

# Umatilla County adopts budget

\$2M going toward project to pipe Columbia River water for ag, more

By **BRYCE DOLE**  
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — The Umatilla County Board of Commissioners adopted the county's budget for the 2021-22 fiscal year at a Wednesday, June 2, meeting.

The board unanimously approved the budget of nearly \$123.7 million, with more than \$117 million appropriated. That's \$21 million more than last year's budget, a significant increase, with two drivers — the federal American Rescue Plan Act and growing property taxes, according to county officials.

General funds amounted to nearly \$36.5 million, nearly \$2 million more than last year, a modest increase, county Chief Financial Officer Robert Pahl said.

"We're not flushed, but we're pleased with the fact that we have a balanced budget and we're not having to make cuts," Umatilla County Commissioner George Murdock said.

Murdock added he was surprised the county has not had to make cuts in this year's budget.

"If you'd asked me a year ago, in March, I had no idea what the impact would be" from the pandemic, he said. "It looked pretty bleak.

But I think on a whole lot of fronts, people have been surprised. The economy has not died. People paid their property taxes. There's been a lot of pleasant surprises."

## County budget, stimulus funds

Umatilla County Public Health saw its total allocated funds increase from \$5 million to about \$5.8 million. The increase comes from state funding for staffing and supplies, including personal protective equipment and tents for vaccine clinics, according to county officials.

Murdock said he wants it to be clear "there is no money in the regular county budget tied to hiring more personnel" or buying extra equipment because it's one-time funding.

"This money makes the budget higher because we have to account for the money in the budget, but it's not money being used to hire more people," he said.

The sheriff's office also saw its funds increase, from \$16 million last year to \$17.4 million. Most of that funding comes from the state's 911 funds and allows the sheriff's office to add staff to dispatch and the county jail, officials say.

In addition, the county will hire a county planner after abandoning the idea last year because of financial uncertainty from the pandemic. There also are provisions in the budget to proactively maintain heating, venting and air condi-

tioning systems, boilers and windows in buildings.

The commissioners also approved the first half of federal stimulus funding in the June 2 meeting, with \$2 million going toward a pipeline project in the west part of the county to deliver water from the Columbia River to support agriculture, preserve critical groundwater areas, recharge the aquifer and create jobs, Murdock said.

Another \$2 million in federal stimulus will go toward the county's public works department, which saw revenue fall during the pandemic due to reduced travel, all while still responding to damage from the 2021 flooding of the Umatilla River.

The commissioners approved \$650,000 in joint investments with local communities to support ongoing partnerships and help restore economies in areas that have limited resources. Murdock added, "In some cases, one or more of these communities will not receive any (federal funds) such as we do."

## The budget's intent

Murdock previously has noted three specific areas the commissioners wanted to address in this year's budget: mental health, equity and flooding. Now that focus has shifted more specifically to mental health and equity, with contingency funds in the budget to set aside to address these issues.

Those funds include

\$200,000 set aside for the possibility of a new program called CAHOOTS — Crisis Assistance Helping Out On The Streets — where medics and mental health professionals assist or replace law enforcement in response to calls involving mental illness, homelessness and addiction.

Murdock said it's unclear exactly when or how the program will come to fruition in the county, but the county has set aside funds in the budget "to significantly modify how we address mental health and other programs within the community."

Murdock said what happens in the 2021 legislative session also will determine how the county continues to address equity issues, such as the pandemic's disproportionate impact on Hispanic residents.

"There are pieces of the puzzle that have to come together before we can frame the final plan," Murdock said.

In other action, the board approved the purchase of several items. They include a nearly \$72,500 water truck, a \$15,000 asphalt paving machine, a water truck for the Meacham Fire Department, and approximately \$7,300 worth of body armor for the Umatilla County Sheriff's Office. In addition, the commissioners approved a request from the health department to hire an environmental health specialist and to begin a new COVID-19 vaccine incentive program.



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian, File

People wander a sun-spotted Main Street in downtown Pendleton on the opening day of the Pendleton Farmers Market on Friday, May 7, 2021. The month of May saw slightly warmer temperatures with an average high of 72.6 degrees, 2.7 degrees above normal.

# Pendleton sees above-average temps in May

East Oregonian

PENDLETON — The Pendleton area experienced slightly warmer temperatures during the month of May, according to data from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Weather Service Office in Pendleton.

The average temperature during the month was 58.2 degrees, 0.5 degrees above normal. High temperatures averaged 72.6 degrees, 2.7 degrees above normal, according to the monthly climate summary.

The highest temperature was 88 degrees recorded on May 31.

Low temperatures averaged 43.8 degrees, 1.8 degrees below normal. The lowest temperature for the month was 38 degrees, recorded on May 10.

Precipitation for the month totaled 0.47 inches, which was 0.88 inches below normal, the report

said. Measurable precipitation — at least 0.01 inch — was received on five days, with the heaviest, 0.25 inches, reported on May 1.

Precipitation for the year is 4.02 inches, which is 2.39 inches below normal. Since October 2020, the water year precipitation at the Pendleton airport has been 8.47 inches, 1.94 inches below normal.

The highest wind gust was 56 mph on May 23, and just one day during the month when the wind exceeded 50 mph.

The outlook for April from NOAA's Climate Prediction Center calls for above normal temperatures and below normal precipitation. Normal highs for the Pendleton airport rise from 74 degrees at the start of June to 83 degrees at the end of the month. Normal lows rise from 49 degrees to 54 degrees. The 30-year normal precipitation is just under 1 inch.

# Pendleton City Council approves \$105M budget

By **ANTONIO SIERRA**  
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — The Pendleton City Council unanimously voted to adopt a \$105.1 million annual budget at a Tuesday, June 1, meeting, representing a slight increase from the year before.

The \$20.3 million general fund — the only pot of money city staff or the council has discretion over — also will grow when the new fiscal year starts in July, but most of that growth can be attributed to \$3.4 million Pendleton expects to receive in federal COVID-19 relief.

The city is assigning a significant chunk of that money to facilities in need of maintenance, meaning the Vert Auditorium, McCune Recreation Center and the Pendleton River Parkway all are receiving repairs and upgrades.

The budget also directs \$400,000 to Pendleton Comes Alive, a collaboration between the city and Pendleton's tourism interests. The project looks to boost tourism by accentuating Pendleton's Western themes through new bars, tours and other attractions.

The council also met as the Pendleton Development Commission briefly to approve a \$1.2 million bid from Nelson Construction Corp. of Walla Walla to do street reconstruction projects in the urban renewal district, which encompasses downtown Pendleton and some of the surrounding area.

According to a staff report,

the city initially budgeted \$2 million for the projects, but staff decided to defer on some of them while they addressed underground utility repairs. Nelson's bid is slightly higher than the city's \$1.2 million estimate, but it still represented the lowest bid.

The contractor will be paid to reconstruct several roads, all considered below "fair" condition, and also will widen streets at Southeast and Southwest Seventh streets. The city is budgeting \$6.2 million for street repair projects in the urban renewal district over the next three years.

The council also unanimously approved a \$21,975 agreement with energy company Ameresco to

perform an audit of the city's streetlight system with the plan of replacing the high-pressure sodium lights with LEDs.

The potential replacement project could save the city \$80,000 in electrical costs, and once the audit is complete, the city expects to return to the council with a request to start the switch-outs.

Another bid the council approved was a \$342,699 offer from Hancock Sandblast and Paint of Pasco to repaint the water filtration plant's tanks as the city installs new filtration membranes. The tanks require a special paint that can protect the membranes while withstanding the regular acid cleanings the tanks undergo.

# NORMAL



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