

John Day water and sewer rates inch higher

City manager says an end is in sight

By Richard Hanners
Blue Mountain Eagle

On its first meeting of the new year, the John Day City Council approved \$1 monthly rate increases each for both water and sewer service Jan. 9. Mayor Ron Lundbom and Councilor Donn Willey were absent.

The minimum monthly water and sewer bill for a John Day residence will increase from \$81 to \$83 beginning Jan. 1. This includes the base rates for water and sewer along with the Community Development Investment Fund fee, which will remain at \$6.

According to a 2017 water rates survey conducted by the League of Oregon Cities, the bill for 5,000 gallons of water delivered to a 3/4-inch service line ranged from \$14.51 in Glendale to \$108.80 in Klamath Falls. John Day was not included in the survey results.

John Day's water and sewer rates have been inching upwards for several years now, including \$1 each in December 2015 and again in December 2016. The council in the past discussed the need to raise the rates in order to qualify for state grants or loans.

In his memo to the city council, City Manager Nick Green said the water rate increase was necessary to "cover the depreciation of our capital assets in the water fund and to pay down the city's debt obligations for the West End Water System Improvements and the Industrial Park."

During council discussion, Councilor Dave Holland asked Green if the rate increases were sufficient to meet the city's goals looking forward.

Green replied in the affirmative, adding that an end was in sight. He noted that the city's new geographical information system software will enable the city to more accurately determine asset and depreciation levels to find the right balance.

"We're not there yet," he said. In the case of the sewer fund, Green noted that the city will know even more about its financial position once it has a final design chosen for a new treatment plant and the results become available from a community income survey.

"There's not much wiggle room," he said.

In a related agenda item, the council approved \$19,000 in budget transfers needed to upgrade the city's water metering system. About \$13,000 will be used to replace the city's billing software with a new cloud-based software, acquire a new handheld computer and replace the front desk workstation.

Council rejects requests to support National Parks System

Fossil Beds link not enough to sway councilors

By Richard Hanners
Blue Mountain Eagle

The John Day City Council at its Jan. 9 meeting turned down a request by the Pew Charitable Trusts to pass a resolution encouraging Congress to address mounting deferred maintenance costs in the National Parks System.

Pew's Restore America's Parks campaign provided the city with information about the growing maintenance backlog — about \$11.3 billion nationwide, \$105.5 million in Oregon and \$1.5 million for the John Day Fossil Beds National Monument.

John Day City Manager Nick Green explained that he typically blocked such requests from reaching the council, but he decided to forward this request to the council because of the proximity of the John Day Fossil Beds National Monument and the importance of tourism to the city.

Councilor Dave Holland noted that usually organizations seeking backing from the city ask for a letter and not a resolution showing support. Green said the trust provided the basic language for a resolution.

Councilor Gregg Haberly expressed his opposition right away.

"If it's a national park, I don't want anything to do with it," he said.

He expressed concerns about the money being used for other purposes — particularly buying additional land. Green noted that Pew was clear about not using the money to buy additional land.

Councilor Shannon Adair had reservations



EO Media Group file photo

A tourist sets up a shot of the Painted Hills in Central Oregon near Mitchell.

about the request being very political and not the best use of the council's decision-making efforts.

"We could each support this individually," she said, adding that she had been "on the fence about this."

Councilor Paul Smith noted that John Day saw a lot of traffic headed to the fossil beds, but Adair said she wasn't sure it was a city issue.

"Maybe we should defer to the county," he said.

Adair agreed that the maintenance backlog was an important issue, but approving the suggested resolution would mean the council also approved the specific dollar figures Pew cited, she said.

"It seems like they want local governments to do battle for their money," Haberly said. "My problem is that they don't have enough money to do maintenance, but they can buy additional land for national parks."

None of the councilors spoke in favor of the resolution.

According to literature provided by the Pew Charitable Trusts, deferred maintenance in the National Park System resulted from aging infrastructure, record visitation causing wear and tear and unreliable funding for maintenance.

Court updated on county's health department

By Richard Hanners
Blue Mountain Eagle

Representatives from Community Counseling Solutions updated the Grant County Court about the status of the county's health department Jan. 10.

Executive director Kimberly Lindsay said 100-150 children received free physicals during an event last year at Grant Union Junior-Senior High School, and the annual health fair this spring will offer free screenings. The department would need additional funding in order to expand the number of health providers, she said.

Commissioner Boyd Britton praised CCS's Warm Line call-in service (1-800-698-2392), noting that it had prevented some suicides. Lindsay said the Warm Line program was a top hit in Google searches.

Lindsay described CCS's difficulties in getting grant money and praised the "wonderful support from the county court." She said her No. 1 need right now was to support the indigent dental program in Grant County, noting that it's not an expensive program to fund.

Kathy Cancilla, the department's accreditation coordinator, reported that Grant County has two health-improvement plans and work

has started on a third plan to address items not covered by the other two. Staff will conduct surveys and hold public meetings to gather information for this new plan, she said.

Cancilla said the department's Living Well With Chronic Pain workshops were designed to help with opioid addictions. When asked what the department would do if Ballot Measure 101 failed, Cancilla said the tight budget makes it difficult to offer additional staff and hours. The court unanimously approved the department's 2017-2019 Strategic Plan.

In other county court news:

- The court approved a request by Andrea Officer, director of the county's Victim Assistance Program, to submit a Violence Against Women Act grant application. The court also approved establishing a part-time special investigator position pending approval by the court's legal counsel.

The \$610,000 provided by the three-year grant would completely fund the deputy district attorney and victim intervention specialist, partially fund an advocate with The Heart of Grant County nonprofit and pay for training and community awareness programs.

Existing budget funds could pay for the special investigator through most of this year, but new grant

money would be needed after that, Officer said. The previous three-year \$606,000 grant will run out Sept. 30, and VAWA grants are competitive, but Officer was optimistic about receiving the grant.

- The court approved a request by Emergency Management Coordinator Ted Williams to apply for a \$5,815 Department of Homeland Security grant. The funds will be used to purchase emergency radio communication equipment that can address blind spots across Grant County and serve as a backup voice and digital emergency communications system.

- The court approved several entertainment and lighting contracts for this year's Grant County Fair. It also approved moving forward with negotiations for the headliner act, Lonestar, a country-western group with more than 20 singles on the Hot Country Songs chart and the top country songs of 1999 and 2003 on Billboard Year-End.

- Britton reported touring the Malheur Lumber Co. mill in John Day with a visiting county commissioner Jan. 4 and learning about plans for a future torrefaction facility. Wood material would be heated and processed at the facility into energy-dense pellets or briquettes that could be sold to Japan as a replacement for coal and nuclear energy, he

said.

- County Judge Scott Myers spoke about an Oregon Department of Transportation project that will take place along Highway 395 south of Canyon City this summer or fall. Hazard trees on hillsides above the highway remaining from the 2015 Canyon Creek Complex fire would be felled and left laying along contour lines to prevent erosion.

- The court made the following board appointments: Cheryl Berry and Barbara Smith reappointed to the Airport Commission; Karla Averett reappointed to the Budget Committee; Donna Becker reappointed and Didgette McCracken appointed to the College Advisory Board; Jody Wildelman and Lenny Dowdy appointed to the Extension and 4-H Service District Advisory Council, with six vacancies remaining; Shanna Northway and John Girvin reappointed to the Fair Board; Robert Raschio and Kathy Smartt reappointed to the Mental Health Advisory Board; Doug Ferguson reappointed to the Southeast Area Commission on Transportation; and John Morris and Kenneth Moore reappointed and Jim Smith appointed to the Wildlife Advisory Board.

- The court's next regularly scheduled meeting will be Jan. 24.

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Under the leadership of a new captain, the first Special Forces team deployed to Afghanistan after 9/11 must work with an Afghan waload to take down the Taliban.
FRI & SAT (4:00) 6:45 9:30
SUNDAY (4:00) 6:45
MON-THURS 6:45

PADDINGTON 2 (PG)
Paddington picks up a series of odd jobs to buy the perfect present for his Aunt Lucy's 100th birthday.
FRI & SAT (4:20) 7:10 9:40
SUNDAY (4:20) 7:10
MON-THURS 7:10

JUMANJI: WELCOME TO THE JUNGLE PG-13
Teens discover an old video game console and are drawn into the game's jungle setting becoming the adult avatars they chose.
FRI & SAT (4:10) 7:00 9:35
SUNDAY (4:10) 7:00
MON-THURS 7:00

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