

OSU: 25 of 36 counties have service districts

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tion, and \$10 per \$1,000 for general government.

If the cap is exceeded, a taxpayer's payment to each entity gets squeezed down in a process known as compression. Pelleberg said the city is already bumping against the cap, and levying an additional tax could impact funding for other projects to support growth and development.

"There are a lot of major projects on the books," Pelleberg said. "I think the council members ultimately decided any additional taxes that would burden our community should benefit the entire community, not just a portion of it."

The decision was not unanimous. Councilors Selene Torres-Medrano and Roak TenEyck both voted in favor of sending the district to the voters. Instead, Corp said the city would be excluded from the district boundaries if it passes.

"If they want services from Extension Service in that city, there would be some sort of additional fee associated with it, since they would no longer be providing tax dollars in support of that district," Corp said.

Heidi Sipe, Umatilla School District superintendent, said the district does partner with OSU Extension Service on after-school and nutrition programs that may be affected.

"If those services are not provided to Umatilla schools, that definitely leaves a gap," Sipe said.

Sipe said the school district was not consulted by the city prior to its vote, but they will respect the decision moving forward.

Stable funding

According to OSU figures, the Extension Service districts would raise more than \$1 million annually in Umatilla County and \$462,000 in Morrow County. Corp said that would help provide stable funding not only for the extension offices in both counties, but for the Hermiston Agricultural Research and Extension Center and Columbia Basin Agricultural Research Center north of Pendleton.

Between 4-H, Extension Service and the two research stations, OSU estimates its programs receive 99,000 contacts every year across both counties. However, Corp said they are struggling to keep up due to declining state and federal support.

If the service district passes in Umatilla County, Corp said OSU Extension would be able to take two part-time positions in the 4-H and master gardener programs and make them full time, which would increase

their offerings and outreach.

Claire Sponseller, county leader with OSU Extension and 4-H youth development, said she serves just under 600 kids and 175-200 volunteers.

"Really, that would be huge, just to have another hand to help deliver programs," Sponseller said.

4-H is more than just traditional livestock and cooking classes, Sponseller said. Kids can participate in everything from entrepreneurial clubs to fly tying clubs and shooting sports. She said kids who participate in 4-H are proven to excel beyond their peers in school, and develop life skills to serve their community as adults.

extension agent for Malheur County, said voters passed the district by close to 60 percent, charging 23 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value. Funding goes to support both the OSU Extension office and Malheur Experiment Station based in Ontario.

"There were real concerns about the experiment station here being potentially closed, or just not having enough funding from the state and university," Reitz said.

Agriculture is the lifeblood of the county, Reitz said, and the station is critical to helping growers maximize their production in a unique high desert climate.

The service district also

"That's who employs the people who buy houses in your community, that pay property taxes, that send kids to your school, that buy groceries at your local grocery store."

— **Mary Corp**, OSU Extension regional administrator, on impact of agriculture on the economy

"That's something we're pretty proud of," she said.

Funding collected by both county-wide districts would also go toward supporting CBARC and HAREC, Corp said. The agricultural experiment stations conduct multi-year projects to help farmers improve their efficiency, stewardship and bottom line, with CBARC focused primarily on dryland wheat and HAREC on irrigated potatoes.

In 2008, OSU decided that 25 percent of each station's budget must come from local dollars. Since then, CBARC and HAREC have cobbled support from stakeholders and industry groups. With the service districts, Corp said they can be sure the facilities will have the staff and resources they need.

Corp, who also serves as CBARC director, is quick to point out that agriculture is the dominant industry in Umatilla and Morrow counties, generating a half-billion dollars in farm gate value every year. That total increases to \$1 billion after factoring in the value of support industries, like trucking and food processing.

"That's who employs the people who buy houses in your community, that pay property taxes, that send kids to your school, that buy groceries at your local grocery store," Corp said. "I think this is really about choosing to make an investment locally in the value of research and community development."

Other districts

Statewide, 25 of the 36 counties have already implemented OSU Extension Service districts, including Malheur County in 2012 and Klamath County in 2015.

Stuart Reitz, OSU

pays for a second crop specialist with the extension office, which Reitz said helps tremendously to cover the 9,930-square-mile county.

"The district has been a way to supplement those scarcer and scarcer state funds," he said.

Meanwhile in Klamath County, the 2008 recession forced county commissioners to shift more of its budget to mandated services and away from OSU Extension and the Klamath Basin Research and Extension Center.

A group of stakeholders and volunteers called KBREC Success gathered the signatures needed to petition and campaign for the formation of a service district, which charges 15 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value. Willie Riggs, KBREC director and regional administrator for Extension Service in Klamath, Lake and Harney counties, said the district provides local base support and has helped the station to hire back three faculty positions that were lost during the recession.

"It's tough in a rural, conservative community to ask people to pay more in taxes. Nobody likes to see something new come onto their tax statement," Riggs said. "For us, this was the only option we had left to keep this organization in Klamath County."

Corp said she knows it will take plenty of education to pass the districts in Umatilla and Morrow counties, but is encouraged by the feedback and support so far.

"The credibility of our scientists and faculty is really strong in the community," Corp said. "It's nice to see (people) making the connection."

LGBTQ: 'You lose friends, you lose family'

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echo their leaders, he said, or can make LGBTQ community members worry their leaders will set discriminatory policies or be prejudiced against them.

"If somebody is an elected official, it means they have a soapbox, a platform, to say things," he said.

Nakapalau did not return a Facebook message, email or voicemail asking for comment, and Echo city administrator Diane Berry declined to comment. Nakapalau, a Vietnam war veteran, was sworn in as a new city councilor in January after receiving the most write-in votes for an uncontested seat in the town of about 700.

The exchange between Wilson, who lives in Hawaii, and Nakapalau happened on the "Kumu Hina" Facebook page, named after a documentary Wilson released in 2014 about a transgender Hawaiian woman. Wilson had posted an article about the Trump administration's statement that transgender workers are not protected by federal anti-discrimination laws. Nakapalau commented that transgender people already have rights and he's "Sick of the LGBTQ crowd shoving their ho keyed up agenda down my throat."

Wilson responded by calling Nakapalau "sad" and said that the Confederate flag on his profile "says it all." As the men continued to argue, Nakapalau called Wilson a profanity and said he has "relatives that are LGBTQ whom I love and I'll defend them to my last breath" but didn't want to be forced to support something he didn't believe in, while Wilson accused Nakapalau of bigotry and said "no one is trying to shove anything down your throat, though your protests indicate that that is what you would likely most enjoy." That's

when Nakapalau said he would spit on Wilson's grave.

Wilson said his quip was trying to use "humor and mocking" to show the comments weren't welcome. He said comments like Nakapalau's, and silence from others in response, has a chilling effect on members of the LGBTQ community coming out. Wilson said the incident was especially jarring because in 2010 he visited nearby Hermiston and Pendleton to screen his film "Out In the Silence," about the experience of being openly gay in a small, rural town.

Haley Talamontes knows what it's like being gay in a small town. She said her experience living in Hermiston has included wonderful people, but also closed-minded people. A few years ago when she volunteered at a booth at the Umatilla County Fair for Umatilla Morrow Alternatives, a since-disbanded group that advocated for equality for minorities, she said a few people called her homophobic names in front of her children or told her she was "not right in the head."

She said when she came out as a lesbian she finally felt truly free. But it didn't come without consequences.

"You lose friends, you lose family," she said. "My mom doesn't talk to me."

In November President Donald Trump told CBS he was "fine" with gay marriage, and years before becoming president indicated his support of the LGBTQ community numerous times, including a 2000 interview in which he said he would support adding sexual orientation to the 1964 Civil Rights Act. But some in his administration, including Vice President Mike Pence, have been vocal opponents of gay marriage, and since Trump became president his administration has

announced a ban on transgender soldiers in the military and argued in court that federal law does not protect gay or transgender workers from discrimination by employers.

Talamontes said the Trump administration's attitudes toward LGBTQ issues has caused some people to treat their sexual orientation more carefully, similar to undocumented immigrants who are now more careful about revealing their status.

That's why she caused a scene at the doctor's office the other day when the nurse insisted her 12-year-old daughter had to answer a question about her sexual orientation as part of a well child check-up. Talamontes said her daughter isn't gay, but Talamontes worries for young people who are and may have parents who would kick them out of the house or abuse them if they found out.

She also worries that if she were the patient, answering the question truthfully could cause her problems later if she moved to a state with fewer anti-discrimination protections and any nurse or insurance agent could pull up that information.

Talamontes said she just wants to be loved and respected and not treated like she has some sort of "grotesque disease" that someone may catch from standing too close.

For members of the LGBTQ community or their friends and family who are looking for support, Pendleton has a chapter of PFLAG, short for Parents, Family and Friends of Lesbians and Gays. They can be contacted at 541-966-8414, pflag.pendleton.or@gmail.com or the PFLAG Pendleton Oregon Chapter Facebook page.

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

SMELL: Several residents said they are concerned about property values decreasing in the town

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Both executives apologized for the discomfort the factory's operations have caused residents.

"We ran the plant probably before it was ready to run," Johnson said. "Then we had the fire. We tried to get it up and running as fast as possible, but put in the wrong equipment."

Citizens still had many concerns about how the smell was affecting their health and property values.

One Stanfield resident, who said he has lung problems, asked why the smell was so bad last Friday.

"That was 100 percent our fault," Johnson said. "What we should have been blending was a dry material strain with a wet one. However, our operators were blending a very dry strain with a very dry strain. There was not enough water to take out, and so it basically started baking — that's what was causing the odors."

Stanfield residents asked why the issues with odors weren't worked out before the plant began to operate.

Both Anderson and Johnson said they were relatively new to the company — Anderson was hired in January, and Johnson in May — but that as far as they knew, the plant had always been within its permits.

"We're taking these steps, and we're about 45 days away from getting to that,"

Anderson said.

Kathryn Davis asked about the company's history in Wisconsin and in Burley, Idaho, where it has other factories.

"If those places don't have smells, why aren't you able to use those facilities as your prototype?" she asked.

Johnson said both of those places have systems in place that they are trying to implement in Stanfield, such as a scrubber of the proper size, and a cover on the receiving yard.

"That's the structure we're talking about here," he said.

The company has had problems with smells in Burley, and faced criminal charges in 2016, with two misdemeanor counts of non-permitted use, and two counts of failure to conform to permitted use requirements, according to southern Idaho newspaper the *Magic Valley Times-News*. The company pleaded not guilty on all counts.

In Wisconsin Rapids in 2016, there were reports of the factory emitting a smell many compared to "bad cheese," but by 2017, the smells were reported to have disappeared.

Several residents said they were concerned about property values decreasing in the town, and some said they had been facing trouble selling property.

"I have property for sale by the tracks," said Bill

Barrett. "People won't buy it because of the smell."

Tom Bohm, fire marshal of the Umatilla County Fire District, said he had been pleased with how the company had responded to his requests. He said he now goes to the plant about once a week. The factory does not have a connection from a fire hydrant to a water main.

"A lot of the planning (for fire safety) gets done in Salem," Bohm said. "Not from people who live here, which is part of the problem. There is no water on that side, but they're going to get the water in for us. They've done everything I've asked them. I think they're here to work."

Johnson said the company has been in regular contact with the city of Stanfield and the Department of Environmental Quality, and got a surprise visit from the DEQ Monday morning.

He said the company had put in a request to the Union Pacific Railroad to access the water main that's located under the railroad tracks, but does not have an estimated time for when they'll be able to do so. Until then, the factory has a retention pond from which they can draw in case of a fire.

Citizens asked how they could be sure these steps would improve the odors.

"I can say it will be greatly minimized," Johnson said. "I can't stand here and promise you'll never smell it."

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