

PENDLETON

Business Oregon hoping drones fly soon

By ANTONIO SIERRA
East Oregonian



Chrisman

Several months after contributing to a \$1.7 million financial package for the Pendleton Unmanned Aerial Systems Range, Business Oregon seems happy with its investment.

The Business Oregon Commission reacted positively to a presentation by Steve Chrisman, the Pendleton airport manager and economic development director, at a meeting in Pendleton Friday.

Chrisman touted Oregon as a “federally sanctioned regional monopoly” because of its status as the only Federal Aviation Administration-approved test site on the west coast.

To back up his point, Chrisman cited an Oregon State University study that predicted 317 new jobs as a direct result of test range activity.

According to the study, those jobs would have a wage range of \$45,000 to \$150,000 and a total economic impact of \$77.9 million.

John Stevens, the chief operations officer of SOAR Oregon and the former range manager in Pendleton, curated a list of several dozen jobs that could be created by the range, which included employment in sales, engineering, piloting and technical production.

Chrisman also included testimonials from people in the UAS industry, including Andy Hickl, the senior director of innovation for Vulcan Inc., a company owned by

Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen that uses drones to track wildlife herds in Africa.

“Pendleton provides us with both a great place to fly complex mission and the technical support to keep them safe,” Hickl wrote. “We are excited about flying — and basing new UAS focused businesses — in Oregon and the great Pacific Northwest.”

Chrisman said the Pendleton UAS Range has approval from the FAA to fly three drones from two different companies, with seven companies seeking authorization to begin testing in Pendleton.

Although he couldn’t identify the companies because of signed non-disclosure agreements, he said they were “household names.” He also said he was confident the range could attract Vulcan Inc. and the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory in the future.

Business Oregon Director Sean Robbins bemoaned the lack of state investment in the UAS industry, which he called pitiful.

While the \$1.7 million package to the Pendleton range remains the biggest state investment in drones, Oregon trails Alaska, Nevada Texas and Virginia in financial support for test sites.

All states with test sites are well behind North Dakota, which has spent \$24 million.

“Nobody really wants to be in North Dakota,” Robbins said. “But they’re kicking our butt. Their governor is on TV talking about UAS and they are out there selling their position in the marketplace.”

Another economic area Business Oregon has helped Pendleton address is a lack of workforce housing. The group helped finance the Pendleton Heights housing

development.

State Sen. Betsy Johnson, D-Scappoose, an ex-officio member of the commission, noted the Legislature’s focus on affordable housing and said the challenge is spreading that money across the state and not just unloading it all in Portland.

Johnson said the state also needed to focus on building as many affordable housing units as possible.

Recalling a trip to visit a 10-unit affordable housing development in Boardman, Johnson said she was surprised to find out it cost \$150,000 to \$175,000 to build each unit.

“Let’s skip the granite counter tops and let’s build a couple more units,” she said.

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Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Small fire at Keystone RV

Pendleton firefighters knocked down a small blaze Friday at Keystone RV. The fire occurred in a sawdust collection system in a manufacturing plant on the site’s east end. Firefighters were en route at 10:53 a.m. and wrapped up just after noon. Firefighter Kevin Coleman said Keystone workers hit the fire with extinguishers early, but there were still flames when firefighters arrived. The Pendleton squad extinguished the fire and kept it from spreading to the rest of the building. Coleman also said no one was injured in the fire.

UMATILLA

Pot shops: to regulate or to ban

By JADE MCDOWELL
East Oregonian

As the end of Umatilla’s moratorium on marijuana dispensaries approaches, the city council will be asked to consider two ordinances — one regulating the dispensaries and one banning them outright — on Tuesday.

City manager Bob Ward said the council could make a decision Tuesday if they wanted to, but he expects after the public hearing they will want to consider the ordinances and do some research before making a decision.

“I would expect the action would be made on (August) 18th so there’s not a rush to judgment,” he said.

The city’s temporary ban on the dispensaries ends on Aug. 20. The original plan was to include medical marijuana dispensary regulations in a planned overhaul of

the city’s entire commercial code, but the council ended up sending the planning commission back to the drawing board last month.

Since the city is running out of time before the end of its ban Ward said he thought it would be best to have two ordinances “teed up” at once.

One ordinance would ban all marijuana dispensaries and processing sites, as allowed by the Oregon legislature for communities where a majority of residents voted against legalization of recreational marijuana.

The other ordinance, which runs eight pages long, would require medical marijuana retailers to get a special business license. The license would be granted on condition that the license holder go through a background check and allow the city manager to inspect the premises, including the business’ books

from the last three years, and allow the Umatilla Police to inspect surveillance footage “at any reasonable time” if there are suspicions a crime took place.

The ordinance would also impose a set of regulations on dispensaries operating within city limits, including restricting the operating hours from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m., prohibiting any marijuana products from being consumed or inhaled on the premises, banning logos or illustrations from the building’s signs, installing a filtration system to limit odors escaping the property and confining all business transactions to inside the building.

The city council meets Tuesday at 7 p.m. at city hall, 700 Sixth Street in Umatilla.

Contact Jade McDowell at jmcdowell@eastoregonian.com or 541-564-4536.

ECHO

City offers to help replace dead trees after bad freeze

By JADE MCDOWELL
East Oregonian

The city of Echo is offering to help pay for replacement trees after extreme temperatures over the winter killed foliage around the city.

City manager Diane Berry said younger trees and shrubs around the region were hit hard when the temperature plummeted from almost 70 degrees to below zero last November. The city’s ornamental cherry trees in particular were irreversibly damaged, especially around the arboretum and golf course.

The city, known for its decades as an official Tree City U.S.A., does have a tree budget and when the city orders new trees for city property it will pay half the cost for residents who want to order new trees at the same time.

Costs generally run between \$17 and \$24 depending on the tree, and anything purchased must be planted in the city limits. Berry said the city hasn’t decided yet whether it will get the trees in time for fall planting or spring planting.

Residents can get a list of suggested trees that do well in Echo’s climate from city hall. Berry said the list hasn’t been updated yet to remove ash trees, which the U.S. Forest Service is currently advising against planting due to an invasive insect species called the emerald ash borer that is killing ash trees around the United States.

Residents interested in splitting the cost of a tree purchase with the city can stop by city hall or call 541-376-8411.

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Cause of deadly crash still unknown

UKIAH — Oregon State Police have not pinned down what caused the crash Tuesday morning near Ukiah in which a 79-year-old man died.

Ronald Elmonte Thompson was from Anchorage, Alaska, according to information from his family. State police Sgt. Mark Banks said Friday morning Thompson was on his way to visit friends

in Arizona when the pickup he drove went off Highway 395 and down a steep draw near milepost 36 on Highway 395, about 20 miles south of Pilot Rock and 15 miles from Ukiah.

Thompson was the lone occupant. The crash ejected him and he died at the scene.

Banks said speed nor impairment were factors in the crash.

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