

# Bicycle playground hoped for in Wallowa

Plans would allow 'anything with wheels'

By **BILL BRADSHAW**  
Wallowa County Chieftain

WALLOWA — Enterprise got one this year, and Wallowa hopes it will next year — a park that local kids on wheels can call their own.

Ron Pickens, who spearheaded getting Enterprise's skateboard park not only revamped but totally rebuilt, is behind a similar effort in his home community of Wallowa for "anything with wheels," he said Wednesday, Sept. 29.

"My hope with it is that when a kiddo pulls up and sees it that it's friendly, fun and inviting, very much like a playground," he said. "(Kids can) utilize bikes, scooters, roller blades and skateboards. It's this colorful space that kids can play in."

The town of about 800 people has virtually no place for kids who want to get out on their bicycles, skateboards, roller blades or scooters to go — except the streets.

"I think it'd be awesome," said Mali Wilson of Lostine, who is one of Pickens' alternative education students. "Instead of going straight home, we'd have somewhere to ride and practice some skills."

In fact, the ninth-grader is so keen on bicycling, he rides his bike from Lostine every day.

"This kid's an avid bicyclist. He's got it. We've got another one converted to the 'dark side' of cycling, or the 'light side,' I guess we should say," Pickens laughed. "The bike provides an opportunity to stay healthy and active versus the alternative of being indoors playing video games and being sedentary."

Pickens has contacted the American Ramp Co. from Joplin, Missouri, the company that provided the new ramps and other obstacles at the Enterprise park.



Bill Bradshaw/Wallowa County Chieftain  
**Ron Pickens and a group of enthusiastic Wallowa youths stand atop a hill in the middle of what could become the town's bicycle playground next year. From left are Mali Wilson, Noah Wenke, Tony Owings, Pickens, Maddex Kendall, Hunter Reeves, Cayden Ence, Josia Surber and Aleigh Weaver.**



Bill Bradshaw/Wallowa County Chieftain  
**Ron Pickens, left, discusses with a group of Wallowa youths what could become a new bicycle playground behind the schools Wednesday, Sept. 29, 2021, in Wallowa.**

"It's going to be for 'all of the above.' This track is what you call a modular-style pump track," he said, going over a diagram of a sample park. "They manufacture these pieces of concrete in Missouri. They put it on an 18-wheeler and ship it out here and they piece it together like a puzzle and build this series of rollers with these banked corners."

The park would include various obstacles, such as a sloped track, ramps, hoops,

pillars and others.

### Youth support

As Pickens talked, about a dozen enthusiastic youths gathered around to listen and offer their input.

"We haven't had anything like that around here in a long time," said Maddex Kendall, a Wallowa High School ninth-grader.

Sophomore Hunter Reeves agreed.

"We all skateboard, and there's no place around to

skateboard," he said.

Josia Surber, an eighth-grader, said youths find ways to make do.

"The best we've got is either the concrete on the main road or when they lay new pavement on a street," he said.

Even adults were there offering their input.

WHS counselor Kathryn Kemp said she took a couple local youths to the Enterprise park in August and even learned a bit about her own ability on wheels.

"I tried my hand at it and immediately stumbled and fell off, so I don't think I'll be skateboarding," she laughed. "But I've heard from a lot of kids that they just want a place that's theirs, somewhere to go after school."

She asked the group what they usually do after school.

"We just go to our houses and hang out inside because there's nothing to do outside," Surber said.

Pickens asked the kids there if they'd been to the Enterprise park since it

opened. Most said they had not, citing the close to 20-mile distance as an obstacle.

"Having something like this in their community is crucial," he said.

### Paying the bill

But such a plan won't come cheaply. At present, Pickens has no idea what it would cost.

"We're going to be hitting the grant process pretty heavily," he said. "By mid-October, we'll have a number of grant applications out there. With the four that we're submitting, it's not going to be enough to cover the cost of this. It seems like December's the next time to start submitting more grant (applications.)"

Although he's not sure, he hopes the park can break ground in June or July and should only take a couple or three weeks to complete.

In Enterprise, Pick-

ens originally planned to upgrade the existing park, keeping the costs low.

But his efforts got a surprise \$51,500 anonymous gift so he was able to expand his plans, and with donations from Building Healthy Families — where the Alternative School is — the city of Enterprise, community groups, private individuals and businesses, they brought in about \$77,000 and were able to add to their original plans.

### Local support

Pickens is, as yet, unsure how the Wallowa project will be received, but he's optimistic and has been getting positive feedback from people other than the students who will use it.

"I'm excited about it," he said. "I'm super stoked that the school's on board with it."

He also has surveyed parents.

"Last year, we sent a survey out in the school to get the word from parents, if they wanted to say anything, if they thought there was adequate recreation in the community," he said. "The results were interesting. Definitely, the community recognized that they'd like to see something."

He also plans to approach the Wallowa City Council. He said he's discussed it unofficially with Mayor Gary Hulse, but any city decision would have to come from the council.

"I will be chatting with the City Council at their next meeting Oct. 19," Pickens said, before telling the group gathered, "I'd love to have any of you guys come with me to the City Council meeting in the evening. ... All I'm going to ask from them is a letter of support."

He said such a letter would be to include with grant applications he writes. But he's also hoping the city could provide tangible support, as well.

## Railroad authority mulls derailment mishap

No one hurt, no serious damage during Sept. 4 incident

By **BILL BRADSHAW**  
Wallowa County Chieftain

ELGIN — A minor mishap on the Wallowa Union Railroad topped the discussion when the track's governing body met Tuesday, Sept. 28, at the Elgin Depot.

Wallowa County Commissioner Susan Roberts, who co-chairs the Wallowa Union Railroad Authority with a Union County commissioner, said that on Saturday, Sept. 4, a brake on the trailing engine of the train had not been released, causing it to heat up, which caused a portion of the track to lay down flat. That led to a minor derailment of that locomotive between Minam and Elgin.

She said none of the passengers was injured and all

were safely evacuated from the train.

"That was a minor derailment," Roberts said Monday. "They just jacked it up, put her back up and replaced the brake pad."

The authority also discussed maintenance issues, which included repairing the area where the train derailed. Also discussed were work to keep the rails in good shape, brush-cutting during the coming winter and keeping the railroad right-of-way open for the future.

"That's what we started it for in the first place was to keep that right-of-way open, not to run an excursion train," Roberts said.

The commissioner said that during the financial report, she noted that the authority was running a bit short because it had to close down the excursion train last year because of the coronavirus pandemic. Although the train has been operating this year, finances are still a bit short.

Without any income to do that, in becomes a bit untenable," she said.

Roberts did say an Oregon Short Line tax credit had been applied for and received.

The authority replaced the Howard Creek Bridge in Minam Canyon early this year. The commissioner said the authority will be reimbursed \$23,000 through the tax credit.

In other business, the authority:

- Heard a report from the Joseph Branch Community Trail that the city of Elgin applied for a state grant to do

a feasibility study on the first mile of track out of Elgin.

- Considered a proposal by the Eastern Oregon River Outfitters, which in the past, had asked about doing fishing trips in the area and returning rafts and equipment on flatcars pulled by the train. Roberts said no one from the outfitters attended the meeting, so the matter was tabled.

- Set its next meeting for 5 p.m. Nov. 9. Roberts said it is hoped the meeting will be held in Wallowa, but the location has yet to be decided and will be announced prior to the meeting date.



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