

Governor examines hailstorm’s impact in Wallowa

Gov. Kate Brown called damage from Aug. 11 storm ‘unbelievable’

BY BILL BRADSHAW
Wallowa County Chieftain
WALLOWA — Gov. Kate Brown was struck nearly speechless as she viewed the hail damage still evident in Wallowa from the Aug. 11 storm during a visit to the community last week.

The governor spent about 30 minutes on Friday looking around Wallowa City Hall and discussing the damage with about 20 people who showed up for her visit.

“It’s unbelievable,” she said. “We have some friends who live here and they showed something on Facebook. It was tennis ball-size hail. I’ve never seen anything like that.”

Looking at the marks left as scars on the doors of the west side of City Hall, Brown was amazed at the pattern the hailstones left.

“It’s like we just came from an art gallery,” she said.

Brown felt the dents in the metal siding and viewed nearby buildings, such as the Wallowa Senior Center, where the siding was virtually shredded.

At City Hall, Wallowa Mayor Gary Hulse showed the electric meter that had to be replaced.

“Every meter on a west-facing wall was damaged and had to be replaced,” he said.

A window near the meter remains boarded up. The hail shattered windows, sending shards of glass into the council chambers.

During the visit, Brown asked about recovery efforts.

Christy Lieuallen, a co-chairwoman with the Blue Mountain Long-Term Recovery Group, explained how the nonprofit will be directing efforts. She said group representatives have come to town already and would return from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Friday and Saturday at City Hall. They plan to meet with owners of damaged property to gather information about what they need.

“Everything is by case number; we don’t ever talk about people’s names. They just come and tell their story,” she said. “Then, if they are still in



All the windows on the west side of the former United Methodist Church in Wallowa, many of them stained glass, were knocked out by a hail during a storm that passed through town Aug. 11. The siding, too, was seriously damaged.

need of some help, they will be assigned a case manager and that case manager will help them build their disaster recovery plan.”

More money?

Although Brown requested that the state Joint Legislative Emergency Management Board approve \$2 million toward recovery for Wallowa — a request the board approved Sept. 23 — no one Friday was certain that the money would be sufficient.

“This’ll be kind of a pilot deal to see if it’s going to work,” Hulse said. “From there, every time they have a disaster, they would turn (the money) over to a nonprofit.”

Rather than it going to the mayor or the Wallowa City Council, Hulse said, “This independent group will come in and set the parameters.”

The pool of \$2 million will remain in state coffers waiting to be requested for recovery work.

“Blue Mountain will come in and make arrangements for (property) to be fixed up and then they will request the funds from the state,” Hulse said.

Lieuallen said she wasn’t sure if the



During a visit Friday, Gov. Kate Brown examines hail damage from the Aug. 11 storm to the back door of Wallowa City Hall as Mayor Gary Hulse discusses the storm.
Bill Bradshaw/Wallowa County Chieftain

\$2 million would be adequate. “With the amount of insurance we have in the community — I don’t know yet,” she said. “We don’t have enough information to really understand how much. We know that many have insurance. We know that the damage was around \$6 million, but that’s just a ballpark figure in damage.”

Lieuallen said the purpose of the funding is to restore people and their property to pre-storm conditions.

“We’re only trying to make people safe, sanitary and functional,” she said. “It’s not our goal to make them

better than they were before the hailstorm. I am so proud of the state for giving \$2 million to this community. It’s really, really amazing that they’re doing that.”

Asked if more state aid is possible, Brown said it is.

“My sense is the Legislature is open to meeting the community needs,” she said.

“I think this was just a first investment into the community. We wanted to get a better sense of what the damage looks like. Obviously, folks who don’t have insurance or are underinsured, we want to make

sure insurance covers first and get a full sense. There’s another e-board (meeting) in December, so I believe that would be another opportunity, as well as the 2023 legislative session. This is an initial investment in the community to help meet the needs of the community right now.”

Winter is coming

But the biggest need is preparing for winter.

Hulse said as much as \$40,000 has been donated to assist in relief and is in an account at Community Bank.

“We’ll take that out as seed money for Christy (Lieuallen) to start insulating windows,” he said.

Brown was impressed at the community’s generosity.

“That’s a significant amount for this community to raise,” she said.

Lieuallen cautioned that Wallowsans need to be patient.

“It’s not all going to happen before winter,” she said. “We’re going to have to make sure they’re secure for the winter and then in the spring, after the snow melts, the recovery work can begin. We’ll be ready, but how do you replace a roof in the middle of winter with a couple of feet of snow on it? How do you replace windows in the middle of winter? We’re just going to have to be really patient and get these homes secure for winter.”

Hulse said the top priority is getting residents secured for winter. Insulating and installing windows are the first order of business, but there’s a shortage of windows, so many homes will have to rely on plastic coverings.

“Getting windows is so far out. Some people are saying it’ll be eight to 10 weeks,” he said. “Well, in eight to 10 weeks, we’re going to have snow. We’re going to start off by getting those windows insulated. On the roofs, we’ve got contractors working seven days a week.”

He said that so far, he hasn’t heard of any trouble in obtaining materials from roofing contractors.

Lieuallen said the priorities are money, manpower and materials.

Though he was pleased the governor took the time to personally come and view the damage to his town, Hulse was upfront and practical as he bid Brown farewell.

“Thank you for coming over and giving us money,” he said.



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