

Grants, loans to fund Mt. Vernon upgrades

Major face-lift for Phil Boyd Memorial Park

By Richard Hanners
Blue Mountain Eagle

Residents in Mt. Vernon will see construction crews in 2018 as two successful grant applications are put to work improving both the city wastewater system and Phil Boyd Memorial Park.

The city lined up \$2.5 million to address inflow and infiltration problems in its sewer collection system, according to City Recorder Tami Kowing. That includes a \$2 million Community Development Block Grant and a \$225,000 grant and a \$225,000 loan from the Oregon Infrastructure Finance Authority. HECO Engineering of Payette, Idaho, is heading up the project.

"HECO ran video cameras in the pipes a couple months ago to identify problem areas," Kowing said.

The city has 525 residents and about 275 sewer hook-ups. Mt. Vernon Mayor Kenny Delano said the city's sewer collection system is "not relatively old" and is made of PVC pipe, but some underground pipes may be broken,

allowing groundwater to enter. Some areas in Mt. Vernon experience high groundwater when flood irrigation takes place outside of town, but the problem is still under investigation.

The first phase of the project also will include replacing influent flow meters and control valves between the treatment plant's four cells. The facility, which was initially constructed in 1979, was designed to discharge effluent into the John Day River, but the plant never discharged into the river because lagoon seepage and evaporation rates exceeded influent flow volume, according to the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality.

The city submitted a report on groundwater effects by the sewage system in 2005, and DEQ evaluated the city's wastewater permit in 2009 and 2011. DEQ reported in 2011 that leakage into groundwater "was in the normal range for bentonite-lined lagoons and that the John Day River and groundwater was not impacted." DEQ concluded in 2011 that "no further groundwater investigation is required by the proposed permit."

Since then, however, lagoon leakage has worsened, according to a Business Oregon press release announc-



Eagle file photo

Paige Wolfe-Cloud and Ellen Wolfe-Cloud trade candy they collected at a past Cinnabar Mountain Rendezvous parade at the Mt. Vernon park. The park will get a face-lift, thanks to a state grant.

ing the Community Development Block Grant award to Mt. Vernon in November 2016. Tests found that "the lagoons may be leaking with subsurface flow to the river even though the city does not indicate that discharge is happening," Business Oregon reported.

Kowing said the current sewer project will focus on inflow and infiltration, but a later project will look at the sewage lagoons themselves.

cost to rehabilitate Phil Boyd Memorial Park to more than \$200,000.

It was a competitive grant, Kowing told the Eagle, and she traveled to Salem to present the city's application. Mt. Vernon ended up ranked fifth out of 15 Oregon communities vying for \$4.5 million in money from the Oregon Lottery.

Kowing explained in the city's application that Phil Boyd Memorial Park "is one of the first sights that travelers see when entering Mt. Vernon from the east." She said the park was "in desperate need of rehabilitating" and hadn't seen renovations to its playground equipment in 60 years. The park "is beyond its normal life expectancy" and did not meet health and safety code requirements, she said.

The city surveyed residents to gather suggestions and park usage information, and the city's parks committee is still determining how to spend the grant money, Kowing said.

Two thousand or more visitors use Phil Boyd Memorial Park through the year, including for events like the Cinnabar Mountain Rendezvous, Mt. Vernon Rural Fire Department Easter Egg Hunt, birthday parties, weddings, family reunions, picnics and class re-

unions. It also serves as a rest stop for tourists, Kowing said.

The 1.47-acre park includes a basketball court, tennis court, horseshoe pits, gazebo, ADA-approved restrooms, barbecue pits, playground equipment and open space with trees and bushes.

The city plans to install additional lighting and receptacles, upgrade the stairway on the highway side of the park, relocate the horseshoe pits and install new picnic benches, a flag pole and a drinking fountain. The big ticket items include \$13,000 for automated underground sprinklers, \$22,000 for drainage and \$141,476 for new playground equipment.

"Most of the money will pay for the new playground equipment," Kowing told the Eagle.

The older metal playground equipment will be replaced with natural-looking plastic that will last longer and not be hot to the touch in summer. The city typically spends about \$25,000 per year to maintain the park. The new LED lighting and irrigation system will reduce water and power usage, Kowing said.

"The city takes pride in the upkeep of our city park and will continue to keep up our excellent maintenance record," Kowing said.

Projects slated for Prairie City

June storm damaged water system

By Richard Hanners
Blue Mountain Eagle

Several infrastructure projects are slated for Prairie City in the coming year, Mayor Jim Hamsher told the Eagle. A \$1.8 million sewer main project will address cracked pipes identified by remote video, and well improvements will address water shortage problems experienced this past summer.

The sewer project will go to bid soon, Hamsher said. Work will begin along Highway 26 west of town, where a force main has been leaking. The city's wastewater is pumped over a rise to the city's lagoons, he said.

Additional work will be done around town to eliminate infiltration, which takes place in spring when groundwater is high. The goal is to reduce the cost of pumping the additional water that enters the pipes — first out to the lagoons and again to the spray irrigation system, Hamsher said.

A June 26 storm in Prairie City not only uprooted trees that crashed into houses and vehicles — lightning struck near the city's No. 2 well, damaging electronics that controlled the water system. A crew was in the process of investigating the well with video when the storm hit.



Contributed photo

A tree in Prairie City uprooted by a windstorm June 26.

The city already had concerns about water production from its three wells in summertime, and the storm damage just made the problem worse. Residents were asked to cut back on irrigation during the summer, and the city council gave Hamsher the authority to declare an emergency if the water supply reached a critical level.

The council wanted to ensure sufficient water existed for fire protection. The restrictions were lifted in October.

Hamsher said an engineer addressed the city council in December. The city's water master plan will be updated, and plans are being developed to either rehabilitate well No. 2, which has casing problems, or to drill well No. 3 deeper.

He said the city is also updating its water ordinance, including fees for overages. He said the ordinance hasn't seen a revision in a long time.

Meanwhile, cleanup work continues at the former Prairie Wood Products sawmill west of town, which closed in 2008. Crews continue to bury potash at the site, which will later be replanted, Hamsher said. There are no plans to scrap out the steel buildings, with hopes they will one day be put back to use, he said.

Hamsher said there are no immediate plans for the city's parks. Prairie City is home to three countywide events — a Fourth of July parade and fireworks, the Kruzers Car Show in August and Christmas on the Prairie in December.

Seneca begins planning for infrastructure funding

Projects could take three years to complete

By Richard Hanners
Blue Mountain Eagle

Significant infrastructure improvements in Seneca could be completed in the next three years, according to Assistant City Manager Raamin Burrell — including sewer, water, roads, parks and broadband.

Seneca will get a whole new sewage collection and treatment system. The \$3.5 million project will be financed with a \$2.5 million Community Development Block Grant and a \$500,000 grant and a \$500,000 loan from the Oregon Infrastructure Finance Authority, Burrell said.

Planning for the project began in 2012 but was delayed until the city became eligible for funding assistance. Sewer rates began to increase slowly three years ago so the city could take on the debt needed to get the project completed, she said.

Seneca has about 160 permanent residents and 130 to 140 active water and sewer hook-ups. Much of the sewer collection system was built before the city was incorporated in 1970, Burrell said.

"It's a mish-mash of different kinds of pipes, including asbestos cement," she said.

The new sewer plant will include a two-cell facultative wastewater treatment lagoon system built on the west side of the Silvies River. Burrell said staff at HECA Engineers of Payette, Idaho, are still studying whether to run sewer pipes over the river or boring under the river. The current treatment plant on the east side of the river eventually will be dismantled and removed.

HECA crews are also measuring the collection system throughout the city in preparation for putting the project out to bid. Burrell said the new treatment plant would be constructed first, beginning next year.

Additional infrastructure work will take place while the city's streets are torn up, including replacing water lines.

"Some of the water lines are older than the sewer lines," Burrell said.

The city had lined up a state Special City Allotment Program grant to repave Seneca's older streets but delayed the repaving until after other work was completed, she said.

Fiber cable also will be run underground to homes and businesses in town

while the streets are torn up. Funding for that work will come from the \$1.8 million provided to John Day by the legislature for a new broadband network in Grant County, Burrell said. Seneca, John Day and Grant County have signed on to a coalition to manage the network.

Seneca is also lining up grant money for a new fire station. The current facility is attached to city hall and provides barely enough space for Seneca's two "ancient" pumper trucks, she said. The city's three newer fire apparatus are out of action during the winter because there's no heated place to keep them, she said.

The city has been pre-approved for a U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development grant, which can be used to line up additional grants for a new fire station with three bays for the newer equipment, Burrell said.

Seneca is also looking for grants to pay for a new gazebo at the city park. The last one was torn down soon after the annual oyster feed in late May this year.

"We hold the oyster feed rain or shine," Burrell said. "We hope to build a larger building that could be temporarily enclosed during bad weather."

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