

PENDLETON

City council to talk weed and wool

By **ANTONIO SIERRA**
East Oregonian

While the state and Umatilla County have already held public meetings in Pendleton since the passage of Measure 91, which legalized the sale and possession of recreational marijuana in Oregon, Tuesday will mark the first meeting the Pendleton city government will have on the issue since the November elections.

The workshop will be at 6 p.m. in the city council chambers, immediately followed by the regular council meeting at 7 p.m.

According to a report from city planner Evan MacKenzie, the meeting will focus on the steps Pendleton could take to regulate the marijuana industry once the measure takes effect July 1.

MacKenzie wrote that the measure was unclear on implementation, but it did offer a few ways in which cities could regulate marijuana sales.

Local governments may regulate the time, place and manner in which marijuana retailers operate, although there aren't explicit limits in how far those regulations can go.

MacKenzie pointed toward La Grande, where city officials passed a law last year prohibiting marijuana shops from being located less than 1,000 feet from a school, park, library, day-care center or any recre-

ational facility frequented by children.

Preceding the measure by several years, Monmouth passed an ordinance barring stores that sold drug paraphernalia from displaying those wares publicly. The ordinance also forbade those stores from making paraphernalia accessible to customers without assistance from a store employee.

If Pendleton wants to take more drastic measures, MacKenzie wrote someone could file a petition to put a citywide ban of marijuana sales on referendum.

But even if a petitioner were to collect the signatures needed for such a referendum, the earliest date it could go on a ballot is the next statewide general election — November 2016.

MacKenzie also noted that a successful sales ban wouldn't prohibit people from growing and using their own homegrown marijuana.

MacKenzie did warn that any action from the city or voters could be rendered moot by unforeseen developments.

"The City may consider adoption of local restrictions on medical and recreational marijuana similar to or perhaps more stringent than those adopted in LaGrande (sic) and Monmouth, but there is the possibility that any local regulation we adopt may be contrary to forthcoming State rules," he wrote. "There is also the

possibility that a local ordinance will be challenged in the courts, or a similar ordinance may be challenged elsewhere in Oregon, which would mandate changes to our regulations."

Outside of marijuana, the council will discuss other city issues at its regular meeting immediately after the workshop.

While income tax season is still in its early phases, the Pendleton Woolen Mills could receive good news on some of its taxes as soon as Tuesday.

That's when the council will consider abating the mills' property taxes for the next three years as a part of the Pendleton/Pilot Rock Enterprise Zone program.

Businesses usually qualify for abatement when they create one new job or increase employment by 10 percent, whichever is more.

In lieu of adding employees, businesses can also qualify if they increase productivity by 10 percent, retain their current workforce and spend 25 percent of their tax savings on employee training.

A report written by Economic Development Director Steve Chrisman states the mill is seeking the latter option and intends to use a part the \$19,363 in tax savings to help invest in new machinery valued at \$330,000.

Contact Antonio Sierra at asierra@eastoregonian.com or 541-966-0836.



Staff photo by Phil Wright

County hawks

Umatilla County employees dish up the goods Friday for a lunch time indoor tailgate to celebrate the Seattle Seahawks again making it to the Super Bowl, Sunday against the New England Patriots. Employees made the food on their own time, including those deviled eggs in Seahawk colors.

Umatilla Electric Cooperative considering solar projects

East Oregonian

Umatilla Electric Cooperative is looking into developing "one or more" future solar projects as the utility anticipates shouldering greater investment in new renewable energy.

Under the state of Oregon's Renewable Portfolio Standard, utilities that provide at least 3 percent of total retail electric sales must generate 25 percent of their electricity from qualifying renewable sources. With the rise in energy-hungry data centers in Umatilla and Morrow counties, UEC is expected to eclipse the 3 percent sales mark by 2016.

When that happens, UEC will have until 2039 to ramp up to the full 25 percent of new renewable generation. General Manager Steve Eldridge said the investment in solar now would help prepare for the requirement when it is implemented down the road.

Also, a 30 percent federal tax credit for solar power is expected to scale back to only 10 percent by next year. The credit would help cover installation costs.

UEC has already installed one 57-kilowatt solar array at its headquarters in Hermiston

in 2009, generating 80,000 kilowatt-hours of electricity per year. That's enough power for five all-electric homes.

Since then, Eldridge said the cost of solar has fallen by 50 percent.

"If we build larger, there will be economies of scale," Eldridge said in a prepared announcement. "If we level the investment over the life of installation, we believe it may be affordable in the near term as well as for many years in the future."

Spokesman Steve Meyers said they have not yet done any planning on the size or location of new projects. Eldridge said UEC will seek input from members before deciding whether to make the investment.

"Solar has caught the imagination of the general public and cost effectiveness of the technology is improving, so we will explore its feasibility here in our service area," Eldridge said.

UEC serves 10,000 members in Umatilla, Morrow and Union counties. The majority of its power is purchased wholesale from Bonneville Power Administration, generated from the Columbia River hydro system.

Oregon snowpack at record lows

East Oregonian and Associated Press

Oregon's mountain snowpack, vital for farms, fish and ski resorts, is in the midst of another miserable year, posting record low depths despite normal precipitation.

The reason is persistent warm weather, which is turning into the new normal as the climate heats up.

"We are really kind of staring climate change right in the eye right now," said Kathie Dello, associated director of the Oregon Climate Change Institute at Oregon State University.

While there will still be plentiful snowpacks in some years, overall the trend is for them to decline as average temperatures continue to rise, she said.

"Last year we had a bad fire season, and that is in part due to the lack of snow," which left the ground bare, and prone to dry out, she added.

So far this winter, the east slopes of the Cascades and central Oregon have received less than half their snow-water equivalent, or the amount of water contained within snowpack. The Blue Mountains and Wallowa Mountains of northeast Oregon are also hurting, with about half to three-quarters of average precipitation.

Total snowfall in Pendleton and La Grande is more than seven inches below normal, according to figures from the Natural Resource Conservation Service. Walla Walla snowfall is nearly nine inches below normal, and Yakima is 13.9 inches below normal.

Snow that builds up in the mountains serves as a natural reservoir, feeding streams and replenishing groundwa-

ter as it melts.

Natural Resources Conservation Service hydrologist Julie Koeberle says there is time for things to improve, but expectations are low. Long-range forecasts call for warm weather, with no clear indication whether it will be wetter or drier than normal. Meanwhile, some snow measurement sites are at their lowest since the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s.

"It really depends on what happens in February," Koeberle said. "Come March, the writing will be on the wall for sure."

The U.S. Drought Monitor shows drought spreading and intensifying across Oregon, except for the coast and the Willamette Valley. With rains not heavy enough to overcome persistent dry conditions, 2015 is likely to be the third straight year of drought in southern parts of the state, she said.

Warm temperatures in the western half of the state have left current snowpack measurements low: 16 percent of normal for the Willamette Valley, 28 percent for central Oregon, 18 percent for the Rogue-Umpqua region, and 17 percent for the Klamath Basin. Things are better in Eastern Oregon, where temperatures have been colder. Snowpacks ranged from 47

percent in the Umatilla, Walla Walla, and Willow basins, to 79 percent in the Harney and Owyhee basins.

Precipitation throughout Oregon has been normal or near normal since the Oct. 1 start of the water year despite a dry January, according to the service.

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Submit information to: community@eastoregonian.com or drop off to the attention of Tammy Malgesini at 333 E. Main St., Hermiston or Renee Struthers at 211 S.E. Byers Ave., Pendleton. Call 541-564-4539 or 541-966-0818 with questions.

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