

DATA: Vadata estimates the complex would add up to 160 new jobs

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Umatilla, and two more at the Port of Morrow in Boardman.

Thursday's land use hearing was sparsely attended, and no one spoke in opposition of the project. 1000 Friends of Oregon, a nonprofit organization based in Portland, did submit a letter Wednesday raising several issues with the proposal, primarily about the suitability of the property for industrial versus agricultural use.

Though the land does not currently have a water right, the group argues it could be used for farming in the future. They also claim that Vadata has not demonstrated why the data centers could not be located at an existing industrial site.

Seth King, an attorney representing the company, said the property has not held a water right in more than 20 years and data centers would provide much greater benefits to the county. Vadata estimates the complex would add up to 160 new jobs.

Liberated L&E, which is selling the land to Vadata, says the soils are low quality for agriculture and, while there has been some limited livestock grazing, it "has not yielded significant economic returns and is not conducive to operating a financially viable farming enterprise."

As for location, Jim Footh, real estate manager for Vadata, has said the site is ideal because it is close to existing infrastructure — such as high-voltage power

lines — as well as their other data center campuses, which need to be connected by fiber optic cable.

Vadata did consider one other shovel-ready site near Hermiston, but would have required four miles of infrastructure extension.

Commissioner George Murdock said he is sensitive to the issue of rezoning farmland, but as a rural Eastern Oregon county, they also need to focus on bringing in economic development. Commissioner Larry Givens agreed, adding the land does not appear to be suited for agriculture anyway.

"It's a very unproductive piece of ground, and always has been," Givens said.

All three commissioners voted to approve the zone change. Stakeholders have three weeks to appeal the ruling.

Vadata has also signed on to be a customer of the regional water system with the city of Hermiston and Port of Umatilla to provide roughly 400 gallons per minute of cooling water. Once the water is discharged, Vadata says it is looking into ways it can be shared with neighboring farmers who could use the extra irrigation for growing crops.

A similar plan is in the works for Vadata's McNary campus near Umatilla, with a \$3 million project to route water to the West Extension Irrigation District.

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CAREERS: Students learned EOCI offers 432 positions

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Of course, science isn't the only field Pendleton students envision themselves in.

The high school has spent the past few days holding discussion panels and taking students on tours to various worksites from a wide array of fields.

On Wednesday, another group of PHS students ventured inside the Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution to explore the idea of working at a prison. Each student clipped on a badge, checked in with security and walked through a gate of steel bars. Inside, they found denim-clad inmates and the occasional razor wire and guard post, a community of 1,700 inmates and all sorts of professionals from the outside who make the place tick.

The 17 teens visited the education department, then ogled the prison's massive garment factory from a catwalk high above. They peeked into a cell. They dropped into behavioral services, where mentally ill inmates receive care. They visited the prison's medical clinic.

The students learned that EOCI offers 432 positions: correctional officers, of course, but also teachers, counselors, medical professionals, administrative assistants, IT technicians, business and human resources people and a host of others.

To provide students with experience beyond traditional academics, the Pendleton School District has expanded their career technical education options in recent years.

The centerpiece of this initiative is the Pendleton Technology & Trades Center, the re-purposed West Hills



Staff photo by Kathy Aney

Katelynn Johnson and some of her Pendleton High School classmates look out over the massive garment factory at the Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution. About 17 students toured EOCI Wednesday to learn about job opportunities at the prison.



Staff photo by Kathy Aney

Hallie Porter and a couple of her Pendleton High School classmates listen to inmates describing a dog training project at the Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution.

Intermediate School that provides classes in culinary arts, robotics, unmanned aerial systems, aerospace engineering and more.

After leading a tour of the center during an open house Thursday, CTE coordinator Curt Thompson said

the district isn't currently equipped to track how students are doing academically and professionally after they leave high school, so officials don't yet know how effective the district has been since ramping up their CTE efforts.

But he has seen individual

successes, like the student who took aerospace engineering coursework in high school and was able to translate it to a \$64,000 scholarship to Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, a Florida college that specializes in flight engineering.

Thompson said CTE is as much about students figuring out what kind of fields they don't like as finding out which ones they do. Rather than spending considerable time and resources in a college or program before deciding that career path is not for them, Thompson said high school officials can identify a student's proclivities early and reorient them toward a path they like better.

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DEPORT: Washington and California already made the change in the last several years

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The change would have no effect on illegal immigrants.

"This is an equity issue," said House Speaker Tina Kotek, D-Portland. "People should not be torn from their families and their communities because of an arbitrary difference between state and federal sentencing law for low-level, nonviolent misdemeanors."

If adopted, the law would make Oregon uniform with Washington and California, which already made the change in the last several years.

It would serve to strengthen the three states' governors' efforts to create "a zone of inclusivity" along the West Coast, Manning said.

Gov. Kate Brown has been defiant in the face of President Donald Trump's executive orders limiting immigration and banning refugees, which also have been halted by the courts.

In February, Brown issued her own executive order barring the use of state resources to enforce federal immigration policy. Attorney General Ellen Rosenblum subsequently sought to join Washington's lawsuit against the Trump administration's immigration orders.

"Governor Brown supports the amendment and looks forward to signing the racial profiling bill into law to better protect all Oregonians," said Press Secretary Bryan Hockaday.

House Speaker Kotek requested the sentencing change to be added to an amendment to a bill that requires police to collect data on race when they pull over drivers or pedestrians. The bill is meant to discourage racial profiling by law enforcement.

Kotek made the request after receiving feedback from community groups, law enforcement, immigration attorneys and others working on the racial profiling bill, said Lindsey O'Brien, a spokeswoman in the Speaker's Office.

Felonies, certain violent crimes and 365-day or greater sentences for gross misdemeanors can trigger mandatory deportation under federal law. Class A misdemeanors in Oregon can range from falsifying information and writing a bad check to fourth-degree assault.

"Shifting to 364 days means our fellow Oregonians are not subject to that very drastic penalty," Manning said.

As an immigration attorney, Manning said he sees legal immigrants deported for misdemeanor crimes all of the time.

"I couldn't even count for you how many times," he said. "It's extremely painful and sad ... and is a form of stigmatization against noncitizens."

The House Judiciary Committee adopted the amendment and approved the overarching bill March 30. No one addressed the significance of the sentencing change at that time.

Reps. Sal Esquivel of Medford, and Mike Nearman of Independence said they oppose the change because they see it as an attempt to circumvent federal law.

"To me that is a way to dodge the federal law," said Esquivel, who is the son of a legal Mexican immigrant. "You're on probation when you come here on a green card."

The two Republican lawmakers co-sponsored legislation this session to outlaw "sanctuary city" designation and to make English the state's official language.

Several Oregon cities, including Portland, have declared themselves sanctuary cities for immigrants, and the Trump administration has threatened to pull federal grants and other funding from those jurisdictions.

The bill is now before the Joint Committee on Ways and Means but won't have another hearing until May, said Rep. Duane Stark, R-Grants Pass, chairman of the Subcommittee on Public Safety.

RESCUE: The job can demand time away from work, family

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"You could start with a missing person," he said. "You find the person hurt down a cliff. Now it's a ropes situation. Carrying them to safety, and then you have to use first aid. It could be multiple scenarios all in one case."

There are about 25 people in the county's Search and Rescue volunteer program. According to Rick Pullen, a volunteer for the last six years, the team averages about 12 calls per year.

"This year we're already above 12," he said. Last Saturday, volunteers were called to two incidents in one day. Although there may be an urban call once in a while, most are in the mountains, and almost all are in the middle of the night. The number of calls spike in bad weather, especially in winters like this one.

The job can demand time away from work and family.

"A lot of these volunteers are working," Pullen said. "I have to take vacation time out to go on a call."

Pullen said the team uses several different modes to conduct searches: snowmobiles, four-wheelers, drones.

"We'd really like to put together a horse team," he said.

At Wednesday night's training, the group splits up into two teams. The team working on litters practices quickly putting together, then taking apart the device used to carry a person. They practice securing it to a stand with a wheel attached to it. That device was donated by the family of a man who drowned at McKay Reservoir several years ago, and whose body volunteers recovered.

"Just remember," says one of the instructors with a grin. "It's 10 times harder when it's dark out."

As teams practice, others stand around and take mental notes.

Dalton Cash has been with Search and Rescue for about three years, and joined because he'd seen his father volunteer and wanted to do the same.

Though he's had some experience, he said he's been surprised by how many calls the team gets, and how difficult it is to track people.

"Something that's been hard is learning how to get my eyes to look at a track



Staff photo by Kathy Aney

Search and rescue volunteers Kyle Waggoner, Dan Heath, Rick Pullen and Bob English on Thursday night discuss how to attach a litter to a special wheel that allows easier transport in rough terrain during training exercises.

that I can't see," he said, noting the importance of looking for signs of human activity outside the obvious ones.

"An instructor may say, 'there's a footprint there.' I can't see it. He'll point out broken twigs and crushed leaves."

On the other side of the room, Emma Hubbard and Kendra Russell work on tying knots. Russell practices a bowline knot, which rescuers have to learn to tie around themselves in cases of self-rescue.

"If you slide down a steep embankment, barely hanging on, or if you're in the water, someone throws you the rope," Johnson said. "Hanging on with one arm, you have to be able to tie the rope with one hand."

Other knots include a figure 8 knot, a basic overhand knot, a munter hitch knot and a prusik knot.

"Most of the rescue knots — figure 8s are used for anchors," said Kevin Schreiber, a 19-year-veteran with Search and Rescue and one of the instructors. "They're simple, very easy to recognize."

Johnson, who has been with Umatilla County Search and Rescue for about two and a half years, came to the job from a Forest Service background. He also does security for the county courthouse, and had done search and rescue in the past.

Those who volunteer have to get certified in classroom and practical skills, and then get approved by OSA standards as a ground searcher. There are different classifications of searchers, and Johnson said most of Umatilla County's obtain the

second-highest.

"It's about what type of terrain you can handle," he said. "Type 1 searchers, those are the people going up to Mount Hood. They have to be able to sustain themselves

for 72 hours. We try to make all ours type 2 searchers. That means you can sustain yourself for 24 hours."

The team meets at least once a month for a night training, and usually has a Saturday training each month that lasts six to eight hours.

In the next segment of training, volunteers will go out onto a trail, where they will have to carry a litter for a quarter mile. The group will also practice flying a drone.

In addition to their monthly appointments, the group is always on call for emergencies.

"It's definitely a commitment," Johnson said.

For more information about volunteering, contact Johnson at 541-966-3635.

Contact Jayati Ramakrishnan at 541-564-4534 or jramakrishnan@eastoregonian.com

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