

NEAL: Facility will serve more than 80 children

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the Port of Morrow manager, are the center's namesakes, honored for their role in the project's planning and execution. Neal proposed the idea of an early learning center to IMESD superintendent Mark Mulvihill in 2015, and the two were able to pull in other entities to partner with them.

The center will be run by Umatilla-Morrow Head Start, and will have three classrooms for those students. There will also be a classroom for IMESD's Early Intervention, Early Childhood Special Education program, which identifies students who need special services at an early age.

Jason Schoenfelder, a Morrow County resident, said he was excited to have his three year-old daughter, Grace, attend the school starting next week.

"She was part of the IMESD early childhood development (program) in Hermiston," Schoenfelder said. He also said he was happy with the facility.

"The fact that it's preschool, and the early childhood development services in one place," he said.

Angie Hasbell has been a Umatilla-Morrow Head Start teacher for 14 years, and previously taught Head Start at Sam Boardman Elementary School. She will now teach at the new center.



Gary and Kathy Neal speak before a ribbon cutting ceremony for the Neal Early Learning Center on Wednesday in Boardman.

"The facility is beautiful," she said. "I think it will really address the kids' needs."

She said some of the perks of the facility included a bathroom in the classroom, as well as access to a nice outdoor play area.

She added that at Sam Boardman, she was the only Head Start teacher.

"It will be nice to have more to collaborate with," she said.

The facility will serve more than 80 three-to-five year-olds. But next door, at the Workforce Training

Center, there will be an area for infants and toddlers, which will be available 10 hours a day for working families.

Neal said she initially envisioned the center in the same building as the Workforce Training program, so that children could learn as their parents were learning. While that didn't happen, the two facilities are next door to each other.

Neal said she couldn't believe everything had come together so well.

"It's the most humbling thing in my life, but also the

most proud," she said. "We're years out before we will know the actual difference it makes, but it will make an immediate difference in kids' lives."

Neal, whose background is in real estate and banking, moved to the area in 1989 with her husband.

"We saw the potential in this area," she said. "We just knew it was going somewhere."

She added, "everybody wants to make a difference in some way or another."

The facility will welcome students next week.

HOUSING: More than 1,000 acres of buildable land

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the fire, working as a branch manager for Stearns Home Loans and developing a nine-lot housing subdivision near InterMountain Education Service District offices off Southgate.

In the wake of the recession, Galloway said Pendleton had an excess of qualified buyers but a shortage of housing inventory.

The problem could get more acute as millennials begin to look into purchasing property.

"Seventy percent (of millennials) are living in a basement," Galloway said. "They're living with mom and dad."

The land

With more than 1,000 acres of buildable land in Pendleton, especially in Southeast Pendleton along Interstate 84 and the area surrounding Tutuilla Road, some landowners set up tables to solicit interest in their properties.

The Rees family and Indian Hills Investment Co. together own more than 100 acres north of Interstate 84 and east of Highway 11. Community Development

Director Tim Simons said a developer previously tried to build housing in the area in the 1970s before the project fell apart.

Manholes and a rusty fire hydrant are one of the few modern reminders the bare land was going to be developed.

The road that leads to the property, Southeast Kirk Avenue, would need to be reconfigured to comply with an Oregon Department of Transportation rule that requires secondary streets be no closer than 1,000 feet to an offramp.

Representing the owners, appraiser Jerry Imsland said engineering firm Anderson Perry & Associates was working on that issue.

Across town, rancher Fritz Hill already has a master plan to turn 51 acres of his property north of town into a single-family housing development.

Hill said the city needed to look into expanding its urban growth boundary so Pendleton could continue to grow to the north.

"It's just going to sit there and Pendleton is going to keep growing toward Pilot Rock and Rieth," he said.

Simons said that unless Pendleton started experiencing 5 to 7 percent growth, it was unlikely that the state would approve an expansion of the urban growth boundary.

The cost

Trying to counter a longstanding narrative that the city's fees are too onerous, Pendleton city staff shared the estimated cost of building and planning fees for a three-bedroom, two bedroom house.

Their estimates showed Pendleton's fees middling compared to other, similar-sized Oregon cities.

While Pendleton's \$5,495 in planning and building fees is almost \$1,000 more than Hermiston and \$1,600 more than La Grande, it was significantly less than the city of Umatilla.

Comparing Pendleton to Stanfield, Milton-Free-water, Bend, Central Point, Corvallis, Gresham, Forest Grove and Ontario, Pendleton had the second lowest fees for system development charges and water utility hook-ups.

Regardless of planning and development fees, city officials have long acknowledged that Pendleton's geography makes it harder to

develop affordable housing. Pendleton's pitch did land on a representative of at least one housing developer.

Deborah Flagan, Hayden Homes' vice president of community engagement, called Pendleton "progressive" for convening a housing conference.

Based in Redmond, Flagan said Hayden Homes focuses on building workforce housing in "secondary" communities like Pendleton. The Hayden Homes website states that the company has built more than 14,000 homes in Oregon, Washington and Idaho.

Flagan said she believes housing follows jobs and Pendleton is unique in that it has available employment.

With more information about Pendleton in hand, Flagan said she'll have to look at the financial viability of developing in Pendleton as the next step.

One of the keys, she said, will be figuring out a way to build housing that can be sold at just under \$200,000.

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FISH: Estimates suggest enough fish will return to sustain hatchery programs

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which is just 30 percent of the most recent 10-year average.

Despite the disappointing forecast, Jeff Yanke, ODFW district fish biologist in Enterprise, is encouraging anglers not to panic.

"Coupled with the right river conditions, even in a low run year, we can still have a worthwhile steelhead fishery," Yanke said. "Folks will just need to have a little more patience, and that is one quality steelhead anglers always bring to the river."

Oregon officials expect the reduced bag limits will be temporary, but mark a conservatively start to the season.

"It's easy to get burned on a low return year like this if you overestimate," Yanke said. "We want to manage (the fishery) conservatively right off the bat."

So far, only 5 percent of the Grande Ronde and Imnaha steelhead have moved upstream of the Columbia River. Yanke said he should have a better idea of actual returns come October.

Local guides and outfitters are already feeling the effects of this year's steelhead outlook. Grant Richie, who owns the Minam Store along Highway 82 in Wallowa County, said he is definitely seeing a lower rate of bookings for guided raft trips this fall.

Richie said he usually leads one, five-day guided trip down the Wallowa and

Grande Ronde rivers between Minam and Troy during the fall season, with about six to eight people per trip. This year, he said he is booking just two to four people per trip.

One visitor who booked a year in advance called recently with concerns the entire river would be shut down, Richie said. "With all the bad reports

this spring, we're definitely seeing a lower rate of bookings for this fall," he said.

Though Richie acknowledged the run is down, he said there are still steelhead to be caught.

"There will be fish in the river," he said.

Yanke also reiterated that, though the bag limit for steelhead has been lowered, current estimates suggest

enough fish will return to sustain their hatchery programs and provide enough fish for harvest.

A one-fish limit simply prevents a situation where anglers would be forced to put back an injured fish, he added.

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TAXES: Error discovered during an audit of finances conducted in early 2017

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the increase, but even more upset by the way the district approached it.

"My parents have lived here for many years, and have a lot of questions," said Sandra Alarcon. She asked the district how and why the error occurred, and what percentage of the payment was missed. She also asked why the message delivered to residents was so vague.

"The implication was that people were not paying taxes," Alarcon said.

Rosa Holt, a Stanfield resident, noted that the message made it seem like the oversight was the fault of residents.

"It made it seem like it was our responsibility, instead of taking responsibility as a governing body," Holt said. "I'm underpaying, but I didn't know I was underpaying. I think there needs to be some accountability and ownership. A lot is conveyed in the way you communicate."

Another audience member who declined to be named said the board should have informed people about the error as soon as they knew.

"You found out in January and let us know in August?" she asked.

Board members acknowledged that they should have done a better job communicating the information. They said they were directed by their auditing firm to let residents know in August, a few months before their property tax statements go out in October.

An audience member said she would have liked to see the board give residents more notice, so they could have time to plan their budgets for the increase.

"There are a lot of people on fixed incomes," she said.

Residents will pay a 1.78 percent increase on their property taxes for the school bond for the next fiscal year. For the 2018-2019 fiscal year, the board will assess the bond again.

Superintendent Shelley Liscom said the reason for sending the unofficial-looking flyer to citizens, instead of something on district letterhead, was that they didn't want to give residents a false sense of how much they knew about specific tax bills.

"We couldn't answer how it was going to affect people specifically," she said. "We were trying to stay out of that."

Those at the meeting said they understood the difficult spot the district was in, but encouraged them to send out another letter apologizing to citizens.

"People are upset," said Cecili Longhorn. "The worst thing is, I think it will affect us getting a new school bond. I would apologize for how the last (letter) was worded."

Liscom had said in that letter to residents that the error was discovered during an audit of the 2015-2016 school year finances, which was conducted in early 2017.

Liscom and business manager Kris James said last week that they did not know how the error originated. But James said the firm who did the audit, Pendleton-based Cockburn and McClintock, told the previous business manager more than once that there was a discrepancy between the amount needed to cover the bond, which expires in 2019, and the amount citizens were being charged. But James said the previous business manager did not convey that to the superintendent, and that other employees of the district were not aware of the issue until early this year.

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