

# EAST OREGONIAN

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BMCC

## Board candidates talk about enrollment, budget issues

**LOCAL ELECTIONS 2021**

By **ANTONIO SIERRA**  
*East Oregonian*

UMATILLA COUNTY — Blue Mountain Community College is at an inflection point.

The college is preparing for another round of staff reductions, the third in the last 12 months. Enrollment has fallen precipitously in the past decade; BMCC's student body more than halved from 2012 to 2020. The president's sudden resignation in February means the college is conducting its second

### UNION TO HOLD CANDIDATE FORUM

Blue Mountain Community College's faculty union is hosting a candidate forum for the BMCC Board of Education candidates over Zoom on Thursday, April 29. The virtual forum will start at 7 p.m. and include opening statements, prepared questions from the union and audience Q & A. The link to access the forum is [us02web.zoom.us/j/83290551920](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83290551920).

presidential search in three years.

In the midst of all this, the BMCC Board of Education is holding elections for three seats, and thanks to a pair of retirements, the board will receive at least two new faces when members are sworn in over the summer.

The BMCC board is split into zones and only residents of the three zones that are up for election will

vote in the May 18 election.

Over a series of interviews, the *East Oregonian* spoke with several candidates for the BMCC board about the college's future considering its present circumstances.

### Zone 3 (South Pendleton, Pilot Rock, Echo, Ukiah and Meacham)

Despite seeking public office for

the first time, Carrie Sampson-Samuels has the support from a very powerful ally — her opponent.

While nominally running against her, Echo farmer Kent Madison said he is no longer campaigning to replace Heidi Van Kirk on the board and is endorsing Sampson-Samuels.

"What the board doesn't need is another 61-year-old white guy," he said.

Madison said he originally entered the race under the impression that no one else was going to run for the seat. But upon learning that he was involved in a contested race after the filing deadline, he met with Sampson-Samuels and became convinced that she would make a better fit for the board.

Madison said he's now leading

the "Don't vote for Kent campaign" and is supporting Sampson-Samuels, an enrolled member of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation and a project director for the Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board.

Sampson-Samuels is hoping to turn her own experiences as a student into a seat on the BMCC board.

Her first experience with higher education was at the University of Missouri. Having grown up in Belle, Missouri — population 1,500 — Sampson-Samuels had a hard time adjusting to the university's large campus and soon left.

She resumed her studies at a community college and had been

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# HIGH RISK

## Increased COVID-19 cases, decrease in vaccinations has Umatilla County moving back to high risk

By **BRYCE DOLE**  
*East Oregonian*

PENDLETON — Umatilla County was moved to the high risk category for COVID-19 spread on Tuesday, April 27, increasing restrictions on businesses and gatherings as cases are rising across Eastern Oregon.

At high risk, restaurants, religious establishments and fitness facilities can remain open at 25% indoor capacity. Grocery stores and other retail establishments can also remain open at 50%, according to the state.

"It drives me nuts," Umatilla County Commissioner George Murdock said. "Here we are, and all of a sudden, poof, we're back at high" risk.

The county had recently been placed in a "two-week caution period" after surpassing the mark of 100 cases per 100,000 people over a 14-day period, which would move it from moderate to high risk.

Now, with 114 COVID-19 cases reported over the past two weeks, Gov. Kate Brown announced that the county would move back to high risk.

The change comes as 15 Oregon counties



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian, File

Diners eat in at Haven Pho in Pendleton on March 4, 2021, shortly after the restaurant opened earlier this year. A return to the high risk category for COVID-19 will limit restaurants to 25% indoor dining capacity.

were put back under the extreme risk category on April 27, as Brown seeks to stem the latest spike in pandemic infections.

The extreme risk level shuts down indoor dining, limits crowd sizes, caps entertainment and exercise activities, and requires most businesses to close by 11 p.m.

The new limits will go into effect on Friday, April 30, for at least two weeks.

Brown said health officials would review infection statistics each week and that no county would remain at extreme risk level for more than three weeks.

"If we don't act now, doctors, nurses, hospitals, and other health care providers in Oregon will be stretched to their limits treating severe cases of COVID-19," Brown said.

The state is now averaging approximately 840 newly reported COVID-19 cases each day, a 57% increase over the past two weeks. The number of Oregonians hospitalized with the virus is also continuing to increase, with 328 reported on April 27, a 66% spike in the past two weeks.

### Officials decry restaurant restrictions

In response to the heightened restrictions statewide, the Association of Oregon Counties and the Oregon Restaurant & Lodging

Association sent a letter on April 27 to Brown's office decrying the state's move and urging the removal of state-mandated business restrictions.



Murdock



Russell

The letter, signed by nearly 80 commissioners, judges and lobbyists from 26 counties, including all commissioners from Umatilla and Morrow counties, requests the state turn pandemic guidance over to county authorities. According to the letter, it's the first time that county governments have formally aligned with the association.

"It's just unconscionable to do this, particularly to our restaurants, over and over and over again," Murdock said of the new restrictions.

Murdock said restaurants "have never been identified as the problem," noting "they take incredible precautions." He added that maintaining inventory and staffing restaurants is made especially difficult by the shifting restrictions.

"How can they keep their valued staff when

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PENDLETON

## Survey results lead to change in goals

### Nearly 500 residents respond to city survey

By **ANTONIO SIERRA**  
*East Oregonian*

PENDLETON — The Pendleton City Council is making some changes to its goals for the first time in four years, but tackling homelessness in the city won't be one of them.

The council met for a workshop on Tuesday, April 27, to discuss the results of a community survey that gauged what issues residents wanted the city to prioritize.

In an interview after the meeting, Mayor John Turner said he was happy to see that 480 residents responded to the survey, a clear jump from the last time they solicited input on council goals in 2016 and only received about 250 responses.

Respondents were shown a list of goals and asked to rate them on a scale from "extremely valuable" to "not at all valuable."

The results were mixed, but a few trends rose to the forefront. The goals that received the highest ratings were housing, public safety, infrastructure, economic development and communication between the city and the community. At the opposite end of the scale were building a sports complex, historical preservation and tourism.

Turner said the council filtered out public safety because, like public works, the city would always prioritize it regardless of what the council goals were.

The council decided to retain infrastructure, economic development and housing from their previous set of goals while dropping land development. Turner said there's been enough progress at the Pendleton airport and the unmanned aerial systems range that he's comfortable with it falling off the list. It will be replaced by the city-community communications goal.

Although it wasn't listed as a goal that could be voted on, plenty of respondents in the comment section used their space to talk about Pendleton's unhoused population.

While some encouraged the city to invest in homeless services, many just used the opportunity to disparage the unhoused, while suggesting the city either relocate the homeless or take some sort of law enforcement action against them.

"Our quaint little community is being overrun with the homeless and the drug addicts that are unwilling to provide anything positive to the community," one commenter wrote.

Turner said homelessness is an issue that no community in

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## PGG headquarters on the auction block

### Facility on the market for nearly \$2 million

By **ANTONIO SIERRA**  
*East Oregonian*

PENDLETON — One of Pendleton's most prominent buildings is on the market, and all anyone needs to buy is as little as \$2 million.

On behalf of Pendleton Grain Growers, Realty Marketing/Northwest is auctioning off PGG's mostly vacant Pendleton facility for the reserve price of \$1.995 million, a slight reduction from the company's \$2.1 million asking price.

The 3-acre, 1000 S.W. Dorion Ave. property includes a 42,000-square-foot building that once housed the grain co-op's headquarters, retail showroom, automotive service center and warehouse. Once a thriving organization with agricultural and retail

operations across Eastern Oregon, the Pendleton facility has sat mostly vacant for about a half-decade after it decided to shutter retail operations in 2014 and voted to completely dissolve the co-op in 2016.

Many of PGG's other properties have been sold to various businesses and organizations, and the former PGG Energy building near the main Pendleton facility was recently sold to Hines Meat Co., which turned it into a butchery and restaurant. But PGG hasn't yet sold its flagship property.

That's what Realty Marketing/Northwest and President John Rosenthal are trying to change.

Rosenthal said he's already heard interest from several prospective bidders both locally and from the Portland area. With bids due on June 9, Rosenthal said none of the people who have inquired about the building have complained about the price.

Having already sold some of PGG's other properties, Rosenthal said steps were taken to creatively market the building.

In 2019, PGG commissioned a Portland architect to create renderings of what the 1951 building could look like if it was renovated and put back into use. Marketing material also now include a couple of suggested uses for a repurposed building, including a van or RV conversion business to take advantage of the building's repair bays and showroom or a Goodwill-like operation that includes both retail and work training components.

Once the building is sold, PGG has promised to move its remaining offices out of the building and leave the Washington Federal ATM, which brings in a small amount of revenue each year.

PGG did not return a request for comment as of press time.

