

# Model:

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“This need of child care in our community has been known for years,” said Torrie Griggs, Boardman Chamber of Commerce executive director. Griggs also is the Boardman Community Development Association executive director.

She praised the Port of Morrow for being a partner, building the facility and bringing in other partners, such as Boardman Foods and Threemile Canyon Farms.

Brian Maag, an owner of Boardman Foods, expressed the pleasure he gets out of Family First. He said he was blessed to be raised in a happy, stable family, and he wanted to give back to the community with a program that assists the happiness and stability of other families.

“We’re in a capital-intensive business that takes a lot of machinery, equipment and buildings to do, but, at the end of the day, the people are the most important,” he said. He said he wants to reinvest in families.

He said Families First is more than a babysitter; it is an educational center. If you can keep children at grade level, they have a better chance of success. He said the center in general and Brenda Proffitt, director of Families First, is doing an excellent job of educating children.

Thomas J. Flaherty, also an owner of Boardman Foods, added he and Maag are from a family with a 100-year-old history in Oregon. They are, he said, “Oregonians to the core.” As such, they care about the state and the Boardman area, and they like what they see in Families First.

“This endeavor with this child care center is probably more fulfilling than anything we have ever



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Sen. Ron Wyden, left, listens to Debbie Radie, vice president of Boardman Foods, center, during a tour Tuesday, Aug. 31, 2021, of the Neal Early Learning Center in Boardman.

done,” Flaherty said. Having gone through difficult times, he is grateful the Boardman community had “stuck with” him. He also said he appreciates Debbie Radie, Boardman Foods vice president, whom he called a “magical woman who makes things happen.”

Radie said, though Families First started in January, Boardman Foods actually began caring for workers’ families 17 years ago. Back then, an after-school program was started. In that program, schools would bus the workers’ children to a Boardman Foods facility. There, the children would snack and do homework while their parents completed their shifts.

COVID-19 increased the need of the after-school program, Radie said. With schools closed, children needed more supervision and educational resources. As a result, after-school program hours were extended.

The community spread word

of the after-school program, Radie said. Soon, people who were not even employed by Boardman Foods were asking if they could enroll their children.

Needing more space, she received help from the Port of Morrow, which made available space in their new facility. With this as well as help from Proffitt, she was able to move forward with the new space.

The center also received assistance from the Family First Prevention Services Act. Wyden and Sen. Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, wrote the legislation was to help people affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

This is important work, said Varon Blackburn, Threemile Canyon Farms human resource manager.

“Last year, I had mothers working at Threemile Canyon Farms who couldn’t come to work because they didn’t have a place for their

kids,” he said. He credited Radie for solving this problem and Marty Myers, visionary Threemile general manager, for seeking a solution to child care. Myers died December 2020.

“There’s no place like Families First here in Boardman,” said Dan Daltoso of Umatilla Morrow Head Start, which also wants to offer its support.

There is a need for physical infrastructure, Wyden said, but also a need to help people. Child care needs to be more plentiful and affordable and needs more programs such as Family First. He said this is not just an urban issue, but also a rural issue.

“Supporting kids is a hugely important statement about our values as Oregonians,” Wyden said. “We want to make sure that the little ones in our families are taken care of.”

Wyden also said that is a moral and an economic issue.

# Plant:

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The process also is coming in well under the original estimated \$75 million budget with the latest estimate reading just more than \$56 million. The majority of this comes from savings in abatement and demolition costs, which were more than cut in half from \$34 million to \$15 million. PGE also has been able to sell roughly \$1.7 million worth of materials to scrappers.

As of the Aug. 27 meeting, there were about 157,000 pounds of hazardous waste removed and, while PGE will retain the property after demolition, there are about 650 acres on the Boardman property that will be reusable.

According to Cope, Portland General Electric has covered its ash disposal area, removed 146 tons of lead-contaminated soil, removed two underground fuel tanks and excavated 291 tons of soil from a stormwater and equipment wash pond. Additionally, the company reclaimed more than 40,000 tons of coal from its coal yard and revegetated it in January.

“The goal is for the site to eventually kind of blend into its surroundings and to just look like another part of the Eastern Oregon landscape,” Dobscha said.

Of the 67 workers employed at the plant in October 2020, 11 transferred to new roles within



Portland General Electric/Contributed Photo

Grasses grow at the former Boardman Coal Plant coal yard in April 2021, several months after the facility shut down. Portland General Electric, the plant’s former operator, is in the process of decommissioning the facility.

the company, 37 were classified as retired and 15 were laid off, according to Cope. Four employees remain at the coal plant to support the site, down from an average of 110 when it was running.

“We’re really grateful for everyone who’s involved in the decommissioning process,” she said, “and then also for the dedicated employees who served Boardman during its 40 years of operation.”

## Boardman to Hemingway

The latest objections to the Boardman to Hemingway Transmission Line met their end at the meeting.

The council dismissed recent challenges to the 500 kilovolt power line project — also called B2H — that stretches roughly 300 miles from the Hemingway Substation southwest of Boise to Boardman. Idaho Power is the company behind the project and claims the line will help link the Pacific Northwest

with the Mountain West regions and help share power.

Oregon and Washington use the most electricity in the winter months while Idaho and Montana use the most in summer, according to Idaho Power, and B2H would allow the sharing of power during each respective off-peak periods.

The B2H project first submitted its notice of intent in 2010 and filed its complete application in 2018. But the project cuts through large swaths of public and private land and has hit snags with issues surrounding ownership, accusations over environmental regulations and impacts on agriculture. Landowners and environmentalists alike have objected to the project, with the largest opposition coming from the Stop B2H Coalition, an organization of “860 individuals and a growing number of member organizations,” according to its website.

The council at the meeting first took on the accusation from La Grande’s Irene Gilbert, who claimed the case’s hearing officer, administrative law Judge Alison Greene Webster, demonstrated incompetence and bias in her judgments. At the Aug. 27 meeting, the siting council dismissed Gilbert’s challenge.

The second challenge came from Michael McAllister, also of La Grande, who argued for his role in the process and alleged the proposed Morgan Lake Alternative route did not comply with fish and wildlife habitat standards, soil protection standards and whether the visual impacts of the project “are inconsistent with the objectives of the Morgan Lake Park Recreation.”

The council dismissed the fish and wildlife habitat standards and the soil standards issues for lacking material evidence. However, Jesse Ratcliffe, the Oregon Department of Justice senior assistant attorney general, said there was some material evidence that the project had a visual impact on Morgan Lake Park.

“Theoretically,” Ratcliffe said, “there could be a diminishment of the value of that recreational opportunity.”

The council overruled the hearing officer’s rejection of McAllister’s appeals on the visual impacts, reinstated that issue and reinstated McAllister as a party for that issue.

# Cases:

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Meanwhile, the delta crisis has unfolded with grim consequences, placing a strain on hospitals statewide. Umatilla County set pandemic records for COVID-19 deaths and hospitalizations in August and reached its highest infection rates since the pandemic started. The county has reported more than 400 COVID-19 cases for five straight weeks.

Fiumara said this shows, as more people are being infected and being hospitalized, people are changing their minds about the shot.

“People kind of thought (the pandemic) was over,” he said. “There were people who were nervous about the vaccine and wanted to wait and see. And then all the restrictions opened and everyone didn’t want to bother with it. Then case numbers started going up and hospitalizations and everything — that’s what’s driven it more than anything.”

More than one in seven Umatilla County residents

have contracted COVID-19, according to the Oregon Health Authority, yet less than half of the county’s residents have been vaccinated against the virus.

But Fiumara said he believes the uptick has nothing to do with the Food and Drug Administration’s latest approval of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine on Aug. 23.

“I’m sure there are some people who were legitimately waiting for that and are now going to get the shot, and that’s fantastic,” he said. “But I think most of the claim around that was an excuse, not a reason. And I think now that that excuse is gone, I think others are coming in place.”

Breakthrough cases The Oregon Health Authority on Aug. 26 released its latest data showing COVID-19 breakthrough cases, or cases among people who were vaccinated. Of Umatilla County’s 5,765 total confirmed COVID-19 cases from Jan. 1 to Aug. 26, 278 came from people who had been vaccinated.

Across the state, only about 5.5% of COVID-19 cases in vaccinated individu-

als have led to hospitalization while less than 1% have died — meaning the overwhelming majority of those hospitalized or who have died are unvaccinated.

The number of breakthrough cases didn’t surprise Fiumara, who said no vaccines are perfectly effective against stopping the spread and the real power of

vaccines comes from when the majority of the community has chosen to partake.

“The vaccines are not going to be 100% against stopping all illness,” he said, “but they do a very good job at preventing illness, and they do an even better job at preventing hospitalization and death.”

While most other vaccina-

tions are not perfectly effective, he said, most people don’t see those illnesses because the majority of people are vaccinated.

Fiumara emphasized that while the delta variant spreads more easily and studies show it spreads faster, the COVID-19 vaccines still are very effective and it is far safer to get vaccinated.

He said vaccinated people don’t necessarily need to be worried, but should be cautious in their day-to-day activities regardless.

“They can go about their business,” he said, “but watch for symptoms and if you start getting sick, isolate. Because we do want to try to stem some of this spread as much as we can.”

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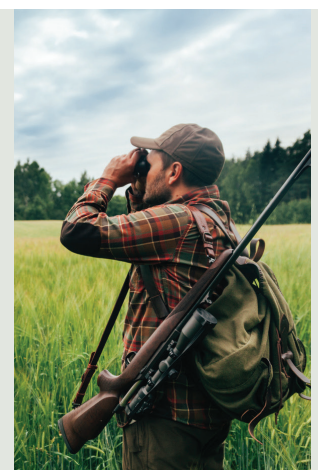
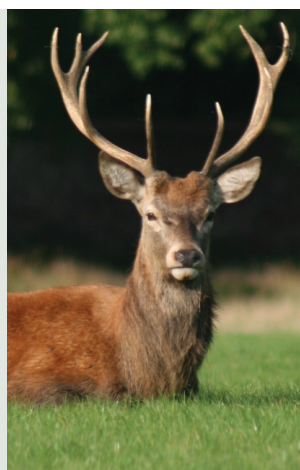
**Candyman (2021) (R)**  
1:00p 3:30p 6:00p 8:30p

**PAW Patrol: The Movie (G)**  
1:30p 3:50p

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