



Greg Lehman/Walla Walla Union-Bulletin, File
Brooke Boothman, 9, gets blasted with water at the Joe Humbert Family Aquatic Center in Milton-Freewater in July 2020. Some residents at the March 2022 city council meeting urged the city to take steps to improve the public pool.

M-F residents push for pool improvements

By SHEILA HAGAR
Walla Walla Union-Bulletin

MILTON-FREEWATER — At its regular meeting in mid-March, the Milton-Freewater City Council directed staff to further explore improving swimming conditions of the public pool.

A group of residents who attended the meeting alerted city officials that the water in the Joe Humbert Family Aquatic Center is too cold for safe and comfortable swimming.

The facility has been the topic of discussions at the city level for several years as problems with the pool's rubber coating emerged in 2019 and again in 2020. The coronavirus pandemic and smoke from wildfires also contributed to an early closure in the 2020 season.

Repairs and upgrades were made with the lion's share of a \$500,000 Parks and Recreation bond passed in 2018, meaning other targets of that funding were left off the work list.

Milton-Freewater will seek a second, voter-authorized \$500,000 on the May 17 ballot.

As part of the aquatic center refresh, last summer the council and city officials presented potential pool-heating options at a public meeting to see how residents wanted to spend money left from the 2018 tax measure.

Options presented then included installation of four heat pumps at a cost of \$140,000, adding two heat pumps to be used only during the summer at \$72,000 or the purchase of a solar thermal cover that would keep pool water above freezing level.

City Manager Linda Hall reported the thermal cover was considered then to be the best solution for the money.

In February's city council meeting, resident Markie McRae raised the issue of the pool water's too-cold temperature. Two weeks ago, she was joined by several other people who share the concern.

The group's spokesperson, John Mitchell, stood at the microphone during public comment, telling councilors the thermal cover has been inadequate for heating, and Milton-Freewater's city pool is uninviting to swimmers.

Mitchell referred to city records showing that even when the outdoors heated up in the third week of last July, the pool did not get warmer than 69 degrees and was as low as 56 degrees on one morning.

And that was after water leaks had been fixed, he added.

"We are not asking for bath water but water that is comfortable and healthy," Mitchell said, noting that swimming in water below 64 degrees can lead to cardiac arrest.

Swimming in water cooler than 70 degrees increases heart rate and blood pressure; temperatures below the 78-86 degrees recommended by experts can lead to muscle spasms and hypothermia.

"I'd be worried about liability issues at letting people swim at 64 degrees," he said.

Children, with less body mass, are at greater risk for hypothermia. Cold water increases fear of water for beginning swimmers and

decreases competency, Mitchell told the council.

When saying yes to the 2018 Parks and Recreation bond, voters understood the money would not only fix leaks but would pay for heat pumps to make the pool more usable, he pointed out.

"We fear for the success of a new levy,"

Mitchell and others encouraged the council to "finish the job" it began with the earlier pool repairs, pointing out that heater prices will continue to rise.

Others echoed Mitchell and added that when voters approved a new pool in 1995, it was community elders ensuring that children could reach swimming competency.

It is "heart wrenching" to drive past the facility and see "virtually no attendance," said educator Jacque Fox.

Mardi Hagerman minced no words in her presentation.

Hagerman said she grew up in Milton-Freewater and was part of the "extraordinary" swim team here during that era.

The pool is set in Yantis Park, built in the 1960s and dedicated to community leader Dick Yantis. The very first swimming pool built there was heated, Hagerman noted, "and that was a giant step."

In 1995, Hagerman, who has worked in medicine for decades, chaired the campaign to replace the first facility with a modern one; the community overwhelmingly voted for a new, heated pool that year, she said.

Now the city pool has the same water temperature as Wallowa Lake, which is filled with the water from mountain snow packs, she said.

Hagerman asked the council to consider the guidelines issued by the American Red Cross in determining what water temperature should be for swimmers, saying it does not make sense for the community to not have a heated pool.

The aquatic center bond in 1995 was based on having such a swimming center, she added.

"We worked very hard to make that pool a success," she said. "Pools do not make money, but they do make communities."

While a thermal cover can help retain heat, those cannot add heat, the group said.

Hagerman reminded the room that in the summer of 1996, the community had no pool as the current one was being built.

"Three young boys went swimming in the river," she said. "One drowned, one was on life support and one survived."

Hall said Milton-Freewater subsidizes the pool's operating costs at about \$240,000 a year now. As well, other residents also are pushing for a dog park and golf course improvements, and the pool people must be ready to defend their interest, the city manager said.

Council President Steve Irving told the pool group that councilors would go to work on the issue, including checking if heaters can be found at an accessible price, and the council is likely to make a decision in its April meeting.

The Milton-Freewater City Council meets again at 7 p.m., Monday, April 11, in the Albee Room of the public library, 8 S.W. Eighth Ave.

River trails project moves forward

By JOHN TILLMAN
East Oregonian

UMATILLA — The Umatilla River Trails Project is a system of paths connecting Umatilla, Hermiston, Stanfield and Echo to increase recreational opportunities and community livability. The project is on the way to becoming a reality.

"We've been working on the project for seven years," said former Umatilla County Commissioner Bill Elfering, chair of the trails committee. "Now we have the first segment pretty well settled from the Columbia River to Hermiston. It's about 7 miles, with views of the river most of the way. The stretch from Hermiston to Stanfield to Echo is still in the works."

Public input was received through a survey and a meeting in October 2019. The plan then was to select one of five routes in 2020.

"COVID put us behind schedule," Elfering said. "And the flood. But we've narrowed it down to three routes."

He explained the trail, as much as possible, uses public rights of way, such as county roads and irrigation ditch embankments.

"We want as little impact on private property as possible," Elfering said. "We won't condemn any at all. Some private landowners are welcoming. Others not so much."

And the project needs grant searchers and writers to help with funding, and Elfering said there is money available for bicycle paths. But applications must wait for the engineering report by Anderson Perry. He also said the Umatilla County Planning Department has been involved from the beginning.



Kathy Aney/East Oregonian

A stretch of the Umatilla River Trail will follow the river from Umatilla along River Road toward Hermiston. Eventually the system will link four towns: Umatilla, Hermiston, Stanfield and Echo.

"They got us a \$250,000 grant, which helped with matching funds," Elfering said.

"Umatilla and Hermiston have a lot of existing infrastructure which we can connect," Umatilla County Planning Director Robert Waldher said. "Hermiston's parks will be incorporated into the trails, as the terminus of Phase I of the project."

Stanfield and Echo are growing rapidly and developing infrastructure that can also be part of the project.

"Echo had over 400 people at its Red to Red cross-country mountain bike event," Waldher said. "That has a big economic impact."

Longer term, Waldher said, the stretch from Hermiston to Stanfield will be more of a challenge.

"It's subject to constraints, with industrial areas, the railroad and Highway 395," he explained. "But

momentum is building. We have gotten technical assistance from the National Park Service and other federal agencies."

The 2020 floods washed out the pedestrian bridge over the Umatilla River, but that is in the process of rebuilding. Still, Waldher said, the project is looking at sites for another footbridge over the Umatilla River.

"The river isn't accessible on public land all along its length, so we need to cross over it," he said.

The project also is moving from concept to implementation.

"We're refining the details and studying engineering," Waldher said.

"Our implementation committee consists of two members from each of the four communities, plus two members from the county. We drove alternative routes (recently). The whole route from Umatilla to Echo will

be around 25 miles long, depending on the alternatives selected."

The trails can benefit health, recreation and tourism, he said, but there are environmental and cultural surveys to conduct, and the trails have to meet federal accessibility requirements.

While Waldher is involved, he said the Umatilla County Board of Commissioners does not want tax revenue going to the trails project, so the committee is seeking state and federal funding.

"Bringing it to fruition will be a lengthy process, but community support is there," he said.

"I probably won't live to see it happen, but I'd like eventually to extend the trail all the way to Pendleton," Elfering said. "It's county road most of the way."

You can read the Umatilla River Trail Concept Plan here: bit.ly/3KkW4Fe.

Hegarty joins arts center as development director

East Oregonian

PENDLETON — The Board of Directors of the Arts Council of Pendleton recently announced Tiffany Hegarty has joined the staff at Pendleton Center for the Arts as its development director.

"I couldn't be a bigger fan of the Pendleton Center for the Arts and the important role it plays in our community as a creative hub," Hegarty said.

During more than 25 years of working with nonprofit organizations — including as a volunteer, board member, development director, executive director and consultant — Hegarty has helped in securing more than \$7.5 million in funding to support their work, PCA Executive Director Roberta Lavador said in a press release. In addition to her administrative skill set, Hegarty brings an interesting background in the arts.

"I have always loved writing, but I originally intended a career in the performing arts," she said.

MORE INFORMATION

Pendleton Center for the Arts, 214 N. Main St., is open Tuesday through Friday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and Saturdays, noon to 4 p.m. For more information, call 541-278-9201 or visit www.pendletonarts.org.

"After a childhood performing in regional theatre I studied in New York, then moved to Los Angeles with the intent of landing TV or film roles."

She soon realized she enjoyed being part of film projects from concept to editing and that the production side of entertainment allowed for a creative voice that actors were rarely allowed. During her time in the film industry, Hegarty developed and produced network television movies, series and specials.

Hegarty's family packed up and moved to Pendleton in 2007 when her husband, Mike, a former professional golfer, was recruited by the PGA to fill the head

golf professional position at Wildhorse Resort & Casino.

"We wanted to raise our children outside of the big city and Pendleton offered us that opportunity," she said about the move. "I was born in Portland and Mike is a proud University of Oregon graduate, so moving to Oregon felt a bit like coming home."

The family's connection with the arts center began soon after the move. Their daughter, Morgan, was invited to join a new creative writing class the arts center was starting for teens.

"Morgan really bloomed there and went on to take other classes and even joined the teen advisory group that helped develop and promote

classes for peers," Hegarty said. "She graduated from the University of Oregon with a degree in journalism and continues to write."

The bulk of Hegarty's work with nonprofits during the past 14 years has been across other parts of Oregon. She was ready to focus her experience and skills on an organization in her own community. When the position opened with the retirement of longtime grant writer J.D. Smith, Hegarty said it felt like the timing was right. While excited to follow Smith's 20-years of strong development work, Hegarty sees opportunities for the organization as well.

"I'm realizing that many in our community have never been inside this beautiful building. Financial support from the community has been so essential in providing a level of creative opportunities not typically available in rural areas," she said. "I'm looking forward to connecting with more businesses, organizations and families to be able to create even more impact."

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3:50p 6:30p 9:20p
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Ambulance (R)
5:00p 8:00p
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Morbis (PG13)
4:20p 7:00p 9:30p
Extra 1:30p show 4/8-4/10

The Lost City (PG13)
4:10p 6:40p 9:10p
Extra 1:40p show 4/8-4/10

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