

Council approves grant application, pauses Elders Committee

By Danielle Harrison
Smoke Signals editor

Tribal Council approved an application to the Federal Highway Administration for a \$9.9 million grant to help with infrastructure improvements at tumwata village during its Wednesday, Dec. 18, meeting.

If the funding is secured, the Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity grant will be used for expenses such as project inspection fees, demolition and removal, construction and equipment costs.

“In particular, this funding will be used for the roadway and utility infrastructure around block six (of the property) that includes four streets,” Community Development Manager Kristen Svicarovich said during a Tuesday, Dec. 17, Legislative Action Committee meeting. “So, because the Tribe qualifies as a historically disadvantaged community under this federal funding opportunity, there is no required federal match. We believe this project will be really competitive...so being able to show consistency with a lot of those planning documents really helps in these grant applications...I’m really excited about this funding opportunity.”

- In other action, Tribal Council:
- Approved commercial timber sales of the Tseqw Thin Logging Unit and the Paya Logging Unit to Round Valley LLC;
 - Approved a \$100,000 grant application to the Oregon Community Foundation for the Arts and Culture Rebuilding Program;
 - Approved an interagency agreement between Tribal Council and the Tribe’s Engineering and Planning Department due to American Rescue Plan Act funding stipulations in order to carry forward for construction related projects at tumwata village;
 - Approved the purchase and sale agreement for the 52.2-acre Deer Path West property near Falls City. The Tribe acquired the adjacent, 57.8-acre Deer Path East property in December 2023 and expects to close on Deer Path West in January;

- Approved an indemnity agreement with the Bureau of Indian Affairs for the 6-acre Agency Block 1 property located northwest of Highway 22 and Grand Ronde Road;
- And approved enrolling one infant, enrolling four non-infants and re-enrolling one non-infant because they meet the enrollment requirements in the Tribal Constitution.

In other news, Tribal Council Vice Chair Chris Mercier read aloud a statement from the council regarding the Elders Committee.

“Tribal Council met with the Elders Committee this morning and had a productive discussion about the need for Tribal Council to provide clear and consistent guidance to the committee on policies and expectations. We have received reports from Tribal Elders and staff, requiring further attention and we need to update applicable Tribal ordinances and committee bylaws and policies. As a result, it is in the best interest of the Tribe and its Elders for the committee to take a break from all official activities, including the upcoming committee member election, until Tribal Council and the committee have had an opportunity to review and make recommendations on ordinances, bylaws and policies. We discussed with the committee, the upcoming Elders events such as the Christmas party will still continue through Elders Activity Center staff.”

Mercier then introduced a motion directing the committee to take a break on official Elders Committee business, including the 2025 election of members until Tribal Council, in consultation with the Elders Committee, has developed appropriate ordinance amendments and revised bylaws and policies, and to direct that the Elders activities continue through Elders Activity Center staff until further notice.

This resulted in an hour-long discussion, with several Tribal Elders expressing their dismay with how the process was handled, including the posting of a letter

about the committee at the Elders Activity Center. However, others thanked council for putting a pause in place until everything could be sorted out.

“I’m sorry we didn’t deal with this more promptly,” Mercier said. “It’s been a long, very un-fun day.”

The council approved the amend-

ment 6-1, with Denise Harvey casting the dissenting vote.

Tribal Council member Brenda Tuomi and Chairwoman Cheryle A. Kennedy were out on medical leave.

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



Contributed photo

Tribal Council member Denise Harvey, front row, fourth from right, joined in a group photo with fellow attendees of the White House 2024 Tribal Nations Summit in Washington, D.C., on Monday, Dec. 9.

Summit included panel on investing in Indian Country

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what we’ve been able to achieve the last 4 years, that would be great.”

The White House Tribal Nations Summit, re-initiated by President Joe Biden in 2021, is a time for administration and Tribal leaders from across the country to discuss ways the federal government can strengthen nation-to-nation relationships as well as ensure that progress made in Indian Country continues.

The summit began with the Native American Women Warriors Color Guard bringing in the colors and the Warpaint Drummers of North Carolina performing an opening song, followed by an invocation.

Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland (Laguna-Pueblo) provided opening remarks.

“Early on in my tenure as secretary – when this building was unfamiliar and the road ahead packed full – I knew one thing for sure: That while my role as secretary was new, my intentions for Indian Country were not,” she said. “I knew that it was my job – our job – to achieve enduring progress for our people with the time we were given. ... Transitions are disruptive, regardless of how we might feel about one leader or another. That’s true on Tribal Councils, and it’s true in Washington. We don’t know what the future may hold, but what I want to focus on today is the enduring progress we have made – progress that, no matter what, cannot be taken away, as long as we continue to press our voice and our action forward.”

The summit included a panel on investing in Indian Country featuring several federal and Indigenous

government leaders, remarks from White House Office of Intergovernmental Affairs Director Tom Perez, followed by lunch prepared by Indigenous chefs from the North American Traditional Indigenous Food Systems.

The afternoon included remarks from White House Domestic Policy Advisor Neera Tanden and Vice President Kamala Harris.

Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs Bryan Newland (Ojibwe) led a panel on strengthening the nation-to-nation relationship between Tribes and the United States.

Harvey also had the opportunity to visit with Tribal member and Bureau of Indian Affairs Director Bryan Mercier, who was selected for the position in September. Mercier previously served as regional director of BIA’s Northwest Region.

Harvey had two big surprise moments during the summit: The first was seeing her face on a training consultation video from the Department of Interior and the second was an impromptu selfie with Biden.

“I was surprised the (Secret Service) let me get that close and that Biden knew how to take a selfie,” she said with a smile. “I was trying to get someone to take a photo of us with my phone and he just took mine, put it on selfie mode and took a photo.”

Harvey spent Tuesday, Dec. 10, at the gaming association meeting.

“Knowing the members of Congress and people who came to speak are looking out for us is good,” she said. “They know how things are potentially changing but building on those existing relationships is key...There is a responsibility to carry on the (government’s) trust responsibility (to Tribes).” ■

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