

Monument making infrastructure upgrades

Grants finance water and sewer projects

By Richard Hanners
Blue Mountain Eagle

The city of Monument has just wrapped up a wastewater improvement project and applied for grant money for improvements to its public water supply system, according to City Manager and City Recorder Dorothy Jordan.

A federal grant was used to install a chlorination system to treat wastewater from the lagoons before it's land-applied by sprinklers, she said. The grant was also used to purchase emergency generators for the wastewater plant, and an existing federal loan was refinanced through the U.S. Department of Agriculture, she said.

Monument's water system has one well and a storage tank on a hill above the football field providing water for the city's 130 residents through 83 commercial and residential hook-ups, she said. A high-water event in 2011 drove the need to upgrade the system.

"The well was deemed



Contributed photo/Jeanne Strange

Buckaroo Festival grand marshals Betty Richards, left, and Donna Campbell sit together at this year's event in September. Tom Campbell was the third grand marshal.

"under the influence of surface water" by the Oregon Health Authority," Jordan said.

The city received a technical assistance grant from the Oregon Infrastructure Finance Authority to study the best options to avoid a repeat of the 2011 problem. An engineering firm recommended the city draft a water master plan, Jordan said, but OHA said Monument was too small to require a water master plan and turned down the city's application for a Community Development Block Grant to

pay for the plan.

"The city council didn't want the ratepayers to bear the burden for something intangible like a water master plan, so we looked at other options," Jordan said.

The city is currently under an administrative order issued by OHA that requires a solution by January 2019, Jordan said. The city plans to hire a firm to draft a preliminary engineering report to determine if a filtration system for the well will solve the problem and how much a filtration sys-

tem will cost to install and to operate and maintain.

Scott Fairley at Business Oregon said the state is wrapping up the paperwork for another \$20,000 grant to pay for the preliminary engineering report. The engineers will determine if it's more cost effective to put in another well or install a filtration system for the old well.

In the meantime, the water is chlorinated and safe to drink, and the city has implemented small rate increases over the past few years in anticipation of needed improvements, Jordan said.

Monument recently signed a contract with Western Display Fireworks for next year's Fourth of July celebration.

"We put on the best fireworks show in Grant County," Jordan said.

Funding for the display comes from generous donations from community members, she said. The successful Buckaroo Festival in September raised money for the Monument Senior Association, which maintains the community's senior center, and Mayor Sahara Hyder has applied for state grant money to improve the city's downtown park, Jordan said.

County welcomes new hires, shuffles offices

Repairs completed on library, fairgrounds fixes coming

By Richard Hanners
Blue Mountain Eagle

Road, building and office projects were the highlights for the county in 2017, Grant County Judge Scott Myers told the Eagle.

Roadmaster Alan Hickerson said preparation work was completed on County Road 18 near Magone Lake, including cattle guards and brush-clearing, in preparation for chip-sealing in 2018.

Federal government crews in 2018 will rebuild County Road 73 near Drewsey, which has a bad base and pavement, Hickerson said. Work will begin on the Granite road project in 2018, with seven miles of 33-year-old pavement and four new bridges needed to replace culverts. The county will provide a 10 percent match for the project, which could run around \$8 million in total, Hickerson said.

New hires for the county include Katee Hoffman in the Veteran Services office and Allison Field at the Economic Development office. Myers said Field's grant writing abilities will be an asset for the county.

With the OSU Extension Office relocated to the Madden Business and Education Center in John Day, a shuffling of offices is underway at the county's L Building on Highway 26, with the Economic Development office moving into the former Extension Office location. The Emergency Management and Veteran Services offices likely will also relocate to the L Building, Myers said.

Both the Treasurer's and County Court offices were remodeled in 2017, with new carpeting and painting, Myers said.

New reader boards and a new audio system were installed at the Grant County Fairgrounds, Myers said. Planning continues for remodeling Keerins Hall — bids are being collected for a new roof, which could be installed in spring 2018. Myers



Contributed photo

Katee Hoffman was hired as Grant County's new veterans service officer in 2017.

said volunteers likely would hang new siding on the hall.

A leaky library roof in November 2016 resulted in about four months of remodeling and repair, Library Director Vicki Bond said — including a new roof, a new wall, painting and new carpet. Books and bookcases had to be temporarily moved during the project, which concluded in late March. A new bike rack will be installed outside by February 2018.

Looking forward, the library will offer a program through the Dollywood Foundation and sponsored by Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative that will provide one age-appropriate book per month for children for their first five years, Bond said. Other programs include the monthly Lego Night, a music program starting in April and the Summer Reading program.

Grant County and other Eastern Oregon counties were represented at numerous Forest Service meetings in 2017 during the Malheur National Forest Plan revision, Myers said. County representatives were successful in relaxing grazing regulations and reducing the number of acres set aside for wilderness study areas or potential wilderness, Myers said.

Commissioners from Harney and Wallowa counties traveled to Washington, D.C., when the Forest Plan was presented. The final environmental impact statement for the Forest Plan is expected to be completed by July 2018, and work will begin next on the Malheur National Forest's Travel Management Plan, Myers said.

Quiet times in Long Creek

By Richard Hanners
Blue Mountain Eagle

Life is a lot simpler and quieter in Long Creek, City Recorder Marsie Watson told the Eagle.

The community's infrastructure originally was designed for 800 residents, but the city has shrunk since then.

"Everything's gravity-fed," she said. "The well pumps water to the tanks, but everything flows downhill from there."

Following a local resident's advice, the city paid to install a new motor starter for the well to protect electrical equipment.

The half-block city park



Contributed photo/Brian Burgess

People gathered to view the eclipse in Long Creek Aug. 21.

on Highway 402 is popular with local children, with swing sets, a merry-go-round and a basketball hoop, Wat-

son said.

"There's often someone using the basketball hoop," she said.

Watson said the city is careful with its limited budget, setting aside money for rainy days. With no growth in the community, the city often "reacts" to needs as they arise, she noted.

Long Creek's Fourth of July picnic is held to honor the city's founding fathers, Watson said. An all-class reunion is held about every five years. The community raised money to remodel the school's kitchen by holding an educational event during the eclipse, featuring personnel from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

"We had a good turnout," she said.

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for the project beginning July 1.

In addition to constructing a new wastewater treatment plant that will reclaim up to 80 million gallons of water per year, plans call for making the Innovation Gateway a community gathering place and an attraction for tourists. Plans include construction of a river trail and gardens, a commercial greenhouse that will grow 31 tons of produce annually and converting the former planer building into an open-air farmers market.

Portions of the Oregon Pine property will be sold, and the steel maintenance building will be utilized as a new city shop. A state Transportation Growth Management grant will be used to pay for design work starting in spring 2018.

Broadband

Improving internet access in Grant County as part of an overall economic develop-

ment plan became a city goal in 2017, and a task force was established to study broadband possibilities in the county. The mission was to retain and attract younger people and virtual commuters to the John Day area.

The two main internet providers in the county were CenturyLink, which brought internet to the county by microwave tower and provided DSL service over copper telephone lines, and Oregon Telephone Corporation, which accessed the outside world with fiber cable and ran fiber to homes and businesses in some areas.

Green traveled to Salem in February and successfully lobbied the legislature for \$1.8 million in state funding. A plan emerged calling for running a 144-strand fiber cable from the fiber backbone on Highway 20 at Burns 75 miles to John Day. The cable would

cross Forest Service land and hang on Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative power poles.

Grant County and Seneca joined John Day in establishing a Grant County Digital Coalition to decide how the legislative funding would be spent and how a broadband network would be built and operated in the county. Prairie City and Canyon City opted not to join the coalition, fearing unknown future expenses or obligations.

Establishing the coalition proved controversial, with opponents arguing that government should not compete with private enterprise, county taxpayers should not be on the hook for improving inter-city access for John Day residents and the new network should provide broadband to Long Creek and Monument and rural residents scattered between the cities.

Despite these objections,

the county court approved creating the coalition Dec. 13, but it will be March before the members can meet and start making decisions.

Main Street revitalization

Fearing that a prominent building in downtown John Day might close, forcing four ground-floor businesses to move and increasing blight on Main Street, the city council approved purchasing the Weaver Building and making improvements to the 120-year-old structure.

In June, however, the council learned that the 12,000-square-foot complex consisted of four buildings sharing one roof. The city had been awarded a \$100,000 Main Street Revitalization Grant to purchase the building, but fire hazards posed by failing electric sys-

tems and voids in walls indicated the project might require more restoration than anticipated.

Green described the building as "highly dangerous" and a "playground for fire." Deputy State Fire Marshall Dave Fields said the whole block could be lost if a fire started in the building.

The city closed on the property Nov. 16 and began to line up a \$200,000 loan to complete Phase 1 renovation work — interior demolition of the top floor, removal of hazardous materials, required structural reinforcement and constructing a fire separation between the first and second floors, Green said. Rental in-

come from the four businesses would pay off that loan in 10 years, he said.

The goal is to develop a mixed-use property, with commercial businesses on the ground floor and six condominiums on the second floor. Peter Baer of Pinnacle Architecture estimated the project could cost nearly \$2 million to complete.

Green defended the city's acquisition of the Weaver Building by noting that the private sector had not invested in renovating downtown buildings. If this project proved successful, perhaps more private investment in downtown John Day would follow, he said.

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