

Grants: Restaurants will still be closed for in-person dining

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the council approved \$460,000 for the 23 restaurants eligible in the urban renewal district. But the council also plans to open up \$140,000 for the seven restaurants outside the district, which will require a follow-up action at a future meeting.

For restaurants outside the downtown core, the grant money is much appreciated.

“Every little bit helps,” said Randy Cook, the owner of The Saddle Restaurant and Lounge.

Cook said the shutdowns have forced The Saddle to lay off about half of its staff and make cuts to work hours. While he’s been able to make payroll and pay the bills, Cook said he doesn’t make money off of The Saddle these days.

If he gets the grants, Cook said the money would go toward payroll and keeping his employees working at the restaurant.

On the other side of town, Roosters Country Kitchen has also been hit hard by the pandemic and its accompanying restrictions.



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

If he obtains a grant from the city’s new program, The Saddle Restaurant & Lounge owner Randy Cook anticipates he will use it for payroll.

In an email, Roosters General Manager Amy Madden wrote that the restaurant’s staff has been reduced from the 22 staff members to three and a 58% drop in volume.

A member of the chamber

board, Madden gave plaudits to Rosenberg and the council for starting the program.

Although she isn’t sure if Roosters will apply for the grant, she says the restaurant plays a role in helping the downtown area.

“Even though our business is not downtown, just over half our annual volume can be directly linked to visitors who make a downtown visit a part of, if not the reason for, their stay in Pendleton,” she wrote.

While the city has been planning on how to help restaurants survive the shutdown, elected officials across the county wrote to Gov. Kate Brown to end it.

In a letter dated Friday, Jan. 22, Turner was joined by Hermiston Mayor Dave Drotzmann, Milton-Free-water Mayor Lewis Key, Umatilla County Commissioner George Murdock, state Sen. Bill Hansell and state Rep. Bobby Levy in requesting Brown allow Umatilla County restaurants to reopen in-person dining.

The letter argued that the county’s COVID-19 rates have continued to rise despite the restaurant shutdowns, suggesting that maybe residents were choosing riskier at-home social gatherings over restaurants. The group proposed making Umatilla County a trial county in demonstrating the viability of keeping restaurants open during the pandemic.

The officials also referenced data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that showed Flori-

da’s COVID-19 death rate was below California’s, despite the latter having tougher restaurant restrictions.

The letter didn’t mention Oregon’s death rate, which is far lower than both and is tied for the second best among states. When asked about Oregon’s death rate compared to other states, Turner reiterated a line from the letter that states, “Locking down restaurants does greater economic harm than its value in controlling the spread of the virus.”

Their arguments didn’t sway the governor’s office, which wrote a response on Tuesday, Jan. 26.

“We have had other counties come to us with pilot proposals as well,” Leah Horner, the regional solutions director for the governor’s office, wrote. “We will be announcing small tweaks to extreme risk tomorrow but not that allow indoor dining given the inability for face coverings. We will continue to monitor data and this letter is helpful as we look to the future.”



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

The Oregon Trail Library District has been working to provide internet to patrons throughout the pandemic by offering wireless hotspots and 24-hour access to Wi-Fi in the libraries’ parking lots.

Internet: Devices are also being used in community outreach

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on weekends to Facetime with our grandkids,” she said.

Some law enforcement officials and neighbors of the Oregon Trail Library District’s three branches (Boardman, Irrigon and Heppner) have pushed back on the policy of 24-hour access to Wi-Fi in the libraries’ parking lots, Street said, complaining about people loitering there. But given her experience of not having home internet access for six months, she felt it was important for people in those small communities to have round-the-clock access to an internet connection.

She didn’t think that was enough, however. So, when Lamb Weston gave the library district enterprise zone funds, the library district used them to purchase 20 Wi-Fi hotspots in October 2019 and began allowing library patrons to check them out for three weeks at a time before moving back to the end of the waiting list.

The length of the waiting list shot up as soon as the pandemic hit. Parents called libraries, desperate to secure one for their children’s learning. Others needed it to work from home.

“One lady was crying,” Street said. “Her employer had sent her home with a laptop, and she had assumed it came with internet access, but it didn’t.”

Street had to tell her that it would probably be weeks before it would be her turn to check out a hotspot, but in the meantime, she could try working from her car in the library’s parking lot.

Since then, the library district now has 80 hotspots for checkout, and during an interview on Monday, Jan. 25, Street said there were a few available that day that had not yet been checked out. She said even for people who have internet access at home, it can be convenient to check out a hotspot for traveling, or boosting the number of devices a home can accommodate

when people are visiting.

The library district pays a \$25 a month service charge for each hotspot, which comes from T-Mobile and provides Wi-Fi internet service anywhere that has T-Mobile cellphone reception. People with a library card can check them out for free.

Street said the library district’s board recently had a discussion about the cost, with some people questioning whether the library should be subsidizing internet access for community members. But she said others pushed back, pointing out the library is a community service that also allows people to check out books for free despite the fact they may be able to afford to purchase books to read.

Several other libraries in the area also allow patrons to check out Wi-Fi hotspots, albeit on a smaller scale.

Pendleton Public Library Director Jennifer Costley said in an email the library began checking out internet hotspots from T-Mobile about a year ago, and has five. The hotspots and Google Chromebooks the library also has on hand can be checked out for seven days at a time.

“We have not had any trouble with them so far and the patrons seem to love the opportunity to borrow the internet,” she said.

In addition to personal use by patrons, Costley said they have also come in handy in community outreach situations, such as allowing vendors at a fundraiser bazaar use them.

The Umatilla Public Library has two T-Mobile hotspots it checks out as well, after patrons sign an agreement acknowledging the hotspot, charging cord and box will cost \$65 to replace if they lose it. City Manager David Stockdale said in an email on Tuesday, Jan. 26, that both hotspots were checked out that day, but overall they have not seen a big problem with being short on units.

“If they become more popular, we will order more,” he said.

Deputy: Smith’s trial is set to begin on April 5

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carrying firearms while he awaits trial, but he claims in the suit this was only an excuse to terminate him.

“Defendants claimed that the reason was because (Smith) could not carry a firearm pursuant the conditions of his release,” the suit states. “However, that reason was false both because there were duties he could perform without a firearm and because the past practice within the department was to keep persons on administrative leave during the pendency of criminal cases until the criminal cases were resolved.”

Abigail Mobley was on paid administrative leave from March 18, 2019, until she resigned Dec. 26, 2020. During that time, her conduct was investigated by the Oregon Department of Justice and the Umatilla County Sheriff’s Office, but they did not file criminal charges. She was also arrested for driving under the influence of intoxicants and pleaded guilty to enter a diversion program, but she was not ordered not to carry firearms.

The phone extraction

Smith claims in the lawsuit, he came to the conclusion Abigail Mobley was using drugs in 2018, the same year he separated from his spouse, who is a close friend of Zach and Abigail Mobley, and began a relationship with Haley Olson.

A transcript of messages from Olson’s phone show she and Smith discussing his concerns about Mobley.

Idaho law enforcement extracted the contents of Olson’s phone when she was arrested in January 2019, but the charges were dismissed. They also notified Palmer

they found Smith’s business card in Olson’s vehicle.

Palmer asked Carpenter to request a copy of the phone extraction, according to a letter provided by Carpenter.

“The information, if applicable, will be used only for internal purposes, and will not be disseminated to any other agencies or third parties,” Carpenter wrote in a Jan. 30, 2019, letter to the Jerome County, Idaho, prosecutor, who provided him a copy of the extraction.

In an April 10, 2019, letter to Palmer, Carpenter said the extraction contained images, videos and audio files.

“I have reviewed the phone dump to determine whether any actionable evidence exists which could possibly subject Deputy Tyler Smith to discipline or sanction,” Carpenter said. “While no formal review for criminal activity took place, evidence of such is unlikely as the standard for any criminal action would be higher than the review undertaken. I have concluded my review and recommend that you take no action against Deputy Tyler Smith.”

In a Dec. 4, 2019, letter to Olson, Carpenter said he looked at the contents of the extraction but “was not willing to provide the flash drive to the sheriff or any other local agency” and deleted the contents.

Smith claims in the lawsuit that Carpenter provided access to, or described the contents of, the extraction — including sexual content and Smith’s intent to report Abigail Mobley to the DOJ — to others, including Palmer.

“Carpenter provided access to Screenshots of portions of Olson’s phone to Palmer,” the suit states. “Sheriff Palmer showed intimate pictures of (Smith) and Olson to members of the community. The Mobley defendants likewise obtained access to intimate photos of (Smith) and Olson from Palmer and/

or Carpenter’s copy of the phone.”

Olson has also filed a federal lawsuit against Grant County, Palmer and Carpenter that is pending. Carpenter did not respond to emailed questions about that lawsuit, but his attorney has filed a motion to dismiss the lawsuit on procedural grounds. Palmer’s attorney said the sheriff “never possessed or reviewed any of the material” Olson alleges, and he has filed a counterclaim for slander against her. Grant County’s attorney said “the county court had no involvement with any of the salacious allegations at issue in the lawsuit.”

The arrest

Smith claims in the new lawsuit that Palmer informed him he was being investigated in late March 2019 because his business card was found in Olson’s vehicle and it could lead to his termination. Smith said he told Carpenter he wished to speak with DOJ regarding the criminal investigation of Abigail Mobley, and Carpenter told Smith he would have DOJ contact him, according to the suit.

Several weeks later, in April or May 2019, Smith claims in the suit, Carpenter told Smith to be patient when Smith informed him again that he had information to report regarding Abigail Mobley.

Smith claims Palmer learned he was going to report Abigail Mobley before June 2019.

“On June 20, 2019, Defendant Palmer met with (Smith) and berated him for his plan to discuss Deputy (Abigail) Mobley with DOJ,” the suit states. “Defendant Palmer asked (Smith) if he was running his own drug team or actively investigating Deputy (Abigail) Mobley. Deputy Smith said he was doing neither.”

Palmer met with Zach and

Abigail Mobley in June 2020, Smith claims in the suit.

“Defendant Palmer instructed (the Mobleys) to destroy all evidence they had in their possession regarding Olson or regarding Deputy (Abigail) Mobley’s misconduct and that they were ‘on their own’ regarding her conduct,” the suit states.

On July 29, 2019, Smith again told Carpenter he needed to speak to DOJ regarding Abigail Mobley, and he was finally interviewed July 31, 2019, and provided “information regarding Deputy (Abigail) Mobley’s criminal activities,” according to the suit.

On Aug. 9, 2019, Smith was placed on administrative leave “for unidentified ‘policy violations involving ethical issues,’” according to the suit. Carpenter said Smith had been placed on leave “for issues related to the performance of his duties as a sheriff’s deputy.”

Smith remained on administrative leave until he was discharged.

Smith claims in the suit that Palmer and the Mobleys “orchestrated” a plan around August 2019 to get him arrested and forced out of the sheriff’s office.

“The Mobley defendants told (Smith’s spouse), falsely, that (Smith) was going to try to get full custody of their children if she didn’t do something about it immediately,” the suit states. “In response, his wife promptly filed for divorce, emptied her and (Smith’s) joint bank account and, in early September 2019, lodged a criminal complaint against (Smith) for attempted rape. Both the lodging of the criminal complaint and the draining of the bank accounts was done at the recommendation of Grant County employees, including the Mobleys.”

On Sept. 9, 2019, Smith was arrested based on his wife’s complaint. The trial is set to begin April 5.

Help: Searching for new sense of normalcy

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school, and they’re not able to do that.”

The library held curbside pickups for books and online events for kids, which have even included short talks to explain mask-wearing to kids. One staff member even sewed around 60 masks and put them in “doctor kits” that the library provided to children, along with craft stethoscopes and thermometers.

“We wanted to get them comfortable that everybody was starting to wear masks,” Longhorn said. “Whether we knew if it was going to continue or not, we wanted them to know that it was OK that they would see them when they were out and about.”



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Stanfield Public Library has spent the pandemic providing various services to the Stanfield community.

Longhorn said there were many challenges and mishaps while making the videos, but used those mistakes as opportunities to remind kids that, like the pandemic has shown, it’s all right when

times are not perfect.

“It was cool to show the kids that not everything is going to be perfect, and it’s OK,” Longhorn said. “I was drawing an airplane and it ended up to look like an

elephant, and I said, ‘Well that doesn’t look like an airplane, so I guess it’ll be an elephant instead.’ We were able to show these kids that as adults, we’re not perfect all the time.”

Moving forward, Longhorn said she wants to continue the library’s efforts to try and help people find a new sense of normalcy.

“When I look back, I wonder, ‘Wow, did we really do all that?’” Longhorn said. “But when I look forward, I want to take all the things we always do and work them into the new normal. And the new normal is definitely going to be different. At first I thought this would all go away, but it’s not going away. This is our new normal and we have to adapt.”