

South Canyon Boulevard sidewalk may not get built

Costs have doubled for a much smaller project

By Richard Hanners
Blue Mountain Eagle

Plans to build a sidewalk along South Canyon Boulevard connecting Grant Union Junior-Senior High School to downtown John Day sidewalks may have run into an insurmountable financial hurdle.

When the John Day City Council initially considered the project, they were hoping to construct a sidewalk from Fourth Avenue to the high school for about \$840,000, City Manager Nick Green told the Eagle.

"Where we stand now, we're getting half of that area in sidewalk for more than double the cost," he said.

The city was awarded a Multimodal Transportation Enhancement Program grant and a Special City Allotment grant that would partially fund the project, and the city council approved a design alternative on June 13, 2017 — a shorter project from Sixth Avenue to the high school.

The council chose a \$1.34



The Eagle/Richard Hanners

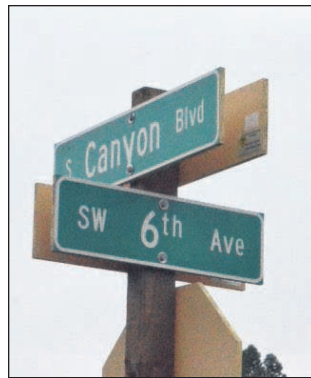
The John Day City Council may walk away from plans to build a sidewalk along South Canyon Boulevard from Sixth Avenue to Grant Union Junior-Senior High School because of skyrocketing costs.

million option that featured a 6-inch offset curb and a 13.5-inch swale between the curb and sidewalk for drainage. Bids were expected in 2018 with construction by 2019.

But the cost of the project increased significantly after the Oregon Department of Transportation settled a \$23 million lawsuit related to the Americans with Disabilities Act. The settlement approved by a federal judge in March 2017 committed ODOT to creating an audit of all crossings on state highways, com-

pleting curb ramp upgrades at 30 percent of the locations by the end of 2022, completing upgrades at 75 percent by the end of 2027 and fixing all of the curb ramp locations by December 31, 2032.

The audit, completed about a month ago, rated only 3 percent of the curb ramps on state highways as "good." Some were rated "fair," but most of the rest were rated "poor." In Grant County, every curb ramp was rated "poor," and many had no ramp of any kind. ODOT



The Eagle/Richard Hanners

Although the city of John Day was awarded funding for a sidewalk along South Canyon Boulevard, the cost of the project has increased to the point it may not longer be a viable option.

Region 5 Public Information Officer Tom Strandberg said the agency has been fixing curb ramps as it completes other work.

ODOT Transportation Project Leader Sean Maloney presented updated costs to the city council over the phone at their Feb. 13 meeting. He had been able to locate \$230,000 in additional funding from ODOT's Sidewalk Improvement Program, which brought the total funding available to just over \$1 million, he said.

But that was only enough for Phase 1 work — com-

pleting the preliminary engineering and design, acquiring all needed rights-of-way, relocating and replacing a shallow city water main and providing for contingency funding.

Funding for Phase 2 — the actual construction of the sidewalk and swales — would include leftover money from Phase 1 along with funding from the Safe Routes to School program that has not yet been awarded. Maloney said the city could apply for the Safe Routes to School funding this year, and if it was awarded early enough in 2019, construction could start that summer. Otherwise, construction would be delayed to summer 2020, he said.

Councilor Steve Schuette expressed concerns about tearing out old sidewalks to replace the water line and then leaving exposed construction work. Maloney said there wasn't much sidewalk there to begin with, but he noted that provisions would need to be taken to comply with ADA requirements.

Costs had gotten out of hand, Councilor Dave Holland noted. Several councilors asked about what it would cost to back out of the project, and Mayor Ron Lundbom asked whether many schoolchildren walked along

that section of the highway. Former councilor Lisa Weigum spoke up, noting that schoolchildren went to get pizza for lunch and that the wrestling team ran along that section of the road.

The council reached consensus that the city should approach Grant County about helping fund the project. They also directed Maloney to continue planning for the project in the meantime.

Green told the Eagle the next day that several councilors had approached him after the meeting with their concerns about the project's cost.

"They asked me to get back to ODOT to see what our buy-out provision is and what it would cost to cancel the project," Green said.

The city may have to walk away from the project, he said.

"I'm going to work with the school district over the next couple weeks, and we will put this on the agenda for our Feb. 27 meeting to discuss again," Green said.

But he was not optimistic. "I think there's a pretty good chance these sidewalks are not going to be built," Green said.

EO Media Group reporter Jade McDowell contributed to this report.

John Day Innovation Gateway project moving forward

Poor response so far to community income survey

By Richard Hanners
Blue Mountain Eagle

A poor return rate for a community income survey of sewer customers in John Day and Canyon City was the only setback cited in City Manager Nick Green's update on the Innovation Gateway project at the city council's Feb. 13 meeting.

Survey information will be used to determine if the community is eligible for a federal Community Development Block Grant that will help pay for a new wastewater treatment plant that will serve the two cities located at the former Oregon Pine property the city purchased in 2017.

Only 23 percent of surveys sent to 312 randomly selected customers had been returned, and the city needed a 90 percent response rate, Green reported. Volunteers will be sent out this month to contact households that have not responded, he said.

The city will need to budget a \$27,000 cash match for a \$200,000 state Transportation Growth Management grant for planning and design of the project. On Jan. 16, the city invited Grant County to

contribute an in-kind, no-cash match to assist in the effort, Green said.

The 2-acre area between the future city shop and the former planer shed was successfully removed from the floodplain map by the Federal Emergency Management Agency. The city's new greenhouse will be built in this area, Green said.

Surveying has begun for a trail system around the project area. Some of the trails could be open to the public by this summer, Green said. Improvements to an existing bridge are undergoing preliminary engineering analysis, and funding for the bridge work would be included in the funding request for trail paving, he said.

City staff were soliciting bids to repair and paint the siding of the former sawmill building to improve its appearance until a future commercial use for the building was decided, Green said. Some vandalism and theft of tools had taken place at the building, and the city plans to install video cameras in the area to increase security, he said.

The city council also unanimously approved a resolution to exempt the contract for the greenhouse project from the traditional competitive bidding process and allow an alternative design-build contracting method. No public comments were made during



The Eagle/Richard Hanners

John Day city staff will solicit bids to side and paint the former Oregon Pine sawmill building that the city acquired last year as part of the Innovation Gateway project.

a hearing on the resolution.

Under the design-build method, one party provides both design and construction services, which is common among greenhouse companies and will deliver "a better overall value to their clients," Green told the council.

According to findings in support of the resolution, the city has budgeted \$400,000 to build and equip a 5,500-square-foot greenhouse, including hydroponic systems, grow lights, mechanical systems, HVAC, "fertigation" and related equipment.

Projected operating costs for the greenhouse are \$150,000 per year, the findings say.

In other city council news: Mayor Ron Lundbom recognized in a proclamation the lifetime achievements of Donn Willey, who passed away Jan. 25. Willey served as a city councilor for nine years and "was a friend, mentor, advisor and colleague of city councilors and city staff both past and present," Lundbom said.

The council unanimously approved providing the \$4,945 in supplemental mar-

ijuana tax from 2017 to the Community Health Needs Assessment Substance Abuse Committee to support education on substance abuse issues.

The city received a request for the money from Blue Mountain Hospital District CEO Derek Daly in a Jan. 9 letter. Green has served as the chairman of the committee since January 2017.

Expressing his concerns about the failure of past substance abuse efforts in the area, Councilor Gregg Haberly asked for more information about how the money would be used.

Others on the council also expressed their concerns before agreeing to make a one-time payment for the requested amount from the city's Community Development Investment Fund in this fiscal year and then replenishing the fund in the next year's budget.

A similar request for marijuana tax revenue was made to the Grant County Court, but the item was removed from the Feb. 14 agenda.

The council approved a schedule for the fiscal year 2018-2019 budget process and appointed Green to serve

as the city's budget officer. Final budget proposals will be discussed during a March 5 staff meeting, and the proposed budget packet will go to the budget committee April 13. The council will hold a public hearing on the proposed budget May 22 and adopt the final budget June 12.

The city's Annual Public Safety Report/Briefing will be presented at the council's Feb. 27 meeting. The State of the City address will be presented at the council's March 13 meeting.

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