WATER: Out of more than 300 requests only 95 were recommended for funding

Continued from 1A

Water Association, has taken months of careful negotiations to make sure they balance conservation interests. Now, state dollars are officially in place to move forward with the project's first phase.

"The legislature has worked so hard on our region's behalf, and on behalf of the state of Oregon to provide a pathway for sensible, multi-beneficial water development efforts to move forward," said Bob Levy, a longtime Hermiston farmer and secretary of NOWA.

Out of more than 300 requests to the Capital Construction committee, only 95 were recommended for funding, according to Sen. Bill Hansell, R-Athena. With bipartisan support from Sen. Michael Dembrow, D-Portland, Hansell sent a letter March 9 to the committee's co-chairs urging support for water development and, in particular, the NOWA proposal.

While grants will be awarded competitively to projects throughout the state, Hansell said NOWA appears to have a substantial head start with the foundation they've already laid.

"From the beginning of my time in the legislature, this has been a top priority of mine," Hansell said. "Nothing comes close to the prospects for what additional, sustainable water development means for our local region's economy."

If successful, future phases of the NOWA project could build out infrastructure even further and tab other work to fully mitigate impacts to fish and wildlife habitat.

> "From the beginning of my time in the legislature, this has been a top priority of mine."
>
> **— Sen. Bill Hansell**

Rep. Greg Smith, R-Heppner, said funding in the form of general obligation bonds is the mechanism that will help get this and other water projects finally off the ground.

"A lot of folks have worked hard on this," Smith said. "It will be great for the region."

NOWA Chairman Craig Reeder, of Hale Farms, thanked Hansell and Dembrow for their support and ability to reach across the aisle.

"When we saw the letter requesting the funding package, we thought we might have a chance," Reeder said.

There is great bi-partisan interest in sustainable water, Hansell said. By working together, he said the state was able to score a major victory.

"We have been able to do something this session I don't believe has happened before," he said. "I believe we will be able to take momentous steps forward with these funds and the water-related policy bills that were passed this session."

Contact George Plaven at gplaven@eastoregonian.com or 541-564-4547.

WATERMELON: Bellinger Farms harvests about 260 acres of fields

Continued from 1A

ahead of schedule and just in time for the Fourth of July. Harvest typically lasts through early October, Bellinger said, with sales peaking around Labor Day.

"(Watermelons) are the face of summer," Bellinger said. "We're selling a fun fruit. It's equated with picnics, good times and people enjoying the nice weather."

It will be another week, maybe 10 days before Hermiston watermelons start showing up at major grocery stores, but they are already available for sale at local produce stands.

Bellinger hires between 80-85 seasonal workers to harvest roughly 260 acres of watermelon fields on the farm, from Hermiston to Irrigon. The labor is hard under the hot sun, as crews stand in lines tossing 20-pound melons into the back of a waiting truck.

Working quickly, the pitching crews are usually able to fill a truck in 20-30 minutes. From there, melons head back to the sorting warehouse where they run down an assembly line and are arranged by size and variety.

Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Armando de Robles sorts watermelons by weight Friday at the Bellinger Farms sorting warehouse outside of Hermiston.

Some melons don't make the cut — they are misshapen, sunburned or overripe. Those are culled while the rest get packaged into cardboard bins with the familiar and welcome slogan, "They're here!"

Selling Hermiston watermelons comes with a marketing advantage, as well as a responsibility, Bellinger said. Customers expect the best, and this year growers expect to deliver.

"I think it could be a year with really high quality and really good yield," Bellinger said. "This is the signature of our town."

Contact George Plaven at gplaven@eastoregonian.com or 541-564-4547.

COUNCIL: Must hold public hearing on new art

Continued from 1A

$1 million to Pendleton's pavement preservation budget.

The council will also discuss when to seek bonds for the city's flagging facilities.

Staff has suggested two different bonds — $5.7 million for a new fire station and $4.4 million for other facilities like the river parkway, the convention center, the aquatic center and city hall. At the city infrastructure committee's last meeting, committee members were split about whether to put the bonds on the November ballot or at a later election.

Although it won't be considered until the July 21 meeting, the council will also get its first look at a public art ordinance.

In the face of criticism over two privately funded bronze statues in Pendleton's downtown, Mayor Phillip Houk suggested the city formalize the public art approval process.

The result is a three-page ordinance that determines how the city council should approve, dispose and relocate public art.

The ordinance doesn't just apply to the bronzes but also applies to other forms of art owned by the city, which include paintings, mosaics, mixed-media installations and architecture.

Before buying, commissioning or accepting a piece of art as a donation, the council must receive a recommendation from the arts commission and hold a public hearing. Donated works of art are not guaranteed permanent public display.

When considering art, the ordinance states the council should look at quality, the proposed site, cost, maintenance and durability, medium, history, public liability and support of the "city's goals, policies or vision." "Representation of cultural diversity" is also an encouraged feature to consider.

Site selection has its own set of criteria, including visibility, pedestrian accessibility, unobtrusiveness, ownership and whether the art piece enhances the surrounding environment.

If the city wants to move an art piece from one site to another, the council needs to consider the same criteria.

Decorative art pieces at city facilities will be displayed at the city manager's discretion.

The sale or donation of a piece of public art would also require a public meeting and a commission recommendation before the council could take action.

Public art could be removed if it's damaged beyond repair, the site is unsuitable because it's unaccessible or destroyed, the art is faulty in design or workmanship, presents a threat to public safety or requires excessive or unreasonable maintenance. The art can be moved either through a recommendation from the art commission or the city manager.

The meeting will be held at the council chambers in city hall, 500 S.W. Dorion Avenue.

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

TEST: Rough data, not broken down by school

Continued from 1A

difficult test, combined with teachers' inexperience in preparing students for the new format, had state officials predicting only 35 percent of students would pass their state tests.

The final 5 percent of tests to be graded include the tests that were submitted incomplete, so the final results will likely be a little lower. But so far the only category where students are falling short is in 11th grade math, where only 31 percent of students have scored a three or four on the test's four-point scale.

In 11th grade English, however, 69 percent of students have passed the test, defying the state's prediction of 41 percent.

Third graders had the lowest English scores, with a pass rate of 47 percent, but the highest math scores, also at 47 percent.

Hermiston School District assistant superintendent Bryn Browning said she was surprised and relieved that the state was getting the tests graded more quickly than expected. Hermiston received a preliminary report Thursday showing 80 percent of their district's tests had been graded.

This year's data is still far behind when districts are used to getting the information, however, because computerized scoring of the old OAKS test gave districts 97 percent of test scores instantly. The upshot is teachers have been planning curriculum and administrators setting goals without a detailed picture of how their students' performance on the first year of Smarter Balanced measured up.

"We don't have the targets we need to set yet because we don't know where we're starting from," she said.

The data the district was given Thursday is rough and not broken down by school, but Browning said it looks like Hermiston is on track to align with or exceed state averages.

Pendleton School District assistant superintendent Tricia Mooney said Pendleton students also seem to be surpassing the state's expectations, a fact she said didn't come as a surprise. The test came with a lot of hype, she said, but in the end the response from students tended to be, "It was just what we have been doing in class all year."

"When we get the final results we're still going to identify areas for growth and celebrate areas of success," she said.

Umatilla School District superintendent Heidi Sipe said in an email that after years of teaching the Common Core standards and waiting for the state testing mechanism to catch up with the district's curriculum, she was happy teachers will have the tools to start making more data-driven adjustments to their curriculum.

"I look forward to seeing the final data and working with our team to use the data to redesign instruction for our students," she said.

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