



The Eagle/Richard Hanners

Chief Dispatcher Valerie Maynard keeps track of numerous computer monitors at the John Day Emergency Communications Center.

911

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This drain on the city's general fund affects efforts to diversify and strengthen the city's economy, Green said.

A countywide levy would be more equitable, Green said.

"Right now, John Day residents pay about \$60,000 per year more than they would if the other cities (in Grant County) also contributed on a per capita basis, and the county pays about \$25,000 more per year," he said. "We both split the deficit, but not proportionally."

Green said the previous John Day city manager, Peggy Gray, attempted to invoice the rural fire districts to help cover the deficit, but the \$500 per district that the city could expect "never made sense" for a \$450,000 operating budget, he said. Green also sent a proposal to the other cities for sharing the cost.

"Some cities responded favorably," he said. "I believe Prairie City went so far as to budget for the cost, and Seneca may have as well."

By state law, the local option tax can only fund the dispatch department for five years and can be reduced or rescinded if additional state funding becomes available. Green notes that the 75-cent telephone surcharge for 911 hasn't been adjusted since 1995, despite steadily increasing costs.

"New services like digital address mapping, text to 911 and geo-location of emergency calls have improved the accuracy and timeliness of emergency responders, but they have also added to the cost to deliver 911 services," Green said.

Green traveled to Salem in February and March to lobby state legislators, including Sen. Ted Ferrioli, R-John Day, and Rep. Cliff Bentz, R-Ontario. The result was a \$420,000 special appropriation that will cover the funding gap for the next biennium.

That will provide the city and the county with time to work on a long-term funding solution through the state legislature. Doubling the telephone surcharge to \$1.50 per month per line would elimi-

nate the deficit and leave a little surplus, but "at \$1.25 we'd break even," depending on how the legislature structured the fee, Green said.

If the ballot measure fails, the city will follow up on talks to outsource 911 service to Frontier Dispatch, a regional dispatch center in Condon, Green said.

"I think the million-dollar question residents will want to know is what happens to our 911 service if this local option levy doesn't pass?" he said. "The answer to that question is that they will still have 911 service — it just may not be local 911."

The impacts of outsourcing are three-fold, Green notes — the loss of six jobs at the emergency communications center in John Day, transferring duties to dispatchers who are not familiar with the history and geography of Grant County, and losing control over dispatch costs in the future.

"Our dispatch operators provide a critical public safety service for our county," Green said. "While they are employees of the city of John Day, they represent each of us and respond to every call for service, regardless of where it originates. They answer the phone on the worst days of our residents' lives. Their work is admirable, and their dedication to our community should be revered."

Ballot forum slated

The Grant County Chamber of Commerce will host a forum on the ballot measure at the Senior Center in John Day on Wednesday, Oct. 18 at 6 p.m.

According to state law, public employees may not support or oppose measures, candidates, recalls, petitions or political committees while on the job during working hours.

A public employee who appears at an event as the representative of the jurisdiction is considered to be on the job, the League of Oregon Cities advises.

While elected officials are not considered public employees, they are prohibited from directing other non-elected public employees from engaging in political activity.

OFFICES

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That doesn't include the gymnasium space in the former junior high school, which can be used for large gatherings. Waggoner has served as an adult 4-H volunteer for more than 20 years and started working at the local extension office in 2008.

"The Grant County extension office was established in 1926 — the last one in the state," she said.

Everyone at the extension office helps with the Grant County 4-H program. Shanna Northway is the county leader, which has 219 members and 44 adult volunteers in 23 clubs across the county.

The year-round program culminates in the county fair with more than 400 exhibits submitted by 4-H members.

The clubs meet six times a year as the members develop their projects and learn by doing. The annual Lake Creek Youth Camp jointly held in Logan Valley by Grant and Harney counties provides five days of activities for 110 members. High school 4-H members serve as counselors for children in grades 4-6.

"The kids get to know each other as they participate in classes, hiking and other activities," Northway said.

This past summer's camp theme was Dr. Seuss. Next year will be "circus." Local 4-H members can also attend an Eastern Oregon leadership retreat and a statewide summer conference on the Oregon State University campus, where they stay in dormitories and visit the O.H. Hinsdale Wave Research Laboratory and learn about tsunamis.

The 4-H program is diverse and includes a foreign exchange program. Several local members have traveled to Japan or other countries, and a local family hosted a Japanese member through 4-H.

Northway, who has a master's degree in agriculture education and has taught agriculture science at Grant Union High School, is in her fourth year at the local extension office. She assists local

“We fill in the gaps for small schools for college and career readiness. We help students visualize what it's like to live outside this area.”

Didgette McCracken
open campus coordinator

farmers and ranchers with questions about hay, forage, livestock, and weed and pest control.

"We are the middlemen between Oregon State researchers and locals," she said, offering help in collecting soil and hay samples and providing pesticide classes.

Northway also fields questions about horticulture and gardening. Waggoner helps coordinate the Master Gardener Program, which is taught by locals or OSU faculty from January through April.

Didgette McCracken is the open campus coordinator. The open campus concept has existed under OSU's Department of Outreach and Engagement for about 10 years, but is new to Grant County, she said. The program's three goals are economic and community development, promoting college and career readiness, and assisting in degree completion.

"The Innovation Gateway project in John Day has all of these components," she said.

The extension service's new office includes a large room that can be used for meetings or classes, and a smaller room that can serve as a computer lab. Locals will be able to use the facilities to take online courses or to proctor online tests, McCracken said.

McCracken, who taught in public schools for 20 years, joined the extension office in June 2016. She notes that smaller rural schools in the county sometimes need help providing guidance counseling. She also helps students learn job interview skills through career fairs.

"We fill in the gaps for small schools for college and career readiness," she said. "We help students visualize what it's like to live outside this area."

Christal Culley is the office's education program

assistant and works with the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), teaching elementary school children about nutrition and physical activities.

"We do a pre-evaluation to see what the children know and a post-evaluation to see how their behavior changes," she said.

This includes switching from sweets to vegetables and making better nutrition choices. Culley provides the children with recipes to follow, such as a pasta salad with half a dozen different vegetables.

"Parents send us photos of their children making these better choices," she said.

Culley, who worked as a preschool teacher and for School District 3, provides students with activity ideas and encourages them to exercise for at least an hour a day. She also works with the 4-H program.

"Fair is one of my favorite things to be involved with," she said. "I love to see youths grow and learn within their projects."

Culley said she is starting something new this year — providing a series of mini-sessions on leadership and communication for fifth and sixth graders.

"The sessions will take place before school starts," she said. "It will provide a fun and engaging way for the kids to learn and build on some life skills."

Kristal Hansen is the STEM program coordinator at the extension office. This is her second year providing a combined science, technology, engineering and math program for students at Humbolt Elementary School.

Last year, about 40 fourth- and sixth-graders signed up to attend STEM classes on Fridays from 9 a.m. to noon. Students visited Blue Mountain Hospital to learn about jobs in the health industry.

They also visited colleges in La Grande, On-

tario, Redmond, Prineville and Bend.

"The students had to commit to a full year," Hansen said.

This year, with a smaller grant funding the program, the STEM program will only be offered to fifth-graders starting in November. The focus will be on trades and careers, including the construction and mechanical trades.

Hansen said she saw a strong turnout at last year's Family STEM Night. This year's event will be held in March instead of November, she said.

Bob Parker handles forestry services for Grant and Baker counties and works out of an extension office in Baker City.

He assists family forest landowners in setting goals for how their timber holdings will look and produce.

This could include thinning, harvesting and tree planting. He also has provided a number of workshops on defensible spaces for homes in an urban-wildland interface.

"Quite a few family forests were impacted by recent area fires," he said, citing the 2015 Canyon Creek Complex as an example.

Parker points to the Ritter Land Management Team, a collaboration of private timber and ranch owners, as a "great success."

"The goal was to improve management on a watershed scale, including juniper removal, noxious weed control and finding markets for raw materials," he said.

Every two years, the extension service in Baker City offers Tree School East for people from around Eastern Oregon.

The one-day event with about 24 classes will take place next April, he said. Parker, who has a master's degree in forestry and worked for many years in the private forest industry, also participates in the Lake Creek Youth Camp, teaching young students about forest management.

The Grant County Extension Service is located at 116 NW Bridge Street, Suite 1, in John Day. They can be reached by calling 541-575-1911.

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