



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Snow covers the front lawn of BackFire Station on Wednesday, Dec. 22, 2021, in Pendleton. The owners of the BackFire, 911 S.W. Court Ave., are refining a request for further funding from the Pendleton Development Commission.

BackFire grant request delayed a second time

By ANTONIO SIERRA
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — A vote on whether to grant the owners of BackFire Station more money to complete their renovation project has been delayed a second time.

Several hours before the Pendleton Development Commission was set to consider Sean Hart and Erin Bennett's request at its meeting Tuesday, Dec. 21, the commission announced it was pulling the vote from the agenda. In an interview, Charles Denight, the commission's associate director, said both sides mutually agreed to postpone further discussion while the owners refine their proposal.

The postponement comes on the heels of a special Dec. 14 meeting where Hart and

Bennett requested the commission expedite reimbursement payments and an additional \$188,288 to get the project done. The couple made the case that inflated construction costs and a labor shortage added costs to the project they never anticipated.

Although much of the work on turning the former fire station into a public-facing business was nearly complete, Hart and Bennett said the business needed the money to finish their project.

The Pendleton City Council in 2020 hand-picked Hart and Bennett, who also operate a motorcycle parts business named Moto Stuff, to buy the newly vacated Fire Station No. 1 at 911 S.W. Court Ave. Acting as the development commission, council members then granted the pair \$494,819 to turn it into a multi-

purpose facility. The owners already have moved in Moto Stuff and launched BackFire Station, a restaurant and lounge. They anticipate adding lodging and motorcycle rentals once the renovations are complete.

After hearing Bennett and Hart's pitch at the Dec. 14 meeting, commissioners discussed ideas about adding a grant to help cover costs of fire suppression sprinklers, but wanted to see more information before making a decision. The Dec. 21 meeting was supposed to provide that decision before the issue was pulled from the agenda.

Denight said the commission could get another chance to consider Hart and Bennett's request at either a special meeting or at the commission's next regularly scheduled meeting, which is set for Jan. 18.

Hospitals:

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An official with Baker City's Saint Alphonsus Medical Center said the funds will be crucial in renewing depleted resources and hiring temporary staff such as nurses.

The American Rescue Plan Rural payment program pool totals nearly \$7.5 billion in federal funds, and was targeted toward suppliers and providers that serve rural Medicaid, Children's Health Insurance Program and Medicare beneficiaries, according to a release from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

"Health care providers in rural

communities have been hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic, and they continue to experience significant financial hardships," U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Xavier Becerra said in a press release. "The infusion of these funds will be critical to ensuring rural communities maintain access to high-quality health care and addressing urgent needs like workforce recruitment and retention."

Payments ranged from as little as \$500, which went to providers such as individually licensed psychiatrists and social workers, to several million dollars. The largest single award for Oregon went to Central Oregon's Saint Charles Health System, which received more than \$10.5 million.

Of the nearly 500 awards distributed, the most frequent award was \$500, which went to 88 Oregon suppliers and providers.

Provisions in the program allowed providers in the Portland metropolitan area to receive funding, even though there was a separate fund of \$9 billion already earmarked for providers and suppliers in non-rural areas. Clinics and providers in Portland that received funding included Northwest Urology in the Pearl District of Portland, which received just more than \$90,000.

According to U.S. Health and Human Services, providers who serve Medicaid, CHIP, and Medicare patients who live in rural communities are eligible for the ARP Rural payments. As well,

providers who serve any patients living in Federal Office of Rural Health Policy-defined rural areas with Medicaid, CHIP, or Medicare coverage, and who otherwise meet the eligibility criteria, will receive a minimum payment.

Other Portland businesses that received funding include optometrist clinics, acupuncturists, a dentist office, retirement homes and Portland State University — which received just more than \$1 million, though the university does have its own on-campus clinic.

U.S. Health and Human Services did not respond to requests for comment about the requirements for the payments before publication.

Fire district reports progress on Hermiston silage burn

East Oregonian

HERMISTON — The silage fire burning in southwest Hermiston continues to garner attention from Umatilla County Fire District No. 1.

The district first responded to the fire the morning of Dec. 8 and found a pile of corn silage had self-heated and began to openly burn. Firefighters extinguished the flames and returned several

times after the fire flared up, but there is little the district can do to extinguish the burn.

In a press release Monday, Dec. 20, Umatilla County Fire District No. 1 reported it conducted a follow-up inspection on the fire, and the property owner is trucking in water and hauled off 15 loads of silage during the weekend.

"This fire is a large smoldering pile of organic material that

requires the use of heavy equipment and water to complete extinguishment," according to the district. "To simply flow water on this type of fire as has been suggested by some citizens, will do nothing to mitigate the smoke in a timely fashion."

The district also reported the fire is not "hostile" and the property owner is working to put out the fire, which the district

explained is unintentional and does not fall under its open burning regulations.

The fire district also stated it has been in contact with the city of Hermiston, Umatilla County Smoke Management and the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality regarding the fire and will continue to monitor the situation until the work is complete.

Snow:

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Measurements on Monday morning, Dec. 20, showed 34 inches of snow depth and a snow water equivalent of 7.5 inches, which is about 14% above average. The seven-day outlook is for 2½ more inches of snow water, which is the more important measurement for predicting spring and summer water supplies.

Emigrant Springs is at 3,800 feet and is southeast of Pendleton and northwest of La Grande. With 12 inches of snowpack, including 6 inches of new snow, the site is 52% below average with 1.8 inches of snow water equivalent. The five-day forecast predicts another 7 inches will fall.

Bowman Springs, at 4,530 feet, is west of La Grande. Snowpack is 10 inches and 100% of the average. The site is forecasted to receive 6 more inches in the next 5 days.

Lucky Strike, at 4,970 feet and south of Pilot Rock, has a snowpack of 7 inches; 72% of normal. Six inches are predicted to fall in the next five days.

Spout Springs Ski Area sits at 5,000 feet west of Elgin and has a snowpack of 31 inches. Eighteen inches are forecasted to fall in the next five days.

The Milk Shakes site on the Oregon/Washington border east of Walla Walla has 42 inches of snowpack with 24% snow/water equivalent. This is 10% above average and 18 inches are predicted to fall in the next five days.

On the Union County side of the Wallowa Mountains just up the hill from Cove, Moss Springs, at 5,760 feet, 25 inches of snowpack is recorded with 6.6 inches of snow water equivalent — 93% of normal for this time of year. Eleven inches of new snow is predicted to fall in the next five days.

In Wallowa County, Mount Howard, at 7,900 feet, has 20 inches of snow with 4.6 inches of snow water equivalent, putting it at 75% of normal. Just over the ridge at Aneroid Lake, 7,400 feet, conditions are drier. The site records a snow water content of 4.1 inches, which is 58% of average. The next five days should see 22 inches of new snowfall.

Across Eastern Oregon, watersheds still are reporting lower-than-average numbers for snowpack. The Grande Ronde-Burnt Powder-Imnaha Basin is at 96%; the Malheur Basin is at 94%; John Day Basin is recording 90%; Harney Basin is at 91%, while the highest for the region, Umatilla-Walla Walla Basin is at 100%.

CTUIR secures stimulus funds for ambulance

East Oregonian

WASHINGTON — Eight months after President Joe Biden signed the American Rescue Plan Act, funds continue to benefit local recipients.

In a Dec. 6 press release, Oregon Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley, both Democrats, announced the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation would be getting a little less than \$1 million in federal stimulus. The tribes will use the \$988,031 to purchase an ambulance and related equipment.

"The Umatilla Tribal Fire Department has been in need of new rapid response vehicles and equipment for some time, and so this award will help us to greatly improve the emergency services that our fire department provides to the Umatilla Indian Reservation community," CTUIR Board of Trustees Chair Kat Brigham said in a statement. "We thank Sens. Wyden and Merkley for their work to help secure this funding for the Tribe."

NO EAST OREGONIAN ON CHRISTMAS DAY

Due to the postal holiday, we will not publish a paper Saturday, Dec. 25, but have included comics for that edition in today's paper. We will publish our next edition on Tuesday, Dec. 28.

MERRY CHRISTMAS

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