

**PLANT**

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by hog fuel from the Malheur mill or other sources.

The dried chips will be roasted in a 70- to 80-foot-long rotary kiln heated by the reaction inside, Krumenauer said. The torrefied material will then be cooled and compressed into briquettes for shipment. Torrefied biomass contains high energy with low weight, is stable and resists moisture.

Krumenauer said plans now call for trucking the briquettes to Prineville, loading them on rail cars and then shipping them to a coastal port for export, or to a domestic user. He said initial talks have been held with the Port of Longview in Washington.

One market for the briquettes is Japan, which is interested in substituting torrefied biomass for coal at electrical-generating plants, but additional negotiations with customers will take place over the following months, Krumenauer said. The U.S. Forest Service, which would be a main source of biomass for the John Day plant, has been very supportive of the project, he said.

"We are excited for the opportunity to partner with and support the torrefaction plant," Malheur National Forest Supervisor Steve Beverlin said. "It will provide additional infrastructure for processing biomass, like the new post and pole mill at Seneca."

Krumenauer said the plant will start small and ramp up production over the next three years. Possible future changes include loading wood chips in trucks returning from Prineville and using juniper trees as a source material.

The Endowment considers the plant to be an equity investment, but unlike the private sector, the Endowment is "more patient and flexible" about its investments, Krumenauer said. The Endowment is willing to take more risk in order to help forest communities, he said.

**911**

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Communications Center. The size of the 911 User Board increased from 18 when it was created in 1989 to 28 today.

Facing increasing and unsustainable costs, the John Day City Council voted unanimously in November to discontinue providing 911 dispatch service by June 30, 2019. The vote followed a failed ballot initiative that would have established a levy of \$38 per \$100,000 assessed value to support 911 dispatch service in Grant County.

According to Green's report to the board, the cost to run the 911 center was \$425,244 in fiscal year 2017. The costs vary from year to year as does revenue from the state 911 tax on telephone bills, which was \$274,501 in fiscal year 2017.

John Day received \$420,000 from the legislature to maintain 911 dispatch through the current biennium while a solution was found and implemented. A 911 Task Force reviewed three options — contracting with Frontier, forming a joint dispatch center with Grant and Harney counties or creating a new countywide entity in Grant County.

The Harney County option was not developed in detail, Green told the board. Harney County was interested in the idea but would not set up a joint center in Grant County, he said.

**The Frontier option**

Frontier Regional 911 serves Gilliam, Jefferson, Sherman and Wheeler counties and the Burns Paiute Tribe. It is the only multi-county public safety answering point in Oregon. Wheeler County Sheriff Chris Humphreys, who is chairman of Frontier's board of directors, spoke to the 911 User Board.

Frontier offered to provide 911 dispatch service to Grant County under a six-year contract for \$300,000 per year, which would come to \$30,000 after the average \$270,000 from 911 phone tax was accounted for.

Grant County would connect through the Frontier TeleNet system with a fiber optic backup for redundancy. Frontier offered to cover half the initial \$126,500 connection cost and was willing to finance the rest on six-year terms with no interest.

Humphreys said Frontier currently has 11 dispatchers and would need three more if it served Grant County. Priority would be given to hire John Day dispatchers, he said.

Humphreys said Frontier's dispatchers are familiar with pager problems and radio dead spots and sometimes need to go through name lists and phone trees just like they do in John Day. He added that Frontier's dispatchers learn local geography and names quickly, and he's never seen service degradation due to regional dispatch.

**Sharing the costs**

Whether 911 dispatch stays local or is outsourced, a cost-sharing system will be needed, Green said. An independent agency or a new county department will need to oversee it — John Day will no longer be financially responsible, he said.

The 911 Task Force found sharing costs on a



The Eagle/Richard Hanners

**Wheeler County Sheriff Chris Humphreys speaks on behalf of Frontier Regional 911 to Grant County's 911 User Board at the Oregon Department of Forestry building in John Day March 20.**

per capita basis to be unfair and did not recommend it. The Task Force instead looked at the Umatilla 911 Center's cost-sharing system and developed a hybrid model, charging per call as well as by jurisdiction based on assessed tax value not population

**911 user comments**

Grant County Sheriff Glenn Palmer brought up the idea of creating a special district under state law, similar to what's used for hospital, fire and cemetery districts. He noted that it could take several years to set up a special district that could establish a board of directors elected by voters countywide and could establish a tax to fund the 911 system if approved by voters.

Green noted that the 911 Task Force had not looked into raising taxes to fund 911 service.

In explaining their positions on local or outsourced dispatch service, many of the representatives cited the need for dispatchers with local knowledge, and several supported the idea of creating a special district to oversee dispatch.

Several wanted to somehow buy time until a special district could be set up or until the legislature increased the 911 tax on telephone bills when the law sunsets on Dec. 31, 2021. Grant County Judge Scott Myers, however, noted that it might not be wise to count on the state changing the 911 tax for the better — or making enough of an increase to help the financial situation.

Economic conditions will get worse, Palmer warned the board. The sheriff's office is running on a shoestring budget, he noted. Voters turned down the 911 ballot measure last fall and might not support creating a district, he added. With that said, he favored outsourcing 911 dispatch to Frontier.

Seneca fire representative Josh Walker said he couldn't approve of the Frontier option if Grant County would not have a voting position on the Frontier board.

Green said a smooth transition process will take place, with no abrupt change. But John Day 911 dispatchers are concerned, and a severance package has been suggested as a way to keep dispatchers on the job through June 2019.

**SCHOOL**

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determined that instead of being expelled, the student would be educated in an "alternative setting" for the rest of the semester.

Rohner-Ingram told the Eagle that she believes the current issue is that school policy is not being followed correctly.

"I expect the practices within the district to follow the policy, and most importantly the law," she told the Eagle. "I believe the board should diligently review whether this is happening within each school in their district. It is my opinion that on at least one occasion, if not more, Grant Union High School is not following the law regarding student discipline."

**Student impacts**

Offering the student online courses and a few hours of tutoring per week was not a satisfactory solution for Tracey Blood and Lisa Weigum, who also addressed the school board.

Blood, a 1999 Grant Union graduate, is the executive director of Prevent Child Abuse Oregon, a nonprofit organization. Weigum, a 2003 Grant Union graduate, is a substance abuse prevention coordinator with Community Counseling Solutions. They spoke to the board as concerned citizens.

"There is a need for intervention, not discipline," Weigum told the Eagle.

In a three-page letter to the school board, Blood said Grant Union's practice of disciplinary response not only fails to comply with state law, it "has been proven to be detrimental to the development of children."

Over five months of working with school administrators and staff to implement a "trauma-informed" approach, Blood said she saw an "inability or unwillingness" by Grant Union administrators to "ensure the needs of each student is met." As a result, at least 12 students have left and enrolled in online programs or at Prairie City High School, she said.

"At least seven of those have withdrawn in the last two months alone," she said. "Numerous others have voiced their desire to withdraw from this school or intend to move to another school at the beginning of the next school year, citing lack of academic and social supports and services as their reason for changing schools."

Blood said that instead of helping children learn from their mistakes and striving to provide students with protective factors that would help them develop healthy habits, Grant Union's exclusionary approach to discipline "deprives students of the essential support services they need."

Instead of providing guidance or instruction, the school's punitive reaction breeds distrust toward adults and nurtures an adversarial, confrontational attitude, she said.

"It's been proven that

when students miss school because of suspension and expulsion, they are not only missing those class days, but are more at risk of being suspended again, falling behind in school, dropping out and being drawn into the juvenile justice system," Blood said. To improve outcomes for children in Grant County, "Grant Union administrators and staff will need to abandon the draconian measures taken against students for typical adolescent behavior," she said.

Numerous parents and students spoke of similar experiences and frustrations, Blood said, and some said they were unwilling to confront school administrators "out of fear of retaliation by the school." Both Blood and Weigum described to the Eagle instances of personal retaliation they claim resulted from their efforts to address this issue.

**Troubling numbers**

Weigum provided the board with a litany of statistics to back up Blood. According to a 2016 student wellness survey, 46 percent of 11th graders at Grant Union reported they could talk openly to teachers, compared to 61 percent statewide, and 64 percent of the students reported feeling like teachers treated them with respect, compared to 76 percent statewide.

About 78 percent of the students reported hearing other students being bullied, compared to 66 percent statewide, and 85 percent reported hearing another student spread mean rumors or leave other students out of activities, compared to 64 percent statewide. About 21 percent reported bullying another student physically or verbally, compared to 12 percent statewide.

About 21 percent of the students were found to be in psychological distress, compared to 14 percent statewide, and 28 percent reported seriously considering attempting suicide, compared to 18 percent statewide.

In his response to the presentation, School Board Vice Chairman Zach Williams noted that the numbers were "very troubling" and he didn't want to see students leaving school.

Williams said he grew up in Grant County and attended Grant Union High School. The culture in area schools has changed, he said, and demographic changes, with families moving in and out of the county, might explain why.

Williams also noted that the school board acts in a judicial role when it reviews suspension and expulsion cases, and with the strict rules that the board operates under, the board cannot look at the details of a case until it comes before them. On the other hand, Williams noted that the district could review suspension and expulsion policies.

The board reached consensus to direct Superintendent Curt Shelley to review the district's policies and present a report on recent disciplinary actions at their next meeting. The board will meet next in Seneca on April 18.



Tracey Blood



Lisa Weigum

**PALMER**

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disclosed, but The Oregonian was awarded \$28,337 in attorney fees.

Palmer and DeFord also incurred \$41,355.62 in fees while represented by a private law firm, Hostetter Law Group, according to the new complaint, which claims the county must cover all of the fees.

Palmer and DeFord's attorney, Benjamin Boyd of Hostet-

ter Law Group, declined to comment for this story. County Judge Scott Myers said he would not discuss pending litigation.

The suit claims the county has a duty to defend Palmer and DeFord because The Oregonian's lawsuit was based on "alleged acts or omissions" in the performance of their duties. Palmer and DeFord requested that the county provide legal counsel for their defense, but the county did not respond in a timely manner, so they retained

private counsel, according to the suit. Except in cases of malfeasance in office or willful or wanton neglect of duty, Oregon law requires public bodies, such as the county court, to defend its officers for acts occurring in the performance of their duties.

The Grant County Court declined to pay for the attorney fees in a unanimous decision in December 2016 after investigation determined the action was not covered by the Oregon Tort Claims Act.

Myers previously told the Eagle Palmer's actions regarding the records were personal, not in his official duties as sheriff.

He said District Attorney Jim Carpenter ordered Palmer and DeFord to produce the records when they were requested by The Oregonian, but the records were not released until the lawsuit was filed.

Myers said the county's insurance company has also indicated it will not cover the sheriff in this matter.

MARCH 30

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