

# EAST OREGONIAN

THURSDAY, JUNE 9, 2022

146th Year, No. 74

WINNER OF 16 ONPA AWARDS IN 2021



**INSIDE**

CHECK OUT 10 DAYS OF SHAKESPEARE IN ELGIN IN GO!

**PENDLETON**

## No more yellow glow

City replacing 1,005 streetlights with higher efficiency lighting

*East Oregonian*

PENDLETON — Pendleton's nighttime glow is undergoing a big change.

The city is replacing 1,005 existing streetlights from high pressure sodium fixtures to light-emitting diode fixtures. Work begins June 20 and runs through August.

The city announced the plan Monday, June 6, in a press release.

According to the city, the new LED light fixtures will reduce the city's energy costs, reduce maintenance and reduce carbon emissions by 310 tons per year. The new lights use up to 50% less energy and have a longer lifespan than the traditional lights the city is using.

The project is part of the city council's strategic goal No. 1 to seek out more sustainable infrastructure funding for buildings, roads and utilities.

"The new LED lights will have a slightly different color," the city reported, "appearing more white than yellow, and direct light differently, enhancing visibility for drivers."

And the project is budget-neutral for the city.

Energy Trust of Oregon has provided an incentive of about \$70,000 for the project cost in the first year. "The projected energy and maintenance savings will fully fund the project," according to the city, "resulting in no cost to taxpayers" and no up-front capital.

**The work**

The project will replace light fixtures on existing poles. The city is not installing new streetlights or relocating poles.

Ameresco, the city's energy services contractor, is coordinating the work, and its subcontractor, DJ's Electrical, is installing the fixtures. Multiple crews are estimated to complete 30 – 40 fixture conversions per day, taking 20 to 30 minutes per light.

"Work will be performed in a moving operation that may require temporary traffic lane restrictions, and the sidewalk, bike lane or curbside parking spaces located adjacent to the work site will be temporarily restricted while crews are actively working on a specific fixture," the city reported.

*See Lights, Page A8*

## BMCC board approves budget and faculty layoffs



Kathy Aney/East Oregonian

**Blue Mountain Community College President Mark Browning addresses faculty members Monday, June 6, 2022, at a meeting before board members approved a retrenchment plan that would lay off five faculty members.**

Some board members, teachers hope for higher enrollment in fall

By JOHN TILLMAN  
*East Oregonian*

PENDLETON — The Blue Mountain Community College Board of Education has approved the administration's retrenchment plan, laying off five full-time faculty members.

The board voted on the plan Monday night, June 6, in a special meeting.

The college laid off the instructors in business, criminal justice, English, music and chemistry, according to Blue Mountain Faculty Association President Sascha McKeon.

The board also passed adjustments to its current budget and changes to the proposed 2022-23 budget, then adopted the new budget.

The college's total budget for fiscal year 2022-23 is more than \$55,626,381, an increase of \$11.4 million (25.8%) from the previous year.

According to budget documents, this is largely due to the college planning increases in the building fund expenditures to construct the FARM II project. In addition, expenditures in the debt service fund have increased due to increased bond principal payments. Expenditures in the enterprise fund have also increased as a result of planned increases in continuing education activity and liquidation of remaining inventory and assets in the bookstore.

The general fund budget for 2022-23 is \$17.4 million, a decrease of almost \$1.14 million — or 6.14% — before the budget for 2021-22. Decreases in the general fund and other funds offset the overall increases.

According to the college, the decreases are due to changes in activities as a result of decreased enrollment and include decreases in financial aid, student club activity and in the general fund as a result of "aligning projected expenditures with revenues."

*See BMCC, Page A8*



Kathy Aney/East Oregonian

**Blue Mountain Community College English instructor Ki Russel urges college board members Monday, June 6, 2022, to rethink retrenchment plans during public comments before the board voted on a budget that laid off five teachers. Listening from left are BMCC Chief Operations Officer Pat Sisneros and board member Kim Puzey.**

## Much abuzz at Pendleton's drone testing hub

UAS range has boosted economic activity at the airport

*Editor's Note: This is part one of a three part story Oregon Public Broadcasting produced on the Pendleton Unmanned Aircraft System Range. The second and third parts are running in subsequent print editions of the East Oregonian. The entire story is online at www.eastoregonian.com.*

By KRISTIAN FODEN-VENCIL  
*Oregon Public Broadcasting*

PENDLETON — Ten years ago, Eastern Oregon Regional Airport in Pendleton was an albatross: an expensive relic left over from World War II.

"It was a pretty sleepy little regional airport, to be honest," Pendleton Mayor John Turner said.

Back then, the airport only had 20 employees, and there wasn't enough economic activity to justify a regular flight to Portland.

But the Pendleton airport did have two massive runways that date back to World War II and carry a storied history. This is where the so-called Doolittle Raiders — the pilots who first bombed Tokyo, taking off from the deck of



Stan Springer/Contributed Photo

**Retired Air Force Col. Stan Springer, center, runs the Volatus Group, a drone pilot training facility in Pendleton. He said there are several reasons Pendleton has become popular.**

the aircraft carrier USS Hornet in the middle of the Pacific Ocean — trained for that mission.

In 2012, Pendleton hired a new economic development director, Steve Chrisman, and one of his top priorities was figuring out a better use for the airport. On his first tour, he met Oregon National Guard Lt. Col. Alan Gronewald, who was overseeing a drone test.

Chrisman said the officer had a simple message for him: "He said, 'Listen, I don't want to tell you your

job Mr. Economic development guy, but this world is coming fast.'"

**In the beginning**

Gronewald was talking about drones. So in partnership with the University of Alaska-Fairbanks, the city applied to become a federally-approved drone test range. It was a long shot; Oregon had neither a long history of working with drones nor as much money as others states. But in 2013 the Pendleton Unmanned Aircraft System

Range was granted federal permission.

The concept of a federal commercial drone testing range was relatively new, so initially, Pendleton officials weren't entirely sure how to proceed. Gradually, city leaders collected enough state and city money to build new hangars so visiting drone companies could test and tweak their vehicles in private.

Then, using an Oregon Innovation Council grant, the airport bought laser cutters, 3D printers and high-tech lathes, so companies could remake broken drone parts on-site and quickly resume testing.

The airport bought several mobile air-command centers too, so companies could drive out into the countryside to fly their drones over varied terrains, like canyons, forests, pastures and rivers. Most recently, with the help of a \$3 million federal grant, the airport built a 100-acre industrial park with lightning-fast internet.

**Efforts yield results**

The result of all this work and spending: Pendleton has become one of the most popular of the federal government's seven drone testing sites, with up to 1,000 take-offs or landings every month.

Retired Air Force Col. Stan

*See Drones, Page A8*

