

ROADS: Pendleton has used close to 700 tons of gravel this year

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and sidewalks. Snow and ice are going to cause damage, he said, but so are the temperature extremes of the region. Any city that experiences below freezing temperatures in winter and temperatures above 100 in summer is going to see asphalt and concrete damage, Sivey said.

He also said plenty of winter damage is done by studded tires, which people can drive on until March 31 — often many weeks after the last ice has melted in the Hermiston area.

Dennis Hull with the National Weather Service reported Pendleton's winter

fell into the "extreme" category under the Accumulated Winter Season Severity Index. The index tracks the persistence and intensity of cold, snowfall and snow depth and it compares each winter going back to 1950-51. For a winter to be classified as "extreme," it must rank above the 95th percentile in severity.

Last year, Pendleton's winter was in the mild or moderate classifications.

"Just looking at the persistent cold, Pendleton normally has only 12 days where the temperature fails to reach 32 degrees during the daytime from Dec. 1 to Jan. 22," according to Hull. "This winter there have been 24

days, just short of the record of 28 days set in 1985-86."

During the same period, he added, Pendleton has had snow on the ground for 38 straight days.

"Normally there are only 15 days of snow cover," Hull reported. "The record is 52 days again set in 1985-86."

The cold winter, Patterson said, caused 151 frozen or broken water meters and at least five broken water mains.

"We're now assessing a policy looking at extreme temperatures and how long and at what temperature we should have folks drip water to keep pipes from freezing," Patterson said.

Each winter, Pendleton

stockpiles 600 tons of gravel for use on its roads. Patterson said the city averaged using 200 tons a season during the past 10 years, and last year used 50 tons.

This year, Patterson said the city has used close to 700 tons. The city also has an agreement with the Oregon Department of Transportation to dip into another 300 tons if the need arises.

Cleaning up the rock also is going to take some time and cost some money.

Patterson said the city rented a mechanical sweeper for six to eight weeks to help gather the gravel starting in March, when schools go on spring break.

"We estimate it will take to about mid-April (to finish) with all this rock out there," he said.

The Oregon Department of Transportation is keeping tabs on where winter did the most damage to roads.

Tom Strandberg, the department's spokesperson in Eastern Oregon, said a large pothole formed on Interstate 84 near The Dalles bridge, and the department may have to tackle that right away. He also said new cracks and seams are showing on state roads in La Grande, where he is based.

"I'm sure it's all over the area," he said. "Not a whole lot we can do when the

weather is too cold."

Snow and ice still cover miles of state roads in the region. Strandberg said the agency won't have a full account until winter recedes, then it can crews can get to work patching problem areas.

How much this might affect the state road budget remains a question, Strandberg said, but ODOT workers in Eastern Oregon racked up 7,000-plus hours of overtime in December — more than twice the amount for the month in any of the previous four years.

And with winter not over, he said, everyone is going to have to wait and see the final toll.

PGE: Gas already a quarter of energy supply

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In comments due to state regulators this week, a variety of stakeholders will argue that PGE is rushing into a gas-heavy future that might be good for its shareholders, but is risky for ratepayers and nearly as bad for the planet as coal.

"Right now, it looks like a shell game," said Amy Hojnowski, senior representative for the Sierra Club's Beyond Coal Campaign. "They're manipulating the process to get the outcome they want, which is a self-built expansion of their existing gas infrastructure at the Boardman site."

PGE says that's nonsense. It says it's keeping an open mind about resource choices and will let the market decide who can provide the cheapest, lowest-risk power to meet its customers needs in a competitive bidding process. But, bottom line, it says it needs to keep the lights on, and can't do that with renewables alone, a point reinforced during the recent cold snap, when the wind wasn't blowing and solar panels around the state were covered in snow.

"We're not putting our thumbs on the scale for any particular technology or fuel," said Brett Sims, PGE's director of resource strategy. "In the end, we don't know what will bid in, but we believe there are resources beyond new gas plants."

A gas future?

The rush to gas is on nationally and could accelerate under a Trump administration loaded with fossil fuel advocates and promising to unleash a new wave of drilling. Utilities around the country are already building or planning scores of new gas-fired power plants and pipelines as they close older coal units, take advantage of historically low gas prices, and add more renewable

resources that require backup.

At first glance, that's a climate win: gas-fired power plants emit about half the carbon dioxide as an equivalent one powered by coal. But the new plants will still generate considerable carbon dioxide for decades. Moreover, the main component of natural gas is methane, a far more potent greenhouse gas in the short run.

Trump's energy plan, posted Friday on the White House website, said he was committed to rolling back Barack Obama's Climate Action Plan, which had aimed to reduce methane leakage from the oil and gas industries by 45 percent by 2025.

Gas-fired electricity already makes up a quarter of PGE's energy supply today. It just opened a 440-megawatt gas plant at the Boardman site this summer. The previous year it opened Port Westward II, a dozen small gas-fired engines in Clatskanie that can flexibly incorporate renewable resources.

In November, PGE unveiled its newest plan for meeting customer demand. The study forecast a power supply shortfall of more than 800 megawatts by 2021, about what it takes to power 800,000 homes.

It's a big hole, mostly the result of the coal plant closure. PGE looked at different combinations of replacement resources, then scored them according to how they would fare under varying fuel price, carbon cost and demand growth scenarios.

Filling the shortfall

PGE's "preferred" option didn't specify the technology or fuel type, but identified two big energy needs, the vast majority from a reliable resource that isn't subject to the weather. Apart from hydroelectricity, which may not be available in the quantity PGE needs, or coal, that generally means natural gas.

A smaller component of the identified need was renewable energy, likely from wind farms on the Columbia Plateau or in Montana.

A variety of stakeholders didn't like that result. Some complain PGE's action plan isn't specific enough, and that its scoring methodology was skewed to favor the gas plants it wants to build.

"They're cooking their proprietary model," said Robert Kahn, executive director of the Northwest & Intermountain Power Producers Coalition. "It's the ultimate black box."

PGE denies that. It says it is trying to offer maximum flexibility and will consider all resource types that meet its criteria. It also said most of the metrics it used are industry standards and required by the state's Public Utility Commission.

Renewables advocates noted that PGE could have chosen another mix. The top options, including one with far more wind energy and less gas, scored within a few points of one another on a 100-point scale. They all met the utility's reliability standard.

"The technologies that exist today are good enough to do the job, said Rachel Shimshak, executive director of Renewable Northwest. "You just have to have a utility that's focused on fitting them all together."

Tyler Pepple, a lawyer for the Industrial Customers of Northwest Utilities, contends PGE doesn't need to add another wind or solar farm until 2028 or 2030, and can comply with the state's increasingly rigorous renewable energy mandates by drawing down the massive bank of renewable energy credits it has built up. In the meantime, renewable energy costs will fall, making compliance cheaper in 2030 and 2040.

EOTEC: On schedule to finish barns by July 14

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profitable. However, when it comes to marketing he said one current problem is that business manager Heather Cannell — currently the center's only employee until a new administrative assistant starts in February — is shoveling snow, cleaning bathrooms and setting up tables in addition to trying to book events.

"Sometimes when you try to save a dime it costs you a dollar," Givens said. "We may be at that point."

Cannell said it is also hard to market a half-finished project, because people want to know how many seats the rodeo arena will have or what day the barns will be finished, and she can't tell them for sure.

"I rented to an RV rally and had to call and say, 'Please still come, but we won't have any grass for you,'" she said. "I don't want to over-promise and under-deliver."

She said since the event center building opened in May 2016 there have been 40 events at the center, generating about \$36,000 in net profits. And Cannell said she has 43 more events booked into early 2018.

Councilors and commissioners asked Smith and Givens to go back to the EOTEC board and ask for an operations and staffing plan to be ready in the next month or so for the two partners to review a second joint work

session.

They acknowledged it might require some additional investment by the city and county to pay for a marketing-focused director who could make the center viable long-term.

"It's going to cost a little, but Byron can't run EOTEC forever," mayor David Drotzmann said.

The city council gave the county commission a heads-up that it would be making a formal request to change the name of East Airport Road, where EOTEC is located. The city has been getting complaints from truck drivers, contractors and others who ended up lost on the adjacent Airport Way.

Commissioner Bill Elfering asked if the council had discussed the change publicly and the council noted they had discussed it during their last city council meeting.

Givens said he had heard from concerned citizens living on East Airport Road who were not happy about the proposed change, and said from going through a street name change himself he knows that the costs and inconvenience add up when everyone has to get new driver's licenses and other legal documents.

Commissioner George Murdock said he had also gone through a road name change twice and it "wasn't fatal."

The commissioners will

discuss the city's request when it comes before them at a later date.

During Monday's work session the city and county also received updates on construction. John Eckhardt of Knerr Construction said things are on schedule to break ground on the barns by Jan. 30 and finish them by July 14.

"We do not have a lot of flexibility in our schedule," he said.

Carl Hendon of Hendon Construction said work on the rodeo arena has continued with heaters and insulating covers over the concrete where possible to push through the cold, snowy weather. The original "aggressive" schedule would have had the arena finished before June 1, but due to the long stretch of below-freezing weather Hendon said that date is now June 14.

In response to a question from the city council about the safety of pouring concrete during such cold weather, Hendon assured them that all the tests have shown the concrete has cured properly and is as strong as it needs to be.

"It's not going to fall down," he said.

The EOTEC board has a meeting Friday at 7 a.m. at the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center.

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UMATILLA: Application will go back to Pelleberg

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Sharp also noted that the city council voted on the zone change for the property on Dec. 20 — a change that would take effect 30 days later. Therefore, when the application was submitted on Jan. 10, it was for land still zoned commercial.

Sharp said the application was incomplete, as well, because it did not follow a long list of criteria including plans for development of streets, utilities, storm water drainage and other components.

"If the application had been submitted to the planning department for review and a development of a staff report, several items would have been noted that make the application inappropriate and illegal for the planning commission to consider it at this time," he said.

The rest of the planning commission agreed and voted to send the application back to Pelleberg.

During Tuesday's meeting Sharp also brought up two new buildings he said had been added recently to the property of Alanis Auto Detail on Sixth Street. He noted that a conditional use permit had been granted for the business, but the construction of new, permanent structures on the property was not part of the

conditional use permit.

Since the only body with authority to amend the conditional use permit was the planning commission, Sharp questioned why no request to amend had come before the commission when the buildings were erected.

Searles said he was "not aware of the construction until most of the work was already done." But in November, Searles said he told the business owner that before the work was completed he needed a conditional use permit, building permit and electrical permit.

Searles said the business owner told him that the city manager had given him permission to erect the structures. Searles told the business owner that the city manager did not have the authority to do that.

Under questioning from Sharp, Searles said he did not know whether the business owner had misunderstood Pelleberg and wouldn't be able to speak for the city manager about what had been said.

Commission member Lyle Smith said the detail shop was a good business for the city but the commission needed the business owner and Pelleberg to sit down with them so they could work out the permit issue and clarify that city staff does

not have the legal authority to approve changes.

"We really want to keep this guy in business ... but we really need to keep things by the books," Smith said. "We can't shortcut."

The commission directed Searles to ask a representative of the business and Pelleberg to attend their next meeting to discuss the issue. A call to Pelleberg by the *East Oregonian* was not returned Tuesday night.

The city council has called for a special city council meeting that will take place Wednesday, Jan. 25 at city hall at 7 p.m. The only item on the agenda, besides the pledge of allegiance and approval of the agenda, is an executive session on "Staff performance/Disciplinary action." The closed-door session is under ORS 192.660 2(b) and 2(i) which pertain to discussing "the dismissal or disciplining of, or to hear complaints or charges brought against, a public officer, employee, staff member or individual agent" and to "review and evaluate the employment-related performance of the chief executive officer of any public body, a public officer, employee or staff member."

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