

OREGON LEGISLATIVE EMERGENCY BOARD MEETS

Lawmakers balk at \$50 million aid to rural hospitals

By Dick Hughes
For the Oregon Capital Bureau

SALEM — Oregon legislators balked Thursday at loaning \$50 million in federal money to rural hospitals reeling from the coronavirus pandemic.

Members of the Legislative Emergency Board tabled the proposal so it could be reworked to include forgivable loans or straight-out grants. Several legislators said hospitals would be unable to take out loans, even at 0% interest for the first year as Gov. Kate Brown has proposed, and the allowable uses were too restrictive.

“This was federal money given to us to pass on to our rural hospitals. Why are we making it a loan program as the state?” asked Sen. Bill Hansell, R-Athena. “It’s wrong. It’s morally incorrect in my opinion. This money should be grants from the beginning. In that way, we

could actually help our rural hospitals.”

Thirty-three rural hospitals, including Saint Alphonsus Medical Center in Baker City, would be eligible. But Sen. Betsy Johnson, D-Scappoose, said the plan envisioned by Brown’s staff was the equivalent of throwing only a 6-foot rope to someone drowning 10 feet offshore.

“We would look so incredibly foolish if we allowed hospitals to go broke on our watch during a global pandemic,” Johnson said. “But there is all kinds of stuff wrong with what the governor’s folks have written.”

House Speaker Tina Kotek, D-Portland, noted that some hospitals are getting federal assistance, with Congress approving additional funding this week.

“I think we want to be cautious about how we don’t just unilaterally say everybody needs, frankly, free money,”

she said, “because there are a lot of businesses and a lot of places around the state that need that money, too.”

After a recess, Senate President Peter Courtney, D-Salem, called for tabling the proposal, saying Brown’s staff agreed with that move. No date was set for when the Emergency Board would take up the issue again.

The board did approve coronavirus-related funding for rent assistance, small businesses, domestic violence resources, COVID-19 testing for workers in long-term care facilities, and aid to jobless workers, such as undocumented immigrants, who are ineligible for unemployment insurance.

Many of the details have yet to be worked out. Legislative Fiscal Officer Ken Rocco told the Emergency Board, which for the first time was meeting by video conference, that it remained

unclear how much federal aid Oregon was getting and what restrictions accompanied the money.

Hospital officials from across the state had told legislators earlier in the week that hospitals cumulatively were losing \$13 million a day due to the costs of COVID-19 equipment, a state ban on nonurgent surgeries, fewer people receiving care in emergency rooms and other factors. More than 30,000 Oregon workers in the health care and social assistance fields have applied for unemployment since March 15.

Oregon Health & Science University announced Thursday that it was substantially reducing salaries and making other cutbacks to deal with a projected revenue loss during the next 28 months of \$1 billion to \$1.4 billion.

“It is not just the rural

hospitals that are struggling,” Sen. Elizabeth Steiner Hayward, D-Beaverton, who is a physician at OHSU, told her Emergency Board colleagues. “Every single health system in the state is struggling as a result of this.”

Brown announced Thursday that as of May 1, she was lifting the ban on elective medical and dental procedures. Steiner Hayward said that would help, but hospitals would take time to ramp up and have lost significant income in the meantime.

The board approved the 11 items on its agenda, all on a bipartisan basis and most of them unanimously. Much of the discussion centered on fiscal accountability for how relief money is spent and ensuring that rural areas benefit.

Legislators approved a new program under which businesses employing 25

or fewer workers could be eligible for state grants or loans if they have not received federal aid.

Rep. David Gomberg, D-Otis, said he had been concerned that coronavirus assistance had not been going to the smallest of small businesses, which are the economic backbone of his district.

“People are hurting everywhere,” he said. “According to the state economist, they’re hurting particularly hard in my part of Oregon.”

The state will contract with community development financial institutions to run the program, but Gomberg noted those institutions primarily are along the Interstate 5 corridor.

“I worry that it’s not going to support everyone equally,” he said, “that perhaps we’re focused on helping the most people rather than people who are hurt the most.”

SERIES FROM LOCAL HISTORIAN GARY DIELMAN EXAMINES 1864 LAND SURVEY OF THE AREA THAT WOULD INCLUDE BAKER CITY

Part 3: The first survey of what became Baker City

By Gary Dielman

From the first wagon trains in 1843 until 1862, the only road through future Baker County was the Oregon Trail, referred to in those days as the Emigrant Road. It traversed Baker County from Ontario to Farewell Bend, then up Burnt River Canyon, over the divide and down through Virtue Flat into Powder River Valley, and on to North Powder.



Dielman

From there emigrants continued to Grand Ronde Valley, over the Blue Mountains to Columbia River, and on to the emigrants’ ultimate goal — the Willamette Valley on the west side of the Cascade Mountains.

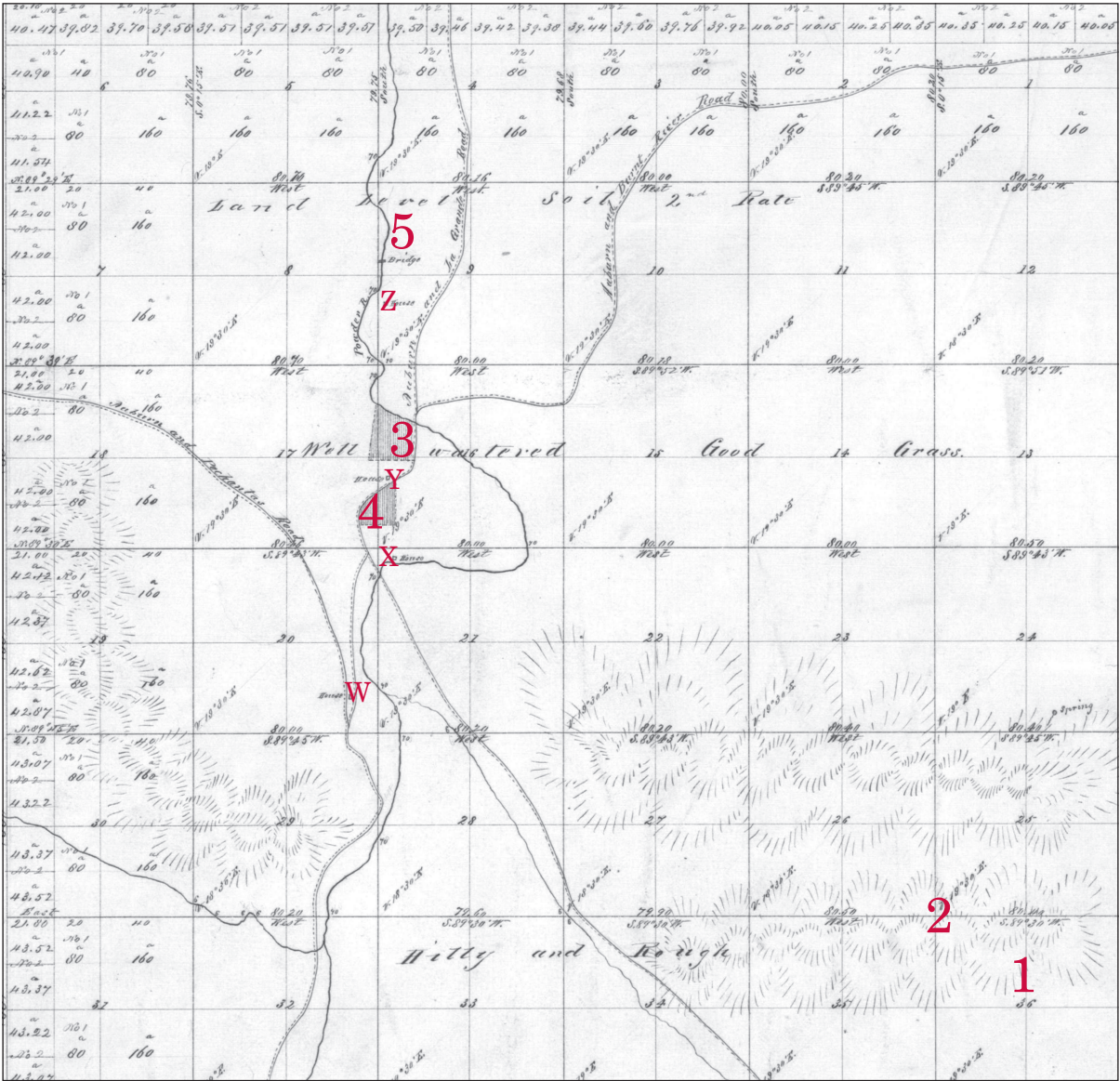
Except for The Dalles at the entrance to the Columbia River Gorge, there were no settlements in the two-thirds of Oregon that lay to the east. The slogan “Oregon or Bust” did not include eastern Oregon.

Spurning of eastern Oregon by emigrants changed abruptly as soon as word spread that gold had been discovered in October 1861 a couple miles southwest of future Baker City. In 1862 the glitter of gold lured thousands of miners, farmers, and merchants to far eastern Oregon. A mining camp named Auburn sprang up like a mushroom in the southern foothills of the Blue Mountains. By the end of the summer of 1862, Auburn could boast several thousand inhabitants. Simultaneously Canyon City and La Grande popped up in similar toadstool fashion.

The Oregon Legislature, eager to encourage settlement in the eastern two-thirds of the state, quickly created a huge, new county along the whole eastern border of Oregon and named it Baker County with Auburn as the county seat. Gold miners from California and southwestern Oregon flocked to Baker County. Gold mining activity attracted farmers and merchants to settle in the new county, where suddenly there was a market for their produce and wares. Anticipating a bright future in eastern Oregon, emigrants began putting down roots.

Not wanting to be considered squatters, emigrants sought legitimate title to land, which in all of eastern Oregon was “public domain,” i.e., land owned by the federal government. In order to get title, emigrants turned to the federal General Land Office, which administered sales of public domain land.

Aware of settlement taking place in eastern Oregon, the General Land Office in Eugene in the spring of 1863 contracted with surveyor Timothy Davenport to survey the outside borders of township T9S R40E, which I refer to as “Baker City Township.” Then in 1864 surveyors David P. Thompson and Daniel Chaplin got the contract to survey the 36 sections within T9S R40E. In a six-day period from May 13-18, 1864, surveyors Thompson and Chaplin and their assistants, Z.S. Dotson, James K. Stricklin, and A.J. Stricklin, surveyed all 36 square-mile sections in the six-



A map that includes the site of Baker City was drawn based on a survey that was done from May 13-18, 1864.

square-mile Baker City Township.

Surveyors Thompson and Chaplin began with section 36 in the southeast corner of the township — the red “1” on the map above. The crew surveyed north one mile on the section line between sections 35 and 36 and set a post to mark where the corners of sections 25, 26, 35, and 36 touched each other — the red “2” on the map. Next they surveyed east one mile between 36 and 25 to the east boundary of the township, then turned around and surveyed west a mile between 36 and 25, which functioned to confirm the correctness of their eastward survey.

Since land in the southeastern portion of the township was hilly — depicted on the map by short, roughly parallel lines — the surveyors recorded elevation gain or loss. Going north on the line between 35 and 36 was a gain of 400 feet. Next they followed the same pattern for surveying section 25, and so on until they reached the north boundary of the township at section 1. So, in order to survey one section, the crew had to walk three miles. Having surveyed the six sections along the east boundary, the crew hiked six miles south and began surveying the next column of sections. In the six days it took to survey all 36 sections of the Baker City Township, the crew walked over 90 miles or an average of about 15 miles per day.

After having surveyed all 36 sections, the surveyors wrote a general description of Baker City Township:

“The quality of land in this Township is generally 2nd rate. The northern portion is level soil good

2nd rate. The southern portion is hilly. All the Township is well watered by Powder River and by numerous springs through it. There is no timber except some cottonwood and willow on the River. There are about twenty settlers in the Township. This is a very fine Township for grass. Gold has been discovered in small quantities in the southern and eastern portions.”

The 1864 Baker City Township Map shows much more than section and quarter-section lines. It reveals a network of wagon roads with almost no evidence of settlement. In the center of what became downtown Baker City, the surveyors shaded in two areas to indicate tilled land. One field was about 5 acres (red “3” on the map) and the other about 3 acres (red “4” on the map) located one above the other about 1,100 feet apart. Today’s D Street is at the top of the north field and Court Street is at the bottom of the south field. Today’s Main Street runs through both fields.

The surveyors also put on the map four little squares labeled “House,” probably log cabins — red “w,” “x,” “y,” and “z” on the map. All four cabins were widely separated from each other within the area that became Baker City.

At the north end of future Baker City the surveyors placed a tiny bar over Powder River labeled “bridge,” located about 490 feet north of the present Hughes Lane bridge — red “5” on the map.

Today we’re able to follow many of the activities of the surveyors by reading their handwritten “field notes.” The survey contract

required surveyors to write field notes describing locations of posts set at all four corners of each of the 36 sections and at all halfway points marking the ¼ section lines between corner posts. Also recorded in the field notes are, for example, the distance from a given corner to significant land features, such as river crossings, including river width, depth, and whether prone to flooding, road crossings, farm fields, nearby trees, and nearby houses.

Also recorded were ascent and descent of hills, including elevation gain or loss. The field notes included comments about the terrain such as “steep,” “hilly,” and “stony,” plus agricultural qualities about soil type, available grass for animal grazing, and the presence of sagebrush.

The field notes gave exact locations of roads and streams only when the survey lines crossed them. The sketched-in routes of those roads and streams between the surveyed locations described in the field notes are not necessarily exact but rather estimations based on visual but not surveyed observations.

(The field notes for the 1864 Baker City township survey are available on this BLM website: <https://www.blm.gov/or/landrecords/survey/>.)

Where were the four cabins? One cabin (“W” on the map), owner unknown, was located in South Baker about 240 feet northeast of the intersection of Colorado and Fourth streets. A second cabin (“X” on the map) a mile north, was owned by Charles E. Place, who, beginning in 1862, operated a toll

road from Auburn to Burnt River. His log cabin was on the north side of Bridge Street and north of the old channel of Powder River. The bridge was a convenient place to collect the toll. Present-day Place Street was named for Charles Place.

(I should note here that I used Google Earth to translate field note locations into locations in present Baker City. Those locations may or may not be exactly correct. Probably the only way to be more exact, would be to do an on-the-ground survey, but I’m not a surveyor. So treat my location descriptions as estimates.)

A half mile north of Place’s cabin was Charles B. Fisher’s cabin (“Y” on the map) located on the west side of Powder River a little south of a stand of mostly cottonwood trees, which locals called Fisher’s Grove, present site of Geiser-Pollman Park. Those surveyor field notes are corroborated by a couple of newspaper reports. The July 7, 1873, edition of the Bedrock Democrat, gave this location for the Fourth of July festivities: “The grounds at Fisher’s Grove (are) about one quarter mile from our city ...The grove was thoroughly cleaned of all underbrush.” A 1909 Morning Democrat article mentioned, “His (Fisher’s) cabin was located where Mr. P. Crabill’s residence now is.” The 1903 Baker City Directory gives the address of Philander Crabill’s two-story house as 2300 Resort, present parking lot of the Dollar Store (earlier occupied by Albertsons).

Fisher successfully filed a claim on land from the east side of Main Street to Powder River, which is known today as Fisher’s Addition to Baker City. Later Fisher acquired farmland on the east side of town, part of which became Mount Hope Cemetery.

The 1864 surveyors indicated there was a fourth cabin (“Z” on the map) about 800 feet south of today’s Hughes Lane. Field notes say the cabin belonged to Thomas Finlay, probably a misspelling of Finlayson. The 1870 Federal Census for Baker City did not list Thomas Finlay, but did list Thomas Finlayson, a 45-year-old Scottish farmer with personal and real estate worth \$10,000, making him one of the richest men in the county. Living with him were his wife, Margaret, 46, also from Scotland, and their four daughters ages 7 to 15. The family came to Baker County in 1862. It was probably Finlayson’s cabin that the 1864 surveyors discovered on the east side of Powder River, south of Hughes Lane and east of present Kirkway Drive.

The cabin was south of where the surveyors showed a bridge over Powder River about 400 feet north of the present Hughes Lane bridge. Finlayson probably built the bridge to access farm land on the west side of Powder River. At that time the surveyors showed no road in that immediate vicinity.

The series will continue in the Herald’s April 30 issue.