

SCHOOL GROUNDBREAKING TOMORROW

The South Lane School District will hold the official groundbreaking ceremony for the new Harrison Elementary School tomorrow, Thursday, March 23 at 4:30 p.m. at 1000 Taylor Ave. in Cottage Grove. Councilman Faye Stewart, Superintendent Krista Parent and Cottage Grove Mayor Jeff Gowing are expected to speak. The public is invited to attend.

FireMed Continued from A1

some residents had racked up a dozen free ambulance rides within a year.

The changes will also affect Life Flight which partners with SLFR. The rate associated with Life Flight will increase to \$65, a change that, according to a Life Flight representative, hasn't happened in over a decade.

While the program has introduced a new helicopter to its services, winter has the crew grounded for much of the time. During the season, Life Flight can assist SLFR with transfers up to 15 times in a month. Those transfers, however, are taking place via vehicle and not helicopter.

"It's wear and tear on the vehicles, it's man hours when we have to go out of town," Raade said. But out of town is becoming a more frequent occurrence.

According to Raade, SLFR can travel with patients as far as Albany, Corvallis, Salem and Portland. He noted that during a busy season,

Life Flight was asked to take a patient to southern Washington due to the capacity levels at area hospitals.

"It's nothing new in America," Raade said of the scarce hospital bed room. "But it's new for Oregon. We saw a change when the Affordable Care Act was passed and people started using emergency rooms as doctor's offices."

Changes to FireMed and Life Flight charges will be sent out with applications later this year. Once residents subscribe to the service, FireMed covers the household, rather than a person. The definition of household, however, is in accordance to federal tax law.

"We're pretty traditional in our interpretation," Raade said. "If you can claim someone on your taxes, they are covered in your household."

"Covered" consists of being assisted by SLFR staff for a medical emergency or being transported by ambulance to the hospital whether it be inside Cottage Grove or as far away as Portland.

"FireMed covers that," Raade said. "If you're injured anywhere in Lane County or where they have FireMed."



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ROADS Continued from A1

"Between the Vintage Inn and KFC, that is 100 percent, guaranteed because of the heavy trucks," Meyers said of the damage on the road.

And those trucks do not contribute funds if the city were to pass a bond measure. Only residents inside the boundaries of the city would be subject to payment.

"There are people who drive on the city roads every day but they live just outside of Cottage Grove," Meyers said. "Those people would not have to pay for the bond. But they would have to pay for the gas tax."

However, with the gas tax voted down by residents, the city is left with potholes but little funds to repair them.

Additionally, several bridges in town have been marked for urgent repair, splitting the financial pie even further.

"The estimates for the bridges, right now, is about \$400,000," Meyers said. "We have just over \$300,000 so I don't foresee there being a lot of money left over to do much more than patch work on the roads."

Other options for road repair include replacing the pavement with gravel. The method has been used in town before, but according to Meyers, it comes with its own set of issues.

"It's cheaper," he said, "but it's gravel. So in the summer you have the dust and in the winter you have the mud. That is really for the roads that have totally failed." Meyers also noted that the city invested in its infrastructure by initially paving the roads. "Are we doing a disservice to those who had the foresight to pave the roads by replacing them with gravel?" he asked.

The city is asking residents to log on to its website to report particularly bad potholes

around the city but Meyers said some responses show how much work needs to be done.

"Some people send in entire streets. N. 6th St., S. 16th St.," he said.

Of the nearly 46 miles of paved roads in Cottage Grove, only 6.83 miles of them are considered in excellent condition. Others, according to the city, show evidence of failure, including the infamous "alligator" pattern which sprawls down many streets within the city.

"We can slurry seal some roads but if we spend the money to keep a good road in good condition, we can't fix the bad roads. So what do we do?" Meyers asked.

The state of Oregon is currently grappling with transportation funds for both metro and rural areas. However, the state has its own budgetary shortfall to close.

"They may increase the transportation package," Meyers said. Currently, Cottage Grove receives \$500,000 from the state. "If that goes up by \$200,000, we could start on some projects," he said.

Currently, the city plans to address the bridges in need of repair and utilize some patch work on roads. Estimates are due back for the bridges in the next month and at that point, the city council and the community at large will have a better financial picture.

"When we get the cost back, the city council will have to decide whether we want the Swinging Bridge, something that looks like the Swinging Bridge or another bridge," Meyers said.

The bridges are at the top of the infrastructure list with roads closely following but without the gas tax and the state trying to cut a budgetary shortfall, the roads in Cottage Grove may not improve greatly in the near future.

"I'm not sure where we get the money," Meyers said. "At this point, we are where we are."

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