

State weighs vendors for health insurance market software

State has used federal platform since Cover Oregon failed

By HILLARY BORRUD
Capital Bureau

SALEM — Oregon is considering proposals by four companies to provide a new software platform for the state's health insurance marketplace.

The state uses the federal insurance exchange, Healthcare.gov, and state officials began to explore other options after the federal government decided to begin charging insurance companies a fee to use the exchange in Oregon.

Oregon has used the federal platform since its own insurance portal, Cover Oregon, failed to launch in 2013.

The state and technology company Oracle, which built the Cover Oregon system, are still engaged in a legal battle over who is to blame for the problems.

Free until 2017

Oregon insurers can continue to use the federal insurance exchange free of charge through the end of this year but in 2017, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services plans to begin charging insurance companies a fee of 1.5 percent of premiums in order to use the federal platform in Oregon. The rate could still increase in future years to the federal government's original proposal of 3 percent of premiums, according to Lisa Morawski, public information and communications director for the state Department of Consumer and Business Services, which handles the state's insurance exchange.

On Monday, however, Morawski said the state will not rush to decide whether to make another attempt at launching its own state insurance exchange. "We're going to be on healthcare.gov for sure for 2017," Morawski said.

The state also charges insurers a monthly fee of \$9.66 per insurance plan member, although the state has proposed lowering the fee to \$6 next year because employees expect higher enrollment will continue to raise more money than anticipated. The state uses the money to pay for everything from publicity for the insurance exchange to technology services and legal costs, according to a document from the Department of Consumer and Business Services.

Four companies show interest

Four technology companies submitted proposals to

provide the platform for Oregon's exchange by the deadline of noon Friday.

hCentive worked on insurance marketplaces for Arkansas, Massachusetts, Colorado, New York and the federal government, according to the company's website.

Vimo, Inc., which does business as GetInsured, worked on insurance exchanges in California, New Mexico, Idaho and Mississippi, according to the company's website.

Softtheon, Inc. also worked on the Massachusetts exchange, according to company CEO Eugene Sayan and Michael Hendershop, the company's business development director for state and federal operations.

It was not clear whether the fourth company that responded to the request for proposals, New Fields Technologies, LLC, had worked on other state health insurance

exchanges. The Department of Consumer and Business Services declined to release a copy of the proposals until after the agency issues a notice of intent to award a contract and allows a window of time for the companies to protest the decision.

State contracting employees at the Department of Administrative Services are reviewing the proposals to make sure they met the minimum requirements, and the companies will present their proposals to an evaluation committee in late March through early April, according to a timeline from the Department of Consumer and Business Services.

No deadline for switch

There is no deadline for the director of the Department of Consumer and Business Services to decide whether to stick with the federal exchange or go with one of the vendors,

Morawski said.

"If we decide to stay with healthcare.gov, which is one of the options that might happen, we wouldn't have to do anything," Morawski said. "If we decided to contract with a vendor, we would need to go through the (legislative) budget approval process."

In that case, the director of the Department of Consumer and Business Services could ask lawmakers for approval in September. The Department of Consumer and Business Services will consult with lawmakers and a newly formed Health Insurance Exchange Advisory Committee before deciding whether to stick with the federal exchange platform or contract for a new state exchange, Morawski wrote in an email.

The Capital Bureau is a collaboration between EO Media Group and Pamplin Media Group.

Warrenton City Commission offers no comment on LNG

By ERICK BENGEL
The Daily Astorian

WARRENTON — It was the first City Commission meeting since a public hearings officer denied Oregon LNG's applications to build a liquefied natural gas terminal on the Skipanon Peninsula while approving a small segment of pipeline that would serve the terminal.

Oregon LNG has not yet appealed the terminal decision, City Attorney Hal Snow said. But, since the energy company

is expected to appeal fairly soon and the matter would come before the commission, Mayor Mark Kujala made it clear Tuesday night that commissioners would not comment on the matter.

"The commission is remaining objective and unbiased so that we can hear that appeal, as we can anticipate that one might come," Kujala said. "We want to make sure that all of us are able to listen to it fairly, so we won't be making any comments."

One person who did comment, however, was

David Zunkel, a Warrenton resident who wanted to get his views on the record before he left on a trip to Europe.

"I am one of many Warrenton residents, as well as people in the state and region, who are heartened by the decision of the city-appointed hearings officer, (Daniel) Kearns, to deny the land use application by Oregon LNG for the LNG terminal on the banks of the Columbia River, our priceless scenic and natural resource," Zunkel said.

Candidates file for primary election

The Daily Astorian

Voters will decide on two seats on the Clatsop County Board of Commissioners and an open judgeship in the Circuit Court during the May 17 primary.

Clatsop County Sheriff Tom Bergin filed and is running unopposed. One county measure is on the ballot this year for a five-year local tax renewal for fairgrounds operation.

In addition to county races, the primary election features contests for president, congressional and state legislative seats, governor and other statewide seats and judge positions.

The filing deadline was Tuesday.

Thursday is the deadline for candidates to file statements for the voter's pamphlet. The county voter's pamphlet will be inserted in the state voter's pamphlet for the May election.

Candidates for county offices who have filed:

Circuit Court Judge, Position 2:

• David Goldthorpe, of Warrenton, is a senior deputy district attorney;

• Dawn McIntosh, of Gearhart, is a lawyer who works for McIntosh & Long in Gearhart;

• Ronald Woltjer, of Astoria, is a municipal court judge for Warrenton, Seaside and Cannon Beach.

Sheriff:

• Tom Bergin, of Gearhart,

has served as sheriff since January 2005.

Board of Commissioners, District 2:

• John Dunzer, of Seaside, has run unsuccessfully for the Port of Astoria, the Seaside City Council and the County Commission. He has experience in engineering, business and teaching.

• Sarah Nebeker, of Gearhart, has served as county commissioner since May 2012.

Board of Commissioners, District 4:

• Kathleen Sullivan, of Astoria, works the front desk of the Cannery Pier Hotel. She has served on the Astoria Budget Committee and on the Astoria Visual Arts Board.

Warrenton turns to public for ideas, feedback on goal setting

By ERICK BENGEL
The Daily Astorian

WARRENTON — The City Commission is inviting the public to weigh in on a tentative list of 2016 goals, all of which carried over from last year.

At a work session Tuesday, commissioners said they will continue to focus on improving and certifying the city's levees, in part to lower flood insurance rates; pursuing downtown Urban Renewal Agency projects and marina improvements; maximizing business and industrial development; and

remediating development restraints in Hammond.

Soon, the city will post these priorities on Warrenton's homepage and let community members comment on them. The commissioners hope the feedback will help them refine their goals, expand on them and perhaps add new ones.

"They may have something we haven't thought of," Commissioner Tom Dyer said. "It would be nice to have input."

Commissioners Henry Balensifer and Rick Newton agreed that some of the city's goals — maximizing devel-

opment, for instance — are better thought of as guidelines for the city's long-term vision. Public input could help the commissioners plant specific goalposts to measure their progress.

"We're going to ask them for suggestions so we can distill them and come out with actual finite goals that we can reach out and touch," Newton said.

Kujala, however, said that keeping city goals somewhat broad allows for flexibility as the commission moves through the year.

Later on, the city will revisit the goals with the

community's ideas in mind.

"If we're really off the mark here, I'd like to hear it," Kujala said.

In other business Tuesday, the City Commission, during a regular meeting,

adopted an ordinance that prohibits attracting and feeding animals not normally domesticated.

These animals include elk, deer, bears, wolves, foxes, cougars, coyotes,

feral cats, groundhogs, opossums, raccoons, skunks and turkeys.

A violation will result in a minimum fine of \$50 and a maximum fine of \$250 for each offense.

Recent shrinking of Washington park glaciars: What does it mean?



Jon Riedel
March 15

TO ATTEND:

For Members:
Dinner & Lecture: \$25 ea.
Lecture only: no charge

For Non-Members:
Dinner & Lecture: \$35 ea.
Lecture only: \$15 ea.

Appetizers will be available at 6 p.m.

Dinner will be served at 6:30 p.m.

The speaker will begin after the dinner service is complete and non-dinner members and guests of the audience take their seats.

Forum to be held at the CMH Community Center at 2021 Exchange St., Astoria.

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