

# La Grande public safety sectors look to fill staff shortages

By **DAVIS CARBAUGH**  
*The Observer*



**Bell** **Cornford**

LA GRANDE — Like nearly any local entity struggling to hire a full staff, the public safety sectors within the city of La Grande have faced similar challenges.

While the city's police and fire departments both have faced staff shortages during the pandemic, hiring incentives and altered training programs have provided a positive trend in getting back to full staff.

"I'm excited that we have some new candidates," La Grande Fire Chief Emmitt Cornford said. "It looks like some good ones based on the applications, so if we can hire one or two that would be great."

The La Grande City Council emphasized the issue of recruiting and retaining employees in the public safety roles at its 2022 council retreat in January. In the council's April meeting, a professional compensation survey was approved to address this issue moving forward.

Cornford and La Grande Police Chief Gary Bell both spoke at the La Grande City Council meeting earlier this month detailing the current status of openings in the departments.

The police department is

currently down three officer positions, but is in the process of selecting new hires. Bell stated the department has made one conditional offer to a candidate and is in the late stages with a few other candidates.

One new officer is currently in the police academy and was due to graduate April 14.

"We've had successes in terms of retirements and things like that in the last five to eight years, but it's just really challenging to recruit and make sure that we work really hard to keep those standards where we need them to be so that we can provide the service that the community deserves," Bell told the council during the Wednesday, April 6, meeting.

The La Grande Fire Department may have help on the way soon, following roughly seven months of lacking a firefighter/paramedic position.

A firefighter/EMT role also recently opened after a retirement, and the department is in the process of



Alex Wittwer/EO Media Group, File

**Firefighters with the La Grande Fire Department respond to a structure fire in the Oregon Department of Transportation sign shop the morning of March 29, 2021. The city of La Grande has adjusted hiring practices in 2022 to help the department fill firefighter/paramedic positions.**

testing eight individuals to potentially fill the void.

"The challenge has been the paramedic piece," Cornford said. "Paramedics are in short supply, so we haven't had a lot of people apply."

The department has faced difficulties in hiring firefighters who are qualified as paramedics, which Cornford said is a statewide trend. To help alleviate the burden, the city of La Grande passed a memo-

randum of understanding with the Local 924 Chapter of the International Association of Firefighters that would allow for new hires to undertake paramedic training while working for the department as a condition of employment.

One current staff member of the department previously completed the training, receiving high marks in the program. Cornford noted

that the process takes roughly two years, so the department would look to stagger the training in order to still have staff on hand. Even so, a sizable portion of the training is online, allowing for the employee to continue working regular shifts.

"It's a good way to do it, but we also don't want to do that until they're a good portion of the way through their first year learning the

ins and outs of the department and firefighting in general," he said.

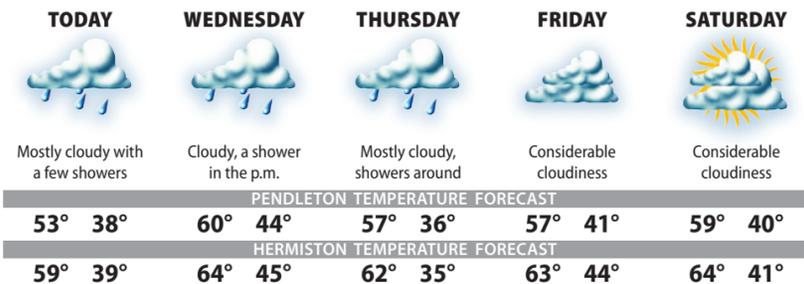
While recent hiring trends resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic have impacted nearly every job market, Cornford stated that the overall need for paramedics in the state and La Grande's location in rural Oregon have been two key challenges in hiring paramedics.

"That puts us in the market for paramedics alongside bigger entities that are more likely to pay better," he said. "There's also the challenges of being in rural Oregon. Some people see that as a benefit, which I myself would say, but a lot of people sometimes see that as not an ideal place to live."

As Cornford and the fire department sustain efforts to get the staff back to full force soon, the chief stated how crucial the current staff has been in keeping operations at the expected high quality.

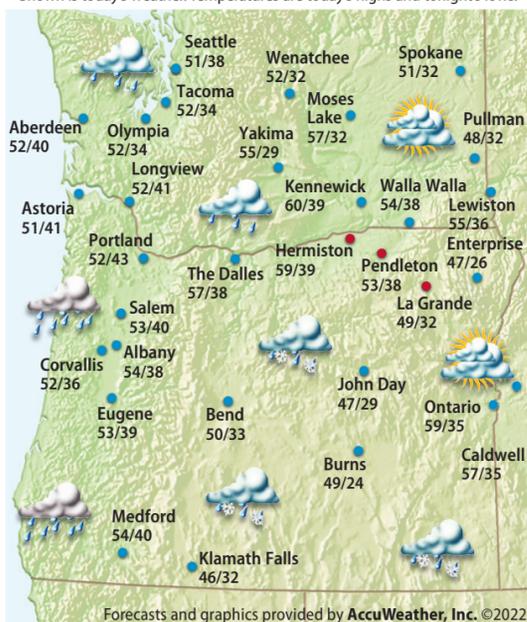
"What has gotten us through it is the ability of the people here to work a lot of extra hours. They have done a fantastic job keeping us up," Cornford said. "There is a lot of time at the fire station running a lot of calls. I just put that all back on them, they've done a great job covering. Most people would probably be hard-pressed to say we're short staffed

## Forecast for Pendleton Area



## OREGON FORECAST

Shown is today's weather. Temperatures are today's highs and tonight's lows.



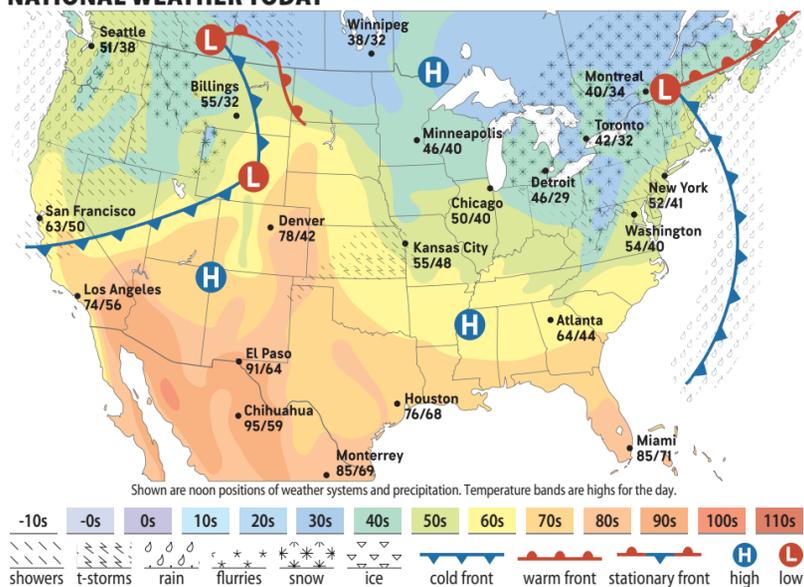
## ALMANAC

PENDLETON through 3 p.m. yest.			
TEMP.	HIGH	LOW	
Yesterday	56°	39°	
Normals	63°	40°	
Records	88° (1910)	23° (1909)	
PRECIPITATION			
24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.00"		
Month to date	0.91"		
Normal month to date	0.81"		
Year to date	4.51"		
Last year to date	3.34"		
Normal year to date	4.88"		
HERMISTON through 3 p.m. yest.			
TEMP.	HIGH	LOW	
Yesterday	56°	39°	
Normals	67°	39°	
Records	87° (1939)	21° (1964)	
PRECIPITATION			
24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.00"		
Month to date	1.04"		
Normal month to date	0.47"		
Year to date	2.99"		
Last year to date	1.73"		
Normal year to date	3.24"		
WINDS (in mph)			
Today	WSW 7-14	Wed. ENE 6-12	
Pendleton	WSW 7-14	SE 6-12	
SUN AND MOON			
Sunrise today	6:03 a.m.		
Sunset tonight	7:47 p.m.		
Moonrise today	none		
Moonset today	7:44 a.m.		
MOON PHASES			
Last	New	First	Full
Apr 23	Apr 30	May 8	May 15

## NATIONAL EXTREMES

Yesterday's National Extremes: (for the 48 contiguous states)  
High 100° in Borrego Springs, Calif. Low 0° in Rugby, N.D.

## NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY



## Baker City police chief proposes limits on camping to address homelessness

By **SAMANTHA O'CONNOR**  
*Baker City Herald*

BAKER CITY — Baker City Police Chief Ty DUBY is asking the city council to approve an ordinance limiting where and when people can camp in parks and other public property.

Duby, who presented Ordinance 3383 to councilors during their Tuesday, April 12, meeting, said the document is intended to address problems with homeless people camping on public property.

Because the complete proposed ordinance wasn't available Tuesday, councilors will continue their discussion of DUBY's proposal April 26.

The ordinance states, in part: "It shall be unlawful for any person to set up tents or any other temporary shelter or to use house trailers, campers or automobiles for the purpose of overnight camping in any city park, nor shall any person remain in any city park after closing

hours; provided, however, organized youth groups under competent adult supervision may be permitted overnight camping privileges."

The ordinance states that if someone is living in a vehicle, it must be moved at least every 24 hours and for at least the distance of a city block.

"Really what we're doing, we're looking for solutions to work with homeless issues that regularly arise in our community," DUBY told councilors.

The police chief said last summer he intended to bring an ordinance to councilors to consider.

He was prompted by a bill the Oregon Legislature passed earlier in 2021 and that Oregon Gov. Kate Brown signed into law on June 23.

The law — introduced as House Bill 3115 and passed by the Democratic majorities in the state House and Senate — is based on a 2019 federal court ruling in a Boise case that in effect

prohibited cities and counties from making it illegal for people to sleep outdoors in public spaces if the jurisdiction doesn't provide indoor alternatives.

Baker County's two state legislators, Sen. Lynn Findley, R-Vale, and Rep. Mark Owens, R-Crane, voted against the bill.

The new Oregon law states that cities or counties that have ordinances regulating "the acts of sitting, lying, sleeping or keeping warm and dry outdoors on public property that is open to the public must be objectively reasonable as to time, place and manner with regards to persons experiencing homelessness."

Baker City does not have such an ordinance now, but DUBY said Ordinance 3383 would serve that purpose.

He said the proposed Baker City ordinance would prevent camping on public property in residential zones, while it would be allowed, with time restrictions, on public property in the general-commercial, general industrial and light industrial zones.

## IN BRIEF

### Forest Service readies for spring burns in the Blue Mountains

PENDLETON — Fire management officials on the Malheur, Umatilla and Wallowa-Whitman national forests are starting spring prescribed burns to reduce the risk of severe wildfire.

The Umatilla National Forest in a recent news release stated frequent, low-intensity fire is essential for healthy forests and reducing the risk of high intensity wildfire caused by excessive fuel buildup.

Prescribed burning is effective for removing excessive brush, shrubs and trees, while

also encouraging growth of native vegetation. As well, the spring burning improves overall forest health and enhances habitat for elk, deer and other wildlife, officials said.

Forest Service staff conduct prescribe burns under controlled conditions, according to the press release, and take wind speed and direction, temperatures, humidity and fuel moisture into consideration before beginning a prescribed burn operation.

Staff also consider potential smoke impacts prior to each burn, officials said, and monitor burns until enough rain or snow falls.

For more information, visit the Blue Mountain Prescribed Fire Council or [www.fs.usda.gov/umatilla](http://www.fs.usda.gov/umatilla).

—EO Media Group

**CORRECTIONS:** The *East Oregonian* works hard to be accurate and sincerely regrets any errors. If you notice a mistake in the paper, please call 541-966-0818.

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