



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Pendleton Fire Station No. 3 sits in the dark on the evening of Thursday, Dec. 9, 2021, at the Eastern Oregon Regional Airport in Pendleton. Pendleton Fire Chief Jim Critchley is looking for ways to staff the station, which houses firefighting vehicles but no firefighters.

Airport:

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John Honemann, the manager of the airport, said he would be supportive of Critchley staffing Fire Station No. 3, a sentiment shared by Darryl Abling, the city's UAS range manager.

Abling said the airport's taxiways and roads provide some natural breaks to any potential fires, but as activity at the range continues to grow — more than 5,800 operations so far in 2021 — the demand for

on-site fire prevention would grow.

Staffing the airport fire station still is in the early stages, so Critchley hasn't determined how the department will fill in the largest blank: funding.

Critchley said he can't spare anyone from his staff to reassign to the airport fire station. Nor does he have money to spare from his department's \$5.4 million budget to hire someone new from existing funds.

Critchley said he's ruling out raising money from taxpayers, so he's kicking around ideas such as



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A pair of aircraft fire engines Thursday, Dec. 9, 2021, fill a garage bay facing the Eastern Oregon Regional Airport at Pendleton Fire Station No. 3.

searching for a grant that may fund a new position or identifying a funding mechanism that could be used with airport tenants.

Honemann said he didn't want to commit to some sort of fee or tax quite yet, but he said it's talking

with airport tenants and customers about how a fire protection service might be incorporated into the airport's services. Any new additions to staff likely would have to go through the budget process and the city council.

While there might not be a definitive start date for a new firefighter at Fire Station No. 3, Critchley said he already anticipates the new employee engaging in new training and data work when not fighting fires at the airport.

Funland:

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Playground security

Each light pole around the perimeter of the playground has two video cameras recording 24 hours a day. And the light posts have sensors that turn on at night and set up a "geo-fence."

The geo-fence, Artz explained, is a set of lasers. When someone breaks the beams, an alert goes to the Hermiston Police Department.

"The first week, the cameras were tripped and alerts were sent to the PD," he said. "A person with eight unrelated warrants was arrested here."

Artz said police arrested the trespasser on the warrants.

Playground dangers

More recently, Artz said, a local noticed two dogs loose and growling at children. Artz heard the report, checked the cameras and took screenshots of a dog urinating on a piece of equipment fashioned to look like an onion. Nothing escapes the watchful eye of the cameras or the department, the director said.

In addition to theft and unleashed pets, he said there are other concerns. Rough usage, as when adults over-extend the rocking horses, is troublesome. The orbit spinner is sometimes abused, too. Also, he said he sees vandalism as an issue.

Vandal strikes

Walking through the playground, he pointed at one piece of equipment with damage he said he suspected is the result of a strike from a baseball bat. Artz expressed frustration over such vandalism.

"It's unfortunate that there are people who just want to come out and destroy and wreak havoc on our things that are for children," he said.

He added that children 5-12 years old are not going to have such a destructive attitude. It is the older people, he said, who want to get a rise out of people and brag about what they can do.

Artz said this destructive spirit was at work the previous times the playground

was vandalized to the point of immolation.

More protection on the way

Waving his outstretched arm to the outer edge of the playground, he pointed to where a fence is going in. It will stand just outside of the pathway surrounding the playground, he said, and stand 4 feet tall.

The director said he was once "on the fence" about building a fence for the playground. He said he sees tall fences topped with barb wire, and he was uncomfortable about such a fence for this playground. Such a fence would be unfriendly and unwelcoming, he said, sending "the wrong message" to playground users.

He thought about this more, he said, and he agreed for the need of a smaller fence, which would keep casual trespassers out and keep young children contained.

"There are quite a few parents like me," he said. As the father of a child who he describes as "a runner," he said he would feel more comfortable if a fence existed to block children from escape.

"I think a fence is definitely necessary," he said, and Farm City Fence is handling that work in the spring.

People already have sponsored pickets to the park, he said, and those pickets will include the name of the sponsors. People can donate to build this fence. Information on sponsorships is on the Hermiston Parks and Recreation website.

The parks department also is adding a speaker to Funland to notify people when they trespass after hours. The police also will receive an alert, as will Artz, through an email.

This automated email service already is operating, Artz said. Recently, when someone entered the playground to jump on a portable toilet, Artz said he was notified of the action and ramifications. In this instance, police officers responded within 10 minutes of his action to confront the intruder, Artz said.

A 10-minute police response is pretty standard,

Artz said. Often, police can be faster, he added, even in the middle of the night.

Motivation for protection

Every piece of equipment tells a story, he said, and it should be protected. Discussing his feelings about the drinking fountain, which looks like a lion. The Hermiston Lions Club raised funds for the fountain and worked to have it installed.

"You look at this, and it's awesome," Artz said. "You come here and you get to stick your head in a lion's mouth to drink some water. This has to be protected."

Hardworking people and donors added other pieces, he said, and Artz was among those who tightened bolts and put up panels.

"My blood, sweat and tears, shivering out in the cold



Erick Peterson/East Oregonian

The rules at Funland Park in Hermiston on Friday, Dec. 10, 2021, encourage good behavior and provide the phone number for police.

last winter, went into this, so I have a huge sense of pride in this," he said.

Jason Barron, parks supervisor, and Brian Fricke, municipal service worker, did most of the "heavy

work," setting posts into the ground and laying concrete, Artz said, but many people were involved in making the playground a reality. The director said he knows these people, and he does not want

to let them, or the community, down by not adequately protecting their work.

He said he was present at the playground's opening. When children started playing on the equipment, Artz's initial feeling was to rush out and tell them not to play on it. After a moment of reconsideration, he said, he remembered children are supposed to jump on it and get it dirty, he said.

"That's what it's here for," the director said.

Though this playground has received much attention, damage, theft and vandalism is not uncommon to such facilities, Artz said. He said he has researched and found other parks around the state face similar issues.

Picking up a lost shoe at Funland, he noted this playground is kept pretty clean and maintained. He said he wants to keep it this way.



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Pictured above (l to r): Stacy Hunter, AVP/Associate Commercial Relationship Manager; Juliann Dodd, SVP/Commercial Banking Team Leader; Steve Campbell, VP/ Senior Commercial Relationship Manager



Erick Peterson/East Oregonian

Funland Playground in Hermiston is a source of community pride and employs several measures, including lasers, to protect the unique features at the park.