



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian, File

Pendleton's Cahill Robinson competes in the 200 meter individual medley during the Pendleton High School Invitational on June 10, 2021, at the Pendleton Aquatic Center. Oregon School Activities Association on Monday, Dec. 13, reclassified Pendleton High School as 4A and moved it into the Greater Oregon League effective next fall.

OSAA:

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Schools at the 3A level will have an enrollment of 146 to 310 in grades 9-11, while 2A is 75 to 145, and 1A is under 74 students.

At the 4A level, enrollment is 311 to 607. Pendleton will be one of the largest schools in the division with 588 — larger than any school in the Greater Oregon League by more than 100 students. Only St. Helens and Crook County are larger.

While travel will be reduced for Pendleton, the hunt for nonleague games begins now.

The GOL athletic directors will meet in Baker City on Thursday, Dec. 16, to discuss standard operating procedures, schedules and the like.

"We are hitting the ground running," Somnis said. "For us, it has been a long, long time since we have been connected to these schools. In 5A and 6A we have scheduling meetings. It's a collaborative effort. I'm not sure how it is in 4A. Being at a small school before, it was a free-for-all. In the past, we haven't played 3A schools. It's a different world we are stepping into."

Goodman and Gonzales Jr. know the challenges of scheduling nonleague games, which can be upward of 14 games or more for basketball, volleyball, soccer, baseball and softball.

"We have to work hard for those games," Goodman said. "If you have teams that are good, it's easier to get those games. Sometimes people don't want to travel that far. Some are good about hosting a game and coming here the next time. It can be challenging."

Gonzales Jr. said Pendleton could help

open up avenues for new nonleague opponents.

"If they can open us up to some new travel destinations, that would be great," he said.

Adding Pendleton to the GOL has benefits, according to Goodman.

"You want your teams to be prepared to go into the playoffs," Goodman said. "You want to challenge them so they will be ready. We have always had a little rivalry with Pendleton. Instead of friendly rivalries, now they mean something."

Gonzales Jr. said he likes that Pendleton can offer junior varsity and freshman teams to play, and they have swimming, which adds another team to their league.

"On the competitive level, we match up well," he said. "It will be good for the region. They were very competitive in baseball and softball, and they are a good 5A football team. I think they will continue to dominate at that. Baker is going to have to step up their game."

Beam:

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With the Oak Hotel in the downtown core, Pearce said he hopes to obtain an urban renewal grant from the Pendleton Development Commission to help offset the cost of the project. Charles Denight, the commission's associate director, said while Pearce hasn't submitted a grant application yet, his project might be a good candidate for the rejuvenation grant program.

When applicants previously sought grants for large projects, the commission would often package together grants from existing projects, the facade and second story programs, to help fund the project. In February, the commission created the rejuvenation grant, which encompasses the costs of interior and exterior renovations under one umbrella. If Pearce were to apply for the rejuvenation grant, Denight said he would be the first to do it.

As Pearce plans to begin work in the coming month, he said he was thankful to Picken and the coalition, adding they have the downtown's best interests at heart.

Editor's Note: Andrew Picken is the spouse of East Oregonian owner Kathryn Brown.



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Rivoli Restoration Coalition President Andrew Picken looks at the brickwork Tuesday, Dec. 14, 2021, where a former beam spanned the interior of the Rivoli Theater in Pendleton. Developer Parley Pearce is using parts of the 50-foot beam in the Oak Hotel, the former brothel in downtown Pendleton he plans to open as a boutique hotel.



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Streetlights on Tuesday, Dec. 14, 2021, illuminate the Oak Hotel in downtown Pendleton.

Lawmakers:

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Majority Democrats said only the full Legislature could extend the grace period for evictions. The E-Board cannot pass legislation.

Impetus for session

Although some cities and counties are still accepting them, the Oregon Department of Housing and Community Services stopped new applications for rental assistance after Dec. 1. Agency officials said that pending applications were likely to consume the rest of the \$289 million available from federal funds — \$180 million has been paid out to landlords as of Dec. 11 — and the state still would not have enough to cover all pending requests.

House Speaker Tina Kotek, D-Portland, called for a special session months ago.

"Today, we kept our promise and protected thousands from losing their homes this winter," she said, along with other priority items. "I'm appreciative of the bipartisan work that led to this successful emergency special session to provide relief for every part of the state."

The \$200 million that lawmakers drew from the state budget a year ago for rental assistance has been spent. Oregon has applied for \$200 million more in federal aid from the U.S. Treasury, but that money is unlikely to come until spring — and even if it comes, it will be the last installment.

Meanwhile, more than 10,000 applications, many of them in the three Portland metro counties, are past the grace periods established by state law and county actions. State law allows 60 days from when a tenant has informed a landlord about an application being filed; in Multnomah and Washington counties and the city of Beaverton, it is 90 days.

"During wintertime, we want to make sure Oregonians are kept whole," said Sen. Kayse Jama, D-Portland, who leads the Senate housing panel. "We also want to make sure that landlords who are struggling get the resources they need."

Senate Republican Leader Tim Knopp, of Bend, helped broker the deal after Republicans resisted the initial call for a special session.

"We do have people with the possibility of being evicted," he said. "We do have landlords who still have to be made whole. There have been several hundred million dollars already spent. In order to protect them and protect landlords, the only option we have today in this emergency session is to provide these funds and that certainty to tenants in a defined period."

Dissent is voiced

A companion bill (Senate Bill 891) extends the grace period for tenants against evictions for nonpayment of rent from Feb. 28 to June 30, 2022. The grace period goes back to April 1, 2020, at the start of the pandemic. The grace period for tenants who have shown landlords proof of application for assistance is now set at Sept. 30, 2022, or whenever the landlord receives the assistance payment.

That bill passed the Senate, 22-6, and the House, 37-18.

At least 10 House Republicans spoke against that bill and called on Brown to replace Margaret Salazar as leader of the state housing agency.

"House Republicans urge significant changes to these agencies under Democrat control," GOP Leader Vikki Breese-Iverson, of Prineville, said. "We call on the governor to dramatically increase oversight to ensure this money gets to real people in need."

Brown said she is aware that the agency, plus community action agencies in the counties, must reduce the huge backlog of applications.

"While we have made significant progress in improving the delivery of rental assistance in the last several weeks, we know that renters and their landlords are counting on these additional state resources and that we must move quickly," Brown said in a statement.

Other spending

The rental assistance money was contained in a larger budget bill that included these items:

- Resettlement of up to 1,200 Afghan refugees who will start arriving in Oregon early next year, \$18 million. A task force led by Jama and Rep. Khanh Pham, D-Portland, recommended the request, which was not controversial.
- Aid to farmers and ranchers affected by the continuing drought, mostly in Southern and Eastern Oregon, \$100 million. The amount is drawn from \$150 million that lawmakers already set aside in the current two-year state budget for natural disasters. About \$40 million is in the form of forgivable loans (Senate Bill 892 sets up a process) and \$10 million is for specified irrigation districts.
- Efforts against large-scale illegal cannabis growing, mostly in Southern Oregon, \$25 million. Most of it (\$20 million) will be made available in grants by the Oregon Criminal Justice Commission to local police agencies; \$5 million goes to the Oregon Water Resources Department for more staff to deal with illegal water use that interferes with water rights.
- A project by the Port of Portland to develop a prototype of modular housing units made from mass timber, \$5 million. It also will assess economic and environmental effects, and the efficiency of creating these housing units to deal with the housing crisis in Oregon.
- Among the smaller items are \$19 million, already in the state budget, for the Oregon Health Authority to increase reimbursement rates that it cut for dental care under the Oregon Health Plan; \$10 million for the Oregon Tourism Commission (Travel Oregon) for outfitters whose business suffered during the pandemic-induced downturn; \$2 million for a program for gun violence prevention in East Multnomah County.