

Cottage Grove Est. 1889 Sentinel



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WEATHER

Chance of showers with a high of 79 and a low tonight of 46.
Full forecast on A5

COLUMNIST

Mary Ellen — Pet Tips 'N' Tales
A5

LEISURE

CG Speedway to host "Wallbanger"
B1

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Obituaries
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Listings and public notices
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Proposed budget approved for council

BY DAMIEN SHERWOOD
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The Cottage Grove Budget Committee approved the city's proposed budget for the 2021-22 fiscal year Tuesday night.

The proposed budget comes after a year of deep financial uncertainty, a year which also saw the

city launch a Small Business Emergency Loan program to offset local economic woes while taking advantage of CARES (Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security) Act reimbursements through the Coronavirus Relief Fund to invest in a number of pandemic-related relief items for the

community. Conservative budgeting and a number of other partnerships and projects helped the city navigate a fiscal year which essentially forced it to fly blind. Though vaccines have provided a silver lining this year, city staff created for the 2021-22 year a budget which assumes higher risk

levels will continue to bog down the economy. "Because of this continued uncertainty, we have again prepared a flexible budget that will allow some ability to adapt," said City Manager Richard Meyers in his introduction to the budget committee.

At \$39,855,653, the proposed budget is \$371,467

less than the previous year's. The proposed number does not include expected revenues from federal packages as rules and disbursement schedules have not yet been released. Meyers' introduction listed three guiding principles of

See **BUDGET** on A10



COURTESY PHOTO

Lola "Mickey" Maxine Partney, a long-time resident of Cottage Grove, was greeted by many longtime friends as well as family from Idaho and North Carolina to celebrate her 100th birthday on May 8. Around 75 people in all showed up for the three-hour open house birthday party. "[I'm] just amazed at how well she gets around," said granddaughter Jenn Caldwell. "I call her my Energizer bunny."

City adopts North Regional Park Master Plan

BY DAMIEN SHERWOOD
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On Monday, the Cottage Grove City Council adopted a resolution acknowledging the North Regional Park Master Plan as the guiding document for maintenance and development of the city's underutilized North Regional Park.

"I think it'll be an excellent first step to spark the imagination of the community," said John Larson-Friend, who has interned with the city and worked on the master plan project for the past year. North Regional Park encompasses an area sandwiched between the Coast Fork of the Willamette River and I-5, covering 58.7 acres, making it the largest park in Cottage Grove.

It's gun-like shape places it in a unique position to connect several points of the interest including the Cottage Grove Disc Golf Course, Middlefield Golf Course, the city's wastewater treatment plant, Cottage Grove Speedway, Western Oregon Exhibition, some northern residential neighborhoods and a strip of undeveloped natural area.

The master plan proposes to explore the various ways in which the space could be

used. "It has a high level of potential for being a really great park in Cottage Grove park system," said Larson-Friend during his presentation to the city council Monday night.

Last summer, the two surveys revealed public sentiment about the park space. Disc golf and general nature walks emerged as the most popular use of the space, though the park did not appear to be among residents' favorites.

Survey respondents displayed a desire to see more infrastructure such as trails, bathrooms, benches and better access points.

People also were interested in seeing some kind of safety measures. Several suggestions for improvements and use of the park appear in the master plan.

For example, while there is already a paved bike path which runs throughout most of the park, the plan supports expanding the trail system and placing waypoints.

"The park itself is has a lot of potential for having various types of educational spaces. It's a great space for the local history, art installations looking at

See **PLAN** on A9

SLMH welcomes new executive director

BY DAMIEN SHERWOOD
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After weathering a challenging year, South Lane Mental Health (SLMH) is embracing a new phase as it welcomes its newest executive director, Noah Zepeda.

Zepeda was born and raised in Oakridge, a rural upbringing he draws upon in framing his approach to the new position.

"I've always lived and worked in rural Oregon, especially rural Lane County, so I think I really bring to the table that I understand what rural com-

munities are dealing with ... and what the issues are," he said.

Zepeda has an undergraduate degree in business administration and a Master of Science Management from Southern Oregon University. He began working at SLMH eight years ago as the director of finance and operations and held that position until the executive director position opened up.

After previous Executive Director Damien Sands stepped down at the end of September last year, Zepeda and Director of Quality Terry Mastin filled in the



Noah Zepeda was chosen to fill the SLMH executive director seat last month.

position as co-interim executive directors.

"And all this was happening in the middle of the

pandemic," Zepeda noted. "So it was challenging. It was a lot of work for both of us. But we were able to make it through."

COVID-19 created a unique barrier to dealing with those who need mental health services by forcing the work and services to be conducted remotely.

"It was a real challenge for us to navigate going completely telehealth - teletherapy and telemedicine, doing tele-prescribing - it was something that we haven't ever done before," said Zepeda.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, the organi-

zation has seen a 40 percent uptick in requests for services. Near the beginning of lockdowns, SLMH received a grant through Lane County which helped them create a system for video conferencing and be able to purchase tablets for clients who might not have access otherwise.

Still, Zepeda recalled that some clients weren't interested in telehealth as a service.

On top of that, insurance companies had to come around to allowing the nonprofit to even bill for

See **DIRECTOR** on A10

Rotary members are making an impact in the fight against COVID-19 in our community. Rotary members around the world persevere. No challenge is so big that we can't make a difference.

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