

DEBT: 'We set this goal and we'll do our best to meet it'

Continued from Page A1

"We've had some recent donations that gave us some additional cash. You don't make much on interest these days, but you can save quite a bit if you pay off some debt. It's something we feel is important," Davy said.

With rapid health care

changes in the wind — including falling reimbursements for hospital care, as well as projected decreases in patient volume — Davy said that quickly carving down the hospital's debt saves hundreds of thousands of dollars over a period of time. "That money can stay in the system and help us thrive instead of us sweating

down the road as the system gets tougher and tougher," Davy said.

Davy and Wanner created a debt list with suggested order of payoff. "Typically, with the 'snowball theory' you start off with your lowest loan, pay it off, and then roll those payments into the second one," Davy said.

The hospital deviated somewhat from the plan, electing to pay off the medical office debt first, although one of the hospital loans is smaller.

"The reason we're starting there is because the clinic debt adjusts to current market rates in 2017. So if the interest rates go up substantially, and odds are that they will, that could

get expensive," Davy said. The current strategy calls for the hospital to pay approximately \$1.5 million over and above scheduled loan repayments each year. At that rate, the hospital's 30-year loan shows a payoff in 16-17 years with a projected savings of more than \$4.5 million. "It adds up quick if you just keep

chipping at it," Davy said. "Of course this is predicated on our current economic status stays similar to the present. If it decays, it could push it out; if it gets better, it could shorten it. If you don't set goals, you don't accomplish anything. We set this goal, and we'll do our best to meet it," Davy concluded.

REPORT: Results expected in December

Continued from Page A1

Houston suggests those results will include some potential construction costs and potential use levels for the proposed trail.

A man who has spent years working with State Parks to design and develop public trails throughout the state, Houston has no interest in voicing an opinion about whether the proposed 63-mile trail beside the rails between Elgin and Joseph could happen. "I just want us to get through the conceptual planning," he says. "I look no further than December."

WURA owns the railroad line and has made it clear from the start that, among other things, all decisions in regard to a proposed trail will be made by the WURA board of directors, that the rails will remain in the ground, and that WURA will incur no expenses in the construction of any future trail.

According to Houston, some answers to questions most frequently asked by the public will not be addressed until the final report, if at all. Common concerns he has heard include what the total cost of such a trail would be, where money would come from to finance the undertaking, and what steps would be taken long-term to maintain the trail.

And yet, says Houston, "there are many, many ways to move forward."

Unknowns still to be addressed include whether the trail would vary in width at different locations, whether

it would include all or part of the 63 miles, the level of volunteerism that would be required to make the effort feasible, and much more.

Still, says Kurtz, much work has been accomplished on the feasibility study since the effort was launched last summer.

Among those things, she says, was a push to interview 26 persons; a land use assessment; a main street assessment; a cultural and historic properties assessment; and a physical rail corridor assessment. All of the information compiled during those studies is available for public review at <https://www.eou.edu/rails-with-trails>.

Terry Edvalson, an active participant in the Rails With Trail push since its inception, says at least one survey again to explore public interest on the bi-county trail issue will be circulated in either April or May. Houston is hoping there will be two separate surveys in March or April — a general survey and a scientific, random survey.

Were results from the feasibility study, when presented in December, to lead the WURA board to determine it wished to move forward with the construction of a trail alongside the railroad line, Houston suggests grant money from such sources as state and federal governments, the Oregon Department of Transportation, private sources, and foundations might be tapped to help foot the bill.

"But," says Houston, "it's all about public sentiment and patience."

CEMETERY: Board agrees to turn irrigation water back on

Continued from Page A1

It covered the cemetery's history, its importance to the community, and what she and dozens of others in the room viewed as a bare necessity: watering. "I would appeal to this board (to reconnect the water)," Hays said.

Convincing the cemetery's directors to reconnect the water system was Friends' foremost goal. To accomplish it, Hays and fellow founding members Gail Swart and Sondra Lozier marshaled the support of scores of citizens who turned out for the Feb. 5 meeting.

As stated by Lozier during her turn in front of the board and public audience, the grassroots group also aims to boost public attendance at cemetery board meetings, and maintains a database of individuals interested in being contacted about cemetery matters.

The issue of the brown-in-summer cemetery has been festering since 2011, when directors chose not to upgrade the cemetery's connection to the city water system after a city crew replaced the city's side of the connection, which until then had come through a wooden pipe. Part of the cemetery side upgrade would have included installation of multiple backflow devices (although currently only one backflow device is contemplated), upping the upgrade cost estimate to around \$6,000. Although



Rob Ruth/Chieftain

Sondra Lozier (standing, wearing black dress), a member of Friends of the Enterprise Cemetery, a group organized in response to three years without irrigation at the cemetery, reads a prepared statement during a Feb. 5 meeting of the cemetery district's board.

the cemetery district could have covered that cost, to board members it appeared that more pricey matters — aging maintenance equipment and a loss of volunteer labor for both irrigation and maintenance — were coming to a head, rendering reconnection a pointless expense at that time.

And those challenges remain.

"You're all excited about the watering," board member George Hill told the

Feb. 5 audience. "Once the watering's in, somebody's got to do the irrigation."

District voters soundly rejected a November 2014 ballot measure proposing a nearly sixfold increase in the district's permanent tax rate. The district planned to use the added income to reconnect the water, purchase a new above-ground irrigation system, and pay for landscape maintenance services. Even if the mea-

sure had won with voters, though, it apparently wouldn't have passed muster legally: district officials learned after-the-fact that they couldn't lawfully raise the permanent tax rate.

In the defeat's aftermath, information that surfaced concerned not only the ballot measure's viability, but also the feasibility of installing an underground sprinkler system, which could simplify the irrigation task. Based on a landscape maintenance firm's assessment, the board had concluded that an underground system would be prohibitively expensive, and possibly couldn't even be made to function, given the area's hydrology. At the Feb. 5 meeting, however, another landscape professional, Dale Worden, of Enterprise, disputed that past conclusion. Worden cited successful installations of underground systems at cemeteries in Cove and Union under more trying conditions.

"Six or eight years ago the hydrology wouldn't allow it, but it will today," Worden said. And he further argues that the system can be purchased for considerably less than the board originally thought.

The board and members of the cemetery supporters group are likely to examine the issue in greater detail when the meeting begun Feb. 5 continues in March, date and time to be announced.

WOLVES: State delisting recommended

Continued from Page A1

- Unlikely that the species or its habitat will be over-utilized for commercial, recreational, scientific or education purposes.

- Existing state or federal regulations already protect the species.

County Commissioner Susan Roberts, who read the resolution aloud at the Feb. 2 meeting where the BOC passed the measure, said the county would now send the resolution to the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission, the state body that decides the wolf's endangered status.

In 2011, the federal government delisted Oregon's wolf population east of highways 395, 78 and 395. ODFW records show at least seven breeding pairs now in the eastern part of Oregon. A breeding pair constitutes an adult male and female with at least two pups surviving until December of the year.

The Oregon Wolf Management Plan contains three phases of management objectives, which in theory perform a separate function from the ESAs of the federal or state governments. Phase one involved a wolf population objective of four verified breeding pairs for three consecutive years. When ODFW recently confirmed the state had met that goal, the management plan automatically slid into phase two, a transition that didn't require action from the Fish and Wildlife Commission. The commission decides the delisting from the ESA but not the three phases of wolf population management.

Wallowa County rancher Todd Nash, who chairs the Oregon Cattlemen's Association's wolf committee, told the county commissioners

last week that every level of the ODFW he knows of intends to recommend delisting of the wolves to the Fish and Wildlife Commission. He added that after the April 24 commission hearings, a public comment period follows until the July or August commission meeting, when that state board makes its decision. Nash urged the county commissioners to submit the resolution, saying, "Some pressure from you guys or anyone else will certainly be appreciated."

The county commissioners passed their resolution unanimously.

Nash said that while he appreciated the resolution's support for delisting wolves, he doubted it would have much bearing

on the state commission's final decision. He did express hope for the current process. "It's my gut feeling that the ODFW is going to submit to the April 24 commission to go ahead and delist the wolves, and I feel the commission will delist the wolves sometime in July or August."

Rob Klavins, Northwest Oregon field coordinator of Oregon Wild, told the Chieftain, "There's been an expectation from a lot of people that now that we've hit this milestone, wolves are going to be delisted. What's feeding that perception, is that it's called a delisting process. I would make the argument it could just as easily be called a re-affirmation of protections pro-

cess. Internally, we're calling it a status review."

Klavins added, "Nobody ever signed off on the fact that once we hit goal, we're done and we automatically delist or keep them on the list. It is a process that everyone agreed to."

ODE OWED TO STEVE LEAR

Thank you, old buddy for your good words to nourish my mind, your good food to nourish my body, and your good heart to nourish my soul!

Love,

Sharon Sherlock

Did You Know...

According to Google:

The true yam is native to Africa and Asia and usually only found in specialty markets in the US. So, what are we eating, yams or sweet potatoes? A famous



American once said, "I yam what I yam!" I think he knew!

Email questions and thoughts to sherri4@myfrontiermail.com

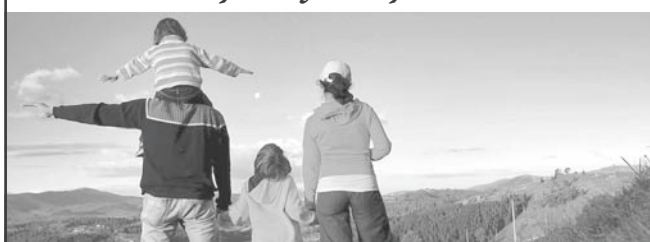
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