

Umatilla County looks to boost overworked district attorney’s office

By PHIL WRIGHT
East Oregonian

Umatilla County District Attorney Dan Primus is aiming to bring on a law clerk to help handle his office’s work load.

The office is down three prosecutors. Primus is even handling misdemeanor cases himself. He told the county board of commissioners during its public meeting Wednesday a temporary law clerk would help.

“We’re trying to find creative ways to bringing professionals out here to Eastern Oregon, specifically to Umatilla County, to assist us with our needs for attorneys,” he said.

The position would be open to applicants in law school or a law school graduate. Primus said many applicants that come to the office are from the Willamette Valley and later return there, and some may not even apply to be prosecutors because of the location. The clerk position would allow someone to get a feel for the district attorney’s office and a feel for Eastern Oregon.

The board approved the position 2-0 (Commissioner Bill Elfering was in Arizona). The board also voted to allow the county health department to oversee inspections and monitoring of on-site septic systems in neighboring Morrow County.

The Umatilla County Public Health Department

already inspects and scores food service, public pools and lodging businesses for Morrow County. Joe Fiumara, Umatilla County Public Health director, told the board the fees for services fully support the program, so it will not need another source of revenue.

Commissioners also voted to give \$10,000 in economic development money to the Pendleton Unmanned Aircraft Systems Range to conduct an economic impact study. The county will co-own the data when the study is complete.

And Commissioner George Murdock is again the board chair.

Elfering asked to step down from the post and have Murdock serve instead for the rest of 2019 with Commissioner John Shafer vice-chair. Murdock and Shafer approved the change.

Murdock later explained Elfering last week suffered a bad fall and needs time to recover. Elfering, however, remains a commissioner.

In other business, Shafer congratulated sheriff’s Sgt. Josh Roberts for receiving the award for the 2018 trainer of the year for driving under the influence of intoxicants from the Oregon DUII Multi-Disciplinary Training Task Force. Shafer also congratulated deputy Nathan Rankin for receiving the 2018 DUII enforcement deputy of the year. The pair can receive their awards April 26 at the task force’s conference in Canyonville.

Echo celebrates 30 years as a Tree City

by JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN
East Oregonian

When Echo first became a “Tree City USA,” none of the school’s students were born. But as it celebrated its 30th anniversary as a Tree City on Thursday, Echo city staff and teachers taught their youngest residents about the history and science of their local trees, with the hopes that those students will carry on the tradition for many years.

In order to be a “tree city,” a city has to meet several requirements, including having a tree ordinance and an official Arbor Day celebration. That Arbor Day celebration was on Thursday, and the city marked it with a tree fair. Students spent the afternoon visiting several different stations to learn about trees and apply their knowledge.

In George Park, the students took paper and crayons and made bark rubbings, looking at the different textures on various species of trees. In “leaf bingo,” they learned how to identify different types of trees based on their foliage. They wrote letters to their future selves in 30 years, to be sealed in time capsules. Students drew posters following the theme “Echo Trees Now and In 30,” to be entered into a poster contest later that day. The winner would be displayed on a sign in George Park.

Several fifth-grade students helped out at each sta-

tion, passing on their tree knowledge to the younger students.

“I’ve been doing this since I came to this school,” said fifth-grader Sarah Morrison, who was helping out in George Park. “I think my favorite part is going to the library, where Miss Nelson reads us a story about trees.”

The students also got to witness city manager Diane Berry receive an award from the Oregon Department of Forestry and the Oregon Community Trees organization. Berry received the President’s Award from Oregon Community Trees, an organization that provides grants to help cities put on Arbor Day events, and provides education programs for arborists.

The Oregon Department of Forestry helps administer the Tree City USA program for the state, and commended Berry for 30 years of work on the program.

“Thirty years is a milestone,” said ODF’s Jim Gershbach, who was at the event. “We don’t come out to every tree celebration, but this was worth marking.”

Samantha Wolf of Oregon Community Trees was also on hand, and said she was pleased with the extent to which Echo teaches their students about trees.

“It’s wonderful, and I’m glad they’re getting the kids involved,” she said. “This is going to be the next generation responsible for maintaining it.”

Riverfront Park remains closed due to flooding damage

By JADE MCDOWELL
East Oregonian

The water has mostly receded from Riverfront Park in Hermiston, but the park remains closed due to flooding damage.

At least one large tree has fallen over, and the park is covered with a thick layer of silt and piles of debris ranging in size from twigs to logs. The section of the Oxbow Trail that connects the trail to the park has crumbled, and parks manager Jason Barron said other parts of the walking path around the park have been structurally compromised.

The rest of the Oxbow Trail and the new Highland Trail are intact and remain open.

“People are still able to get out and use our walking path system, we just ask they refrain from using Riverfront Park until we can get in there

and assess,” he said.

Since the ground is still covered with thick, wet mud, Barron said his crew was going to let the park dry out



Staff photo by Jade McDowell
A section of the Oxbow Trail leading into Riverfront Park in Hermiston has collapsed after being covered with flood waters for several days.

Snow could keep forest roads closed longer

PENDLETON — High snow levels could keep some roads closed longer than usual on the Umatilla National Forest.

The U.S. Forest Service announced certain roads could remain closed past the open dates on the Motor Vehicle Use Maps. The Forest Service closes the roads each winter to protect wildlife. But the late season snow could prevent Forest Service employees from getting to roads and opening gates. Staff will open the roads as conditions permit.

This was an issue last

week in the Heppner Ranger District, according to announcement, but now the situation is across the entire Umatilla National Forest.

The Motor Vehicle Use Maps maps are free and available at any forest office or on the forest website. Additionally, you can download the maps onto a smartphone or tablet via the Avenza app or the Pacific Northwest Forests app.

The forest’s travel management plan prohibits cross-country travel. Much of the Umatilla National

Forest remains inaccessible due to mud, snow or snow drifts. In addition, traveling on thawing, saturated, and muddy roads can result in resource damage and serious safety concerns, especially if visitors are unprepared.

Forest employees are assessing flood risk and mitigating flood damage to roads, and the Forest Service encouraged travelers to plan ahead, contact their local ranger district prior to starting their trip and let someone know where they are going and when they

expect to return. Forest visitors should be prepared to spend the night in the forest and keep in mind many areas in the Blue Mountains have limited or no cellphone coverage.

Additional information about the Umatilla National Forest vehicle maps is available on the forest website at: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/umatilla/maps-pubs/?cid=stelprd5414334>.

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Corbett gets raise despite minor opposition

By ANTONIO SIERRA
East Oregonian

Despite nearly the entire city council turning over since his hiring in late 2011, Pendleton City Manager Robb Corbett has always managed to stay in the council’s good graces.

Corbett’s 2019 evaluation showed no different, revealing another year where the city’s chief executive was given mostly positive reviews by council members.

But when it came time for the council to consider raising Corbett’s annual salary, there was an uncharacteristic ripple of dissent.

On April 2, the city manager and council met behind closed doors for nearly two hours to discuss Corbett’s performance. Since 2017, the evaluation document produced from the meeting has contained only a tally of Corbett’s scores on a rubric, with councilors reserving their comments to the verbal exchanges held in a backroom during executive session.

While every council member and the mayor typically contribute to the evaluation, Councilor Carole Innes, who took office in January, declined to take part in the process this year because she didn’t have enough time to judge his performance, she said in an interview after the meeting.

Corbett was evaluated across 17 categories, where

each councilor could rate him as “exceeds expectations,” “meets expectations,” or “development needed.”

Overall, 71% of Corbett’s ratings were classified as “meets expectations” while another 22% were “exceeds expectations.” The rest, eight ratings total, were under the “development needed” score.

In terms of his professional duties, Corbett was rated highly in the “economic development” category. He was also given no negative scores in the “city-wide core values” section, which includes qualities like “integrity,” “respect,” and “responsibility.”

Corbett was able to leverage a positive evaluation last year into an 8% raise and a “rolling contract” provision that automatically renews his contract each year without council action.

But the council still needed to decide if they wanted to give Corbett another raise this year, and Human Resources Manager Andrea Denton recommended the council give Corbett a 3% raise to reflect a cost of living adjustment.

At a meeting Tuesday, the council voted 7-1 to give Corbett the raise, with Councilor Scott Fairley voting no.

Fairley said that with the purchasing power of the general fund continuing to decrease without a plan to increase budget efficiency

or generate more revenue, he wasn’t supportive of depleting the general fund further by giving the city manager a raise.

In an interview following the meeting, Fairley said he also has some concerns about how the city is implementing the council’s goals — infrastructure, land development, economic development, and housing — and integrating them into the way council members evaluate the city manager.

But he also noted that the responsibility of addressing those concerns lie with the council as much as they did with Corbett and the mayor was convening a working group that would cover some of those issues.

Corbett said in an interview that he was comfortable with Fairley’s position and shared his concerns, but declined to comment on his evaluation.

Although he didn’t have a vote in the matter, Mayor John Turner said he was supportive of Corbett’s raise because most employees

were also receiving a cost of living adjustment in 2019.

A former city manager of Burns, Prineville, and Sutherlin, Corbett now earns \$137,505 per year.

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A heartfelt **Thank You** to everyone who helped make the celebration of life for Dick Snow so special.

We sincerely appreciate the cards, the flowers, the hugs, the thoughts and prayers, the delicious food and donations. We gratefully acknowledge the Echo School kids and staff, Echo FFA, Echo QB Club, Ramos Families, Marty, Ben and Morgan and to all who attended for your love and support shown to Dick’s family.

Finally, Cottage Flowers, American Printing, 60 Minute Photo for your excellent work. Ken and the folks at Burns Mortuary - you are amazing. What a contribution you are to this community.

Thank you all so much!

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