

TOURISM

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Professor Zhao Zhongzhen, who starred in the documentary produced for the Chinese version of the Discovery Channel, also sits on a tourism board in China, which has 3 million visits on its website, Merritt said. He said Zhao has encouraged every travel agency in China to promote visits to Kam Wah Chung.

Two months later, a film crew from Beach House Pictures of Singapore came to Kam Wah Chung for production of a similar documentary for the American version of Discovery Channel. Dr. Eric Brand, a student of Zhao's, and Beth Howlett, vice president of communications and academic services at the Oregon College of Oriental Medicine in Portland, were presenters in the video shoot.

Growing tourism

All this attention has enormous implications for Grant County's small tourist industry, which could be overwhelmed by bus loads of Chinese tourists in coming years. It also could increase impacts to the historical site itself, Merritt said.

For the first time, the interpretive center began to take reservations for tours this year, Merritt said. Guides were conducting 16-20 visitors per hour through the small store, and some visitors were turned away, he said. As word gets out, more people will turn to reservations, and it's possible the site will rely entirely on reservations in the future, he said.

The building, which began as a trading post built on The Dalles Military Road around 1866, has a good stone foundation and walls, but wear and tear from aging and visitation is becoming evident on wooden elements, such as window and door frames, structural posts and flooring.

In 2007, a preservation crew evaluated the building and gave it an estimated lifespan of 50 years. Merritt hoped that figure could be pushed up to 100 years. State preservation experts were expected to complete a study this winter to see if a cap on visitation is necessary to protect the historical building, he said.

The 2007 crew had recommended completely enclosing the Kam Wah Chung building to protect it from the elements, Merritt said. Instead, the state is considering building a new interpretive center after acquiring nearby city-owned parkland.

The new center could be completed in 4-6 years, Merritt said. One feature he said he'd like to see is a virtual reality room that would mimic the Kam Wah Chung interior using lifelike murals on the walls and displaying items currently stored in the archives building. The goal would be to offer visitors an alternative to actual tours, which would address high demand and lessen impacts on the small building.

Historical research

Other work continues at Kam Wah Chung, as Merritt fields numerous requests from researchers interested in the site. In early October, Chelsea Rose, an archaeologist at the Southern Oregon Univer-



Eagle photos/Richard Hanners

From left, Katie Johnson and Chelsea Rose, from the Southern Oregon University Laboratory of Anthropology, and Lew Somers, of Archaeo Physics LLC, take a break from scanning the grounds outside the Kam Wah Chung Co. building in John Day.



The historic Kam Wah Chung building in John Day.

sity Laboratory of Anthropology, brought a crew to John Day to use ground-penetrating radar to survey the Kam Wah Chung site.

In addition to studying Chinese mining sites in the Malheur National Forest, Rose has conducted research in Jacksonville, home of Oregon's first Chinatown, and made two field trips to Guangdong, where most of Oregon's Chinese miners originated.

On top of that, Merritt reported that a 10-year project to scan about 20,000 documents discovered at Kam Wah Chung has been completed — three years ahead of schedule. This is the largest collection of Chinese documents in North America outside of British Columbia, he said. About 6,000 of the documents are in Chinese, and plans call for a small committee of translators to work on the documents in batches to ensure quality control, he said.

The Friends of Kam Wah Chung also had good news to report. The store in the interpretive center took in about \$34,000 in 2018, Kocis said, including \$10,000 in donations and \$2,000 in membership dues. The largest donation was a \$100 bill, he said.

Kocis credited manager Chris Labhart for the store's success. He noted that a visitor from the Lan Su Chinese Garden in Portland said the selection of items offered at the Kam Wah Chung gift store were much better than theirs.

Historic mining

Merritt said the Friends will use the funds to acquire a historic hydraulic mining monitor from Isa

Larkin. The 8-foot long, 500-600 pound cast-iron nozzle was used to direct high-pressure water at mining sites in Grant County.

About 90 percent of the 300 hydraulic miners who worked in the county were Chinese, Merritt said. The monitor and its heavy base will be moved to the Kam Wah Chung site and featured in a future exhibit on the role of Chinese miners here, he said.

The Whiskey Gulch gold rush in 1862 brought thousands of prospectors to the Canyon City and John Day area. About nine years later, Chinese immigrants opened a store called Kam Wah Chung, translated as Golden Flower of Prosperity.

About 2,000 Chinese men lived in the "Tiger Town" part of John Day by 1885. Two Chinese immigrants bought the Kam Wah Chung business in 1888 and expanded it into a grocery, dry goods store and clinic.

Ing "Doc" Hay made diagnoses using pulsology and offered herbal medicine to the burgeoning Chinese population as an alternative to Western medicine. Lung On, who spoke both Chinese and English, ran the general store and facilitated communication between Chinese and American settlers.

In 1967, while surveying for a new park, John Day city staff discovered the ownership deed. When volunteers opened the long-closed building, they found the interior just as it was in 1955, with food in the kitchen, a stock of dry goods and medicinal herbs and Hay's tools on the apothecary table.

POOL

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A steering committee representing the city of John Day, the Grant County Court, the John Day-Canyon City Parks and Recreation District, Blue Mountain Hospital and Grant School District 3 has been evaluating options presented by Councilman-Hunsaker. While the city owns Gleason Pool, the recreation district currently manages the facility.

The city also has contacted Opsis Architecture of Portland to develop options for an indoor recreation space adjacent to the pool, Green told the council.

"They are defining program options for the types of rec spaces we could incorporate that would allow us to have year-round recreational opportunities," Green said.

In addition to reviewing aquatic facilities in other Oregon communities, including Madras, the steering committee discussed four aquatic facility options and two site location options at its Nov. 8 meeting.

Pool options

Possible sites include the west side of the Seventh Street Sports Complex and on the former Oregon Pine mill site north of the John Day River. Both sites could be accessed by the proposed Seventh Street extension, which would run west from the sports complex neighborhood through the proposed Innovation Gateway project to Patterson Bridge Road.

Options so far discussed by the steering committee range from an outdoor pool similar in size to the Gleason Pool to an indoor aquatics facility offering warm water and cold water pools, Green told the Eagle. Construction costs could range from \$4 million to nearly \$15 million depending on features. All options so far include a six-lane 25-yard pool with 3,670 square feet of deck space providing spectator seating for about 200 people.

"Not every option includes an indoor pool because of the expected operations and maintenance costs to operate a year-round facility," Green told the Eagle. "Outdoor pools are far more affordable and a closer fit with our projected budget."

The goal is to create year-round recreation opportunities that are affordable to build and maintain, Green said.

"Our guiding principle has been that we have to present a viable option to replace the current pool, not one that is too expensive to build or that we can't afford to operate," Green told the Eagle.

Bond election

The steering committee and consultants, along with the city's community advisory committee, will select one option that will be presented in a bond election to voters. Green told the Eagle that details on the bond request have not yet been developed, but he told the council that the city will need to make the "best pitch" possible to the public.

"We are working within a bud-

get that would allow the capital cost of the facility to be bond-funded at or near our current tax rates (after the expiration of the hospital bond)," Green told the council. "The operating costs for the facility will vary depending on the size and types of amenities included and will be reviewed along with the capital costs."

The pool decision should not interfere with plans to sell the Gleason Pool site and other city property near Kam Wah Chung to the state, Green told the council. He also noted that the new aquatic facility should be a county facility, not a city facility, a point Grant County Commissioner Rob Raschio has made in county court.

The city of John Day originally built the Gleason Pool and will receive about \$1 million from the state from the sale of land adjoining Kam Wah Chung, so the city is leading the talks, Green said.

"The City is funding the feasibility study, but we do not intend to build or operate the new pool," Green told the Eagle.

If voters approve a bond to pay for a new pool, the city plans to organize a representative board of elected officials from multiple jurisdictions to oversee its construction and operations, Green said.

County pool

"We are leading the facility planning because we currently own the only public pool in the county, but we are not set up to manage an aquatics facility or recreation center," he told the Eagle. "We also view this as a shared asset. We can provide some funding to help kickstart the process and do our part to see it come to fruition, but if there is to be a pool and recreation center in Grant County after 2020, it will be because the voters approved it and we have a representative public body to oversee its operations."

The 20-year bond measure for the Blue Mountain Hospital District will expire by 2021. Passed in September 2000 with a vote of 1,430-1,380, the \$7 million hospital bond currently accounts for about 8.6 percent of property taxes in the county, according to the tax assessor's office.

The combined share of property taxes from Grant School District 3 and the Grant County Education Service District to support schools is 37.5 percent. There had been talk of Grant School District 3 seeking a bond to build a new junior-senior high school once the hospital bond expired, but the district has turned a corner on that idea, School Board Chairwoman Chris Cronin told the Eagle.

The reality is that the district could not tax itself enough to pay for a new school, and the current school will undergo a grant-funded seismic upgrade next year, she said. The district reached a consensus before former Superintendent Curt Shelley left to keep the facilities in as good a shape as possible rather than build a new school, Cronin said.

Cronin noted that the district recognizes the need for a new pool facility and will support a bond election if needed. She said she also sees the need for a therapy pool for older residents.

COALITION

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new county commissioner in January, and a campaign to build support for the coalition should be in place by early next year, Becker said.

An important message is that the coalition is a state-funded agency that is not using local taxpayer funds, said John Day City Manager Nick Green, the coalition's executive director.

The current internet infrastructure serving Grant

County is a patchwork quilt of different companies utilizing copper phone lines, optical fiber cable and satellite, Green said. Some communities, such as Prairie City and Mt. Vernon, have a good fiber infrastructure and residents there don't see a need to improve

internet access, while other areas have poor service or no access at all, he said.

Town halls

The board agreed to spend up to \$20,000 for logo ideas and marketing support from ECONorthwest, a consulting firm hired by John Day to help develop a comprehensive economic development strategy for the city, and Bell & Funk, a marketing agency working with ECONorthwest.

Funded by state and federal grants, the city plans to hold several town hall meetings as part of the public process for developing the economic strategy. The coalition could piggyback onto one of the town hall meetings next year, Green suggested.

The board also reviewed plans for the coalition's Dec. 18 town hall meeting at the Grant County Regional Airport. The board had hoped to know if the coalition was awarded a \$3 million federal Community Connect grant by then, but there was still no word from Washington, Green said.

The meeting would start as a work session for the board and expand from that, Green said. A variety of internet companies providing DSL, fiber and satellite service would be invited, along with

representatives from public agencies, he said. Green said he planned to negotiate with these companies at the meeting.

The coalition will need to rely on a variety of technologies to improve internet access across the county, Green said. Some locations — such as isolated homes at the end of a long dirt road — may be served by wireless internet because running fiber in those cases would be cost prohibitive.

ViaSat, which has been invited to the Dec. 18 town hall, recently won a Connect America Fund 2 award and will provide 10,000 high-speed broadband connections in Oregon. Green said his new home in John Day will utilize ViaSat because no fiber has been run to that neighborhood.

Grant funding

The coalition is one of 124 applicants vying for \$30 million in Community Connect grant funding, Green said, but Congress recently made another \$600 million available for communities to close the digital divide in rural America.

With a bigger pot of federal money available, the coalition's chances for future grants should improve, Green said. By that time, the coal-

ition will have infrastructure in place that will strengthen future applications, he said.

That reasoning was applied in the board's action vote to move ahead with a \$47,000 fiber lateral that would connect the coalition's network hub in the John Day Fire Hall to Grant Union Junior-Senior High School.

Green noted that after committing about \$400,000 to the match for the Community Connect grant, the coalition would still have about \$1.3 million of the state appropriation it received in 2017.

The lateral is a short run that could be completed in one day's work, and the Grant County Education Service District would become the coalition's first internet service provider, Green said.

This relationship with the district would allow the coalition to connect its network to the Oregon Fiber Partnership academic infrastructure once the backbone fiber is run from John Day to Burns, Green said. The district also has agreed to host a backup station at their building for the new Grant County 911 dispatch system, Green said.

The board approved issuing a request for bids for construction of the lateral on Nov. 26. The engineering drawings are complete, and the construction deadline is March 1.

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