

IRRIGON

Library district, city ink deal

By GEORGE PLAGEN
East Oregonian

The Oregon Trail Library District signed an intergovernmental agreement Wednesday with the city of Irrigon to reopen the community's \$1.2 million public library.

Irrigon City Council already approved the deal during a special meeting Feb. 24. It outlines joint management of common spaces between the library building and adjacent city hall.

City Manager Aaron Palmquist said he sent the signed documents to the building official on Thursday and he anticipates the library's occupancy permit could be restored by no later than Monday.

"There's nothing to review," Palmquist said. "I'm confident that it would not be dragged out."

With the occupancy permit in hand, the library district can go about reopening Irrigon's new library building, which has been closed since June 2014. The district will also avoid defaulting on a \$300,000 project loan.

Patrons began fundraising for a new library in Irrigon in 2009. Until then, the



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

The city of Irrigon and the Oregon Trail Library District have signed an intergovernmental agreement that will reopen the Irrigon public library. The \$1.2 million building had been closed since 2014 because of a legal dispute.

library and its 2,500 books were checked out of a retrofitted school bus parked behind the city's only gas station.

The library was built as an attachment to city hall on Northeast Main Street, but each property is technically built on separately owned lots. A firewall separating the two was not built to code, which led to a building

official yanking the library's occupancy permit after just a few weeks of operation.

In order to waive the firewall requirement and go ahead with a building code modification, the city and library district needed to agree how they would share access to common areas, maintenance and other responsibilities. The process took a number of months, swap-

ping proposals back and forth through their attorneys.

Now that the paperwork is in order, Palmquist said residents can once again enjoy their library.

"We're excited, and they (the district) are continuing to move forward," he said.

Contact George Plagen at gplagen@eastoregonian.com or 541-564-4547.



Courtesy of Frank Callahan, Native Plant Society

Giant cane is seen growing near the Talent area in Oregon. A bill proposed in the Oregon House of Representatives would require those growing the plant as a fuel stock post a minimum \$1 million bond to pay for eradication should it spread beyond its plot.

Bill would require giant cane growers post \$1 million bond

EO Media Group

SALEM — Farmers who grow giant cane, a plant used for bioenergy production, would be subject to bond requirements and potential penalties under legislation proposed in Oregon.

Under House Bill 2183, producing up to 400 acres of giant cane would require filing a \$1 million surety bond with the Oregon Invasive Species Council, an entity within the Oregon Department of Agriculture.

Planting a larger parcel of the species *Arundo donax* would require filing a surety bond of \$25,000 per acre.

The money would pay for removing the plants that spread beyond the plot and ODA could also impose civil penalties of up to \$25,000 for violations of bond conditions.

Supporters of the legislation fear that giant cane will become an invasive weed to the detriment of Oregon's environment by crowding out other plants.

"It will inevitably escape control if planted on an industrial scale," said Billy Don Robinson, vice president of the Native Plant Society of Oregon, who testified during a March 3 hearing of the House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources.

Spraying the plant with an herbicide like glyphosate won't necessarily prevent its resurgence, as the chemical may not kill inactive tubers that can remain viable for several years, Robinson said.

"It's a real ticking time bomb down in the ground," he said.

The concern over *Arundo donax* stems from trials conducted by Portland General Electric, which is examining the use of the plant as a feedstock for power generation.

PGE will stop using coal at its power plant in Boardman in 2020 and is considering giant cane as a replacement, said Brendan

McCarthy, government affairs analyst for the company.

Rather than shutter the facility, modifying it to use biomass would preserve jobs in area and allow PGE to keep it as an asset, he said.

The aggressive, fast-growing qualities that make giant cane attractive as a feedstock also make it a potential invasive species, McCarthy said.

Ironically, PGE has reduced its trials of *Arundo donax* because the plant hasn't performed as well as expected due to frost kill and other issues, he said.

PGE doesn't believe that HB 2183 is necessary, as the company is taking precautions to prevent the plant's escape, he said.

Growers and harvesters must comply with "sanitation check lists" such as baling the crop and cleaning trucks after hauling it, McCarthy said.

"We've been extraordinarily careful about how we've started growing this plant," he said. "Due to our project, I think we've improved our state's knowledge of this species."

ODA is not taking a position on the bill but Katy Coba, the agency's director, noted that *Arundo donax* is already subject to restrictions under its "control area" authority for potential pests and diseases.

For example, anyone who wants to grow the crop must provide ODA with a map of where it will be planted and keep the plant away from waterways, she said. Parcels must also be monitored for three years to ensure eradication.

PGE has also filed a \$1 million bond with ODA for its existing trials, she said.

Committee chair Brad Witt, D-Clatskanie, said the testimony of HB 2183's supporters "has succeeded in alarming me."

Further hearings will be held on the bill to get input from scientists at Oregon State University and ODA, Witt said.

BRIEFLY

McNary Heights locked down over suspicious package

UMATILLA — McNary Heights Elementary went into a precautionary lockdown Thursday morning over a suspicious package near the school that turned out to be harmless.

Umatilla School District superintendent Heidi Sipe said a parent noticed the package while walking her child to school. When she noticed it was still there on her way home she called the Umatilla Police Department.

Oregon State Police's explosives vehicle was brought on scene and the school was temporarily locked down. Sipe said the unit determined the package was full of "personal belongings" and didn't contain anything dangerous.

The school was cleared to send students out to recess by 10 a.m.

Community provides support for family's loss

IONE — The community of Ione is rallying together to help the family of Wyatt Aleksa.

The funeral for the Ione Community School seventh grader, who died Feb 27, is Saturday at 12:12 p.m. at the Ione Community Church, 395 E. Main St. A luncheon prepared by the Lutheran and Christian churches and school staff will be provided

afterwards.

Also, a soup dinner and silent auction is planned Sunday from 6-7:30 p.m. in the school cafeteria, 445 Spring St., Ione. In addition, financial donations can be made to the Ione Market in care of the Lehn family. Money raised will help the family with funeral costs and express community support for the family.

Donations for the auction are still being accepted. Anything is welcome, including gift certificates, themed baskets and services provided (a plane ride donated by the Jepsen family and a dinner for four by Shelly Rietmann are among the donations).

For more information, contact Erin Heideman at e2h2@hotmail.com, 541-561-0081 or Glenda Taylor at coyotelady29@hotmail.com or 541-571-4533.

Boardman offers online bill pay

BOARDMAN — The city of Boardman has partnered with Xpress Bill Pay to allow residents to pay their utility bills online.

Visa and MasterCard payments can be made 24 hours a day and are processed in real time. Customers can pay their bills via credit card, debit card or electronic funds transfer and can also set up automatic monthly payments.

Online bill pay may be accessed from a link on

the city's website, www.cityofboardman.com, or by visiting www.xpressbillpay.com. Customers should have their utility bills handy in order to enroll in the system.

For questions about the service, call Boardman City Hall at 541-481-9252 during normal business hours.

Umatilla Student wins \$20,000 scholarship

UMATILLA — A Umatilla High School senior was awarded a \$20,000 scholarship from Coca-Cola in recognition of her community leadership.

Anabel Moreno-Mendez was chosen for the award out of a pool of 100,000 applicants nationwide.

As a Coca-Cola Scholar, she will also travel to a four-day event in Atlanta in April to attend leadership workshops, participate in a community service project, tour local landmarks and be recognized at an awards banquet with television host Suze Orman as keynote speaker.

Moreno-Mendez participates in the service-oriented Key Club, helps out at athletic events and is in student leadership at Umatilla High School. She is also the goalie of the soccer team and is on a robotics team.

Umatilla superintendent Heidi Sipe said the district is "very proud" of Moreno-Mendoza.

"She is a stellar young lady and I know she'll do great work in her future," said Sipe.

Veterans to discuss benefit changes

IRRIGON — A Veterans Benefits Roundtable will present information about changes in veterans burial benefits, survivor benefits and government markers.

The event is Thursday, March 19 at 10 a.m. at Stokes Landing Senior Center, 195 N.W. Opal Place, Irrigon. The gathering is hosted by Morrow County Veterans Services.

For more information, call 541-922-6420.

Booster club sets steak feed, auction

UMATILLA — A steak feed and auction will help raise money for the Umatilla Booster Club.

The Blu Cru is excited about the event, which is in its eighth year. It is Saturday, March 14 beginning with a no-host social at 5:30 p.m. at the Hermiston Conference Center, 415 S. Highway 395. The silent auction starts at 6 p.m., dinner at 6:30 p.m., followed by the live auction. Tickets are \$25 per person and can be purchased at the Umatilla branch of Banner Bank, Java Junkies, the Umatilla School District office and at the office of all schools in the district. They also will be sold at the door.

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