor Beeks, who played "Middle-Aged Ben Snipes," in the production, shared that some of the biggest adjustments they had to accommodate included performing with masks on, which restricted the actors in using tools such as facial expressions in their performances, as well as figuring out scene blocking. "We rehearsed at the high school with kind of a vague idea of what our scene would be when we got to the actual location," he said. "For a lot of them, we had to change most things because the filming locations didn't work out." Despite these adjustments, Beeks felt "everyone

did a good job of pulling it together."

Beeks, who has been a core member of the TDHS Theater Department since his eighth-grade year, said that while he preferred acting on stage, he "had a lot of fun with (filming)" and would "definitely do something like it again."

In her interview with *Columbia Gorge News*, Browning wanted to recognize Parker's contributions to the production. Parker, who is also a music teacher at Chenoweth Elementary, filmed, edited, and put together the entire project. "She filmed it and had to superimpose the music. It was pieced together, bits and pieces, and Corin made it happen."

On May 21, there was a live, "grand opening," of the play for family and members of the cast at the Discovery Center. Due to the historical nature of the musical, the Discovery Center will be showing the movie throughout the month of June, on Thursdays and Fridays at 3 p.m. for museum-goers interested in watching. For any other community members interested in viewing the production, the movie is posted to the District 21 Media Youtube page, where it can be watched for free.

Anyone interested in supporting The Dalles High School Theater Department will find a link in the movie's description box on YouTube, provided by the North Wasco Education Foundation, where they can donate.

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Dr. Conner grew up in a small town in Washington. She earned a Bachelor's of Science degree in Biology with a minor in Chemistry from Eastern Washington University. After obtaining a bachelor's degree she went on to excel in dental school, earning a Doctor of Dental Surgery Degree, from the University of Washington. Following dental school, Dr. Conner received a Master's in Orthodontics from A.T. Still University-Arizona School of Dentistry and Oral Health.

Dr. Conner's hobbies include decorating cakes, making espresso, and reading. She also enjoys traveling, meeting new people, and trying new things.



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