

PENDLETON

Barrier to resolve airport dispute

Shipping containers to prevent ag pad closure for now

By **GEORGE PLAVERN**
East Oregonian

The manager of Pendleton's Unmanned Aerial Systems Range says a strategically placed barrier should help alleviate any safety concerns between drones and traditional crop dusting pilots at the Eastern Oregon Regional Airport.

Darryl Abling, who was hired as UAS range manager last year, recommended last week temporarily closing the airport's northernmost agricultural pad, citing the potential for planes to kick up rocks and debris that could damage nearby drone equipment.

The Pendleton Airport Commission tabled that request after it was met with resistance, and asked for stakeholders to brainstorm other solutions. About 20 people gathered Wednesday at the airport, where they came up with the idea of using shipping containers as a makeshift blast wall that would protect drones and allow the ag pad to remain open.

Abling said a barrier would be feasible in the short term, and the airport commission will hold a special meeting at 6 p.m. Wednesday, March 22 to vote on approval.

"It's just a matter of orchestrating the logistics," Abling said.

The issue centers on the northernmost ag pad at the airport, which lies in close



EO file photo

The Eastern Oregon Regional Airport in Pendleton.

proximity to UAS operations — including the ArcticShark, an \$800,000 drone owned by the U.S. Department of Energy ultimately bound for Alaska to gather climate data.

Flight tests and training will take place next week and throughout the month of April for the ArcticShark, Abling said. At the same time, local wheat farmers are trying to get fertilizer applied to their fields ahead of this year's growing season.

Andrew Kilgore, owner of K2 Aerial Application, expressed interest in leasing the pad but was denied as the airport cited safety concerns at the UAS range. The pad itself has not been used since the Forest Service gave up its lease two years ago.

Time is of the essence, Kilgore said. Farmers are fertilizing now, and the

longer he is grounded, the more work he will lose.

Abling said the container barrier should be effective, and he was pleased by the outcome of Wednesday's meeting. The purpose of the UAS range is to integrate drones with manned flights at the airport, he added, and not to advance the UAS industry ahead of agriculture.

"It's all about working together," Abling said.

Over the long term, Abling said he would like to see access improved at the range's other UAS launch pads, which would allow them to permanently close the pad in conflict with ag pilots. That may take several years, but Abling said the range is starting to turn a profit which will lead to infrastructure improvements.

Eventually, the goal is to

move all UAS operations to the north end of the airfield.

Kilgore said he was also satisfied with Wednesday's meeting, where agricultural pilots like himself had a chance to make their voices heard.

"Now, hopefully, we can work something out between all the local operators, including myself," he said.

There was some further discussion at the meeting about making the vacant pad available for public use, rather than leasing it to one operator. The pads have historically been leased to individual owners, and changing the terms of that lease may require additional review from the city.

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UMATILLA

City will appoint interim mayor

East Oregonian

Umatilla is taking applications for its next mayor.

City manager Russ Pelleberg said interested citizens can visit city hall, 700 Sixth St., to fill out a form signaling their interest in being appointed by the city council.

Former Mayor David Trott resigned March 1, citing "irreconcilable differences" with the city council. His resignation came too late to place the mayor's position on the May ballot.

At the city council's March 7 meeting a citizen urged the council to appoint an interim mayor until the city could hold an election in November, but council president Mary Dedrick stated the city's bylaws called for the council president to preside at meetings until the election could be held in November.

She later contacted the *East Oregonian* to correct that statement and note the city council could and would, in fact, appoint an interim mayor.

The council's next regular meeting is scheduled for April 4.

Umatilla has dealt with a series of unfinished mayor's terms over the past seven years. Trott was elected in 2014 to replace Pat Lafferty after Lafferty died while in office. Lafferty had been elected during a special election in 2011 after Karen Steen served only three months in office before announcing she was resigning due to "bullying" from city staff and elected officials.

Steen had been elected to finish out a term vacated by Trott, who served as Umatilla's mayor from 2005 to 2010 before resigning to pursue the open city manager's position that was eventually filled by Bob Ward.

Several school boards without candidates

By **JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN**
East Oregonian

bond in '08, and that was good."

Board chair Sherman said this is the first year she can remember where no one filed for an open position, and that if no one ends up running, it will become an appointed seat. The board will nominate and select someone, and the term will be shortened from four years to two.

In Pendleton, three positions are up for election, including one contested race — between Debbie McBee and Chris Roop.

Several other districts in Umatilla County have seats open, for which no one has filed. Ukiah County, with most races uncontested, and several open seats with no candidates.

In Hermiston, four seats will become available. Incumbents Bonnie Luisi, Jason Middleton and Karen Sherman have filed for their current seats. Don Rankin has not filed for re-election, and said he plans to retire at the end of his term.

"After 12 years, that's enough," said Rankin, who will be 83 this year. "I enjoyed my time on the school board. It's been interesting. We passed the

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BOARDMAN

Chamber luncheon focuses on rail safety

By **GEORGE PLAVERN**
East Oregonian

A spokesman for Union Pacific Railroad and the general manager of a controversial proposed oil terminal in Vancouver, Washington were guest speakers Wednesday at a Boardman Chamber of Commerce luncheon focusing on rail safety and energy independence.

Aaron Hunt, director of public affairs for Union Pacific in Portland, kicked off his presentation with a look at how the railroad is working to improve its safety measures, especially after last year's derailment of an oil train near Mosier.

Oregon legislators are mulling a pair of bills to curb oil-by-rail disasters — one that would require Union Pacific to develop oil spill prevention and emergency response planning, and another that would prohibit the state from funding new bulk coal or oil terminals.

Hunt did not specifically discuss either bill on Wednesday, though according to an Associated Press report, he submitted testimony to the Legislature arguing that a bill setting time frames for emergency response is invalid under federal laws.

Instead, Hunt highlighted a number of statistics illustrating strides Union Pacific is making in safety. Between 2005 and 2015,

employee injuries have gone down 53 percent, he said. There has also been a 25 percent reduction in incidents involving railroad equipment.

Faulty lag bolts were the cause of the Mosier derailment, which Hunt acknowledged during his talk. Since the fiery crash on June 3, 2016, Hunt said the company has replaced all lag bolts with traditional railroad spikes on eight miles of curved track through the Columbia River Gorge.

Hunt added the railroad has increased the amount and frequency of its rail safety inspections. Walking inspections of track curves now happen every 90 days in Oregon, with visual hi-rail inspections twice per week.

Track geometry cars — which use lasers to take precise measurements of track level and spacing — run three times per year as well.

"All of these technologies fold together into a set of data that we are constantly analyzing to prevent incidents on the railroad," Hunt said.

All of that together has helped make railroads the safest mode of transportation for hazardous materials, Hunt said. Trains are 20 times less likely to be involved in an accident than trucks, according to data, and Union Pacific has spent \$430,000 training 51,000

first responders since 2005 as part of its crude-by-rail program.

"We are safer than the alternative," Hunt said.

Jared Larrabee, general manager for the proposed Tesoro Savage oil terminal in Vancouver, Washington, was also on hand to discuss their project, which has been contested by environmental groups as well as local residents.

If approved, the Vancouver terminal would be the largest such facility in the U.S., handling up to 360,000 barrels of crude oil per day. Larrabee said the terminal would be able to bring in four oil trains every day when operating at maximum capacity.

Speaking to business owners and community leaders in Boardman, Larrabee said railroads are imperative for the West Coast to access booming Midwest oil supplies. By itself, he figures the Vancouver Energy terminal could displace up to 30 percent of crude oil imported by the region from foreign sources, thereby increasing energy independence.

"One of the really important elements of this is the ability to use oil we produce in the United States, and displace some of that foreign oil," Larrabee said. "That's really what our project is all about."

Vancouver Energy also anticipates the terminal will

kick in \$7.8 million annually in local tax revenue, and create 176 direct jobs once it is fully operational.

Safety is paramount to that economic output, Larrabee said. That's why Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad, which will carry the volatile oil from the Bakken Formation in North Dakota, will also inspect each loaded unit oil train either in Pasco or elsewhere in Washington before it is sent down the Gorge.

The facility will only accept trains that use tanker cars meeting the latest federal standard, Larrabee added.

Still, the project has faced stiff opposition while officials have spent more than three years trying to obtain permits. Opponents argue it would increase the risk of another oil train derailment and spill, as well as harm tribal fisheries and increase pollution from burning more fossil fuels.

The Port of Vancouver recently voted 2-1 to extend the company's lease.

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