

Tribe seeks input for possible 2024 opening of charter school

By Katherine Warren
Smoke Signals staff member

About 30 people attended a 90-minute community input meeting regarding the Tribe opening a charter school on Thursday, Nov. 9, in Tribal Council Chambers.

Curriculum and Personal Development Program Manager Justine Flynn and Shawash Academic Teacher Adam Langley were the presenters with Tribal Council Chief of Staff Stacia Hernandez managing the ZOOM link.

The Grand Ronde Tribe has been thinking of opening its own charter school since at least 2019 when Tribal members voted in favor of the idea 643-549 during an advisory vote.

In January, Tribal Council approved a professional services agreement for a charter school feasibility study with GLAS Architects of Eugene. The firm was contracted to examine options, such as opening a kindergarten through fifth-grade or kindergarten through 12th-grade school, and also examine operational models and funding possibilities.

Flynn said there are three phases that staff have determined and provided a QR code to a survey link for community members to provide input as to what they would like to see as well as what they think about the phased process.

Phase 1 would feature kindergarten through sixth-grade students attending a full day with three full-time teachers, three assistants and one special education case manager. Flynn said the school could start teaching Tribal students as early as the 2024-25 school year with full days looking like 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. The first phase has its challenges, she added, such as staffing increases as well as what to do about food services.

Phase 2 would be open enrollment across kindergarten through sixth grade having one classroom per grade. Educational offerings would continue with the language/culture model with math and science instruction included and having a homeroom staff. It would require hiring four more teachers and four more assistants. The second phase also would mean expansion of food services as well as transportation.

During these two phases, Flynn said the Tribe will need to continue to push for legislation with the state of Oregon for school compacts that are



similar to Tribal compacts in Washington state. Staff are also investigating infrastructure that supports seventh- through 12th-grade students and how to support athletics whether on the Tribal campus or with a local school district, such as Willamina.

Flynn said a compact school is a model that needs to pass through state legislation and would operate similar to state-Tribal compact schools in Washington. It would authorize federally recognized Tribes to create schools through a compact with the state and the Tribe would maintain full control of the school while having guidance and regulations directly with the state.

Phase 3 is dependent on infrastructure at the Early Education building, Flynn said. The Tribe already has two staff members who teach social studies and language. The Tribe also has other departments that can help support Tribal student needs, such as Natural Resources for science and Culture for art.

The next step for Phase 1 is a survey for community members to fill out and working with the Language Program staff to plan expanded days, Flynn said.

Tribal member Peter Grout asked if the Grand Ronde Tribe was looking at partnering with other Tribes to get more footing with potential legislation?

Tribal Council member Denise Harvey said that some Oregon Tribes have a charter school and they have a contract and can't get out of it for quite some time, such as the Umatilla Tribe in eastern Oregon.

"Lisa Leno and I will be at the NCAI (National Congress of American Indians) conference and there will be Tribes from Washington so there will be people we can talk to about these issues," Harvey said.

Education Manager Angela Fasana said the Tribe is on the right path to open a charter school in September 2024. ■

Tribal Council approves sixth supplemental budget

By Danielle Harrison
Smoke Signals editor

Tribal Council approved a sixth supplemental budget for calendar year 2023 of \$1.87 million during its Wednesday, Nov. 8, meeting to cover costs for funding the construction of five houses in the home ownership development project east of Grand Ronde Road off McPherson Road.

A lending misunderstanding affected five potential buyers, who were incorrectly notified that the Housing & Urban Development Section 184-approved lender 1st Tribal Lending would not provide loans for new construction on Grand Ronde Tribal lands despite HUD guidelines stating that new construction is eligible for the federally-backed loans.

With the Tribe approving the supplemental budget, the five homes will not be classified as "new construction" and that will streamline the lending process with 1st Tribal Lending or another approved Section 184 lender for the families seeking to own homes in the project.

The new supplemental budget, along with a \$2.326 million supplemental budget approved in August, means the Tribe will own the first 20 homes being constructed by Scholten Construction.

Interim General Manager and Tribal Finance Officer Chris Leno has said that when the Tribe eventually sells the homes, the proceeds will then come back to the Tribe.

In other action, Tribal Council:

- Approved a limited waiver of sovereign immunity with Apple Agreements so that the Tribe's

Information Systems Department can continue to use the software to manage Apple devices for the Tribe;

- Approved an application to the Institute of Museum and Library Services Native American/Native Hawaiian Museum Services grant program for \$112,506 for the purchase of two visual rolling vault systems;
- Approved an application to the Oregon Department of Education Integrated Community Partnerships grant program for \$292,384 to provide funding for an academic coach, field trip costs and family literacy nights;
- Approved appointing Tiffany Keppinger to the Education Committee with a term ending on March 31, 2025;
- Approved a \$1.5 million contract with Portland general contractor Lease Crutcher Lewis for remodeling work at the Sheridan Inn, which will be converted into a residential treatment facility for Tribal members. The Tribe purchased the property for \$1.8 million in June;
- Declared a per capita payment distribution date of Tuesday, Dec. 12;
- And approved Tribal Council member Lisa Leno as a delegate to the National Congress of American Indians, all other Tribal Council members as alternates and approved annual membership dues of \$30,000.

To watch the entire meeting, visit the Tribal government's website at www.grandronde.org and click on the Government tab and then Videos. ■

Tribal nonemergency text line

The Grand Ronde Tribal Police Department has a nonemergency text line at 541-921-2927.

"If you have a nonemergency situation or question, feel free to contact my officer via text through this line," said Grand Ronde Tribal Police Chief Jake McKnight. "When one of my officers receives the text, they will call you back when they have time."

McKnight said that emergency situations still require calling 911.

For more information, contact McKnight at 503-879-1474. ■

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Tribal Council

Holiday Party

Spirit Mountain Casino

Saturday, December 9, 2023

10 a.m. to 1 p.m.
11:30 a.m. Lunch buffet

Hot Chocolate Station