

Projected pool costs stun councilors

Operation and maintenance costs may drive final decision

By Richard Hanners
Blue Mountain Eagle

Operation and maintenance costs for an indoor swimming pool could exceed the financial capabilities of every public agency in Grant County except the county and the hospital.

John Day City Manager Nick Green presented those hard facts to the city council on Dec. 11. He cited the Madras Aquatic Center as a case in point — annual operations and maintenance there cost \$1.5 million.

The city plans to close the Gleason Pool after the 2020 season and sell the land to the state for development of the Kam Wah Chung State Heritage Site.

The reasoning includes three key elements: The Gleason Pool is 60 years old and expensive to maintain; the state will pay the city \$1 million for the land, a windfall that can be used to build another pool facility; and the state will use the land to build an interpretative center that will significantly contribute to the economic development of the John Day area.

“We recognize it is not popular to talk about closing a pool,” Green said. “Many residents have contacted city councilors and staff to express their interest in maintaining a pool in Grant County.”

The current pool-operating contract with the John Day-Canyon City Parks & Recreation District terminates at the end of the 2020 season. According to Green, the district has operated at a loss each year,

spending \$47,710 last year on labor, operations and maintenance and receiving \$23,886 in revenue. The pool lost \$2,500 per week in its 10 1/2-week season, Green said.

“The city does not have a tax base to operate a pool and could not create a revenue stream within our existing budget large enough to continue its operations,” Green said.

To investigate its options, the city hired consultants Counsil Hunsaker, Walker Macy and Opsis Architecture, but the results have not been straightforward.

“It has been incredibly challenging to find the optimal balance between our consultant’s projected costs (both capital and operations) and our anticipated program revenue,” Green said.

At the high end, an indoor competition pool with a recreation pool attached, along with recreation amenities, could cost \$15 million to build and \$800,000 to \$900,000 per year to operate and maintain. A scaled-down indoor pool could cost \$9.7 million to build and \$500,000 to \$600,000 annually to operate and maintain.

Costs come down dramatically for an outdoor pool. At the high end, a competition pool with a 3,152-square-foot recreation pool attached could cost \$7.2 million to build. An outdoor pool slightly larger than the Gleason Pool could cost \$4.3 million to build.

Operation and maintenance costs for an outdoor pool depend on the length of the season — an extended season drives up costs for heating and labor. With insurance and other benefits, five full-time employees can cost \$300,000 over a full year, Green said.

Another option under consideration is combining a baseline outdoor pool with an indoor recreation facility that could include a gymnasium with two basketball courts, exercise amenities and a playground. That plan could cost \$9 million to \$10 million to build, which is close to the cost of the hospital bond that will end in 2020, Green noted.

A steering committee has been involved in every aspect of planning since the beginning, Green said. The committee includes representatives from the city of John Day, Grant County Court, John Day-Canyon City Parks & Recreation District, Blue Mountain Hospital District and Grant School District 3.

“John Day is funding the facility study and has spent \$16,575 on consulting fees to date, but we do not intend to build or operate the new pool,” Green said.

The city’s goal is to establish a county-wide agency to design, build, finance, operate and maintain the facility. A memorandum of understanding between the five agencies represented by the steering committee has been drafted and is undergoing review by attorneys.

He said he has asked the participating public agencies to provide their staff with annual memberships to help establish a revenue stream to whichever facility is built.

Green noted that “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.”

Bookmobile sidelined by changing times

By Richard Hanners
Blue Mountain Eagle

Falling school populations and changes in reading technology are having an impact on use of the Grant County Library’s bookmobile.

Following a recommendation from Library Director Vicki Bond and the library advisory board, the Grant County Court agreed Nov. 28 to suspend bookmobile use from Nov. 30 through May 2019.

The court agreed to take a second look at the bookmobile program in June and possibly sell the vehicle.

In the past, the bookmobile traveled every Wednesday from the main library in John Day to either Prairie City, Dayville, Seneca or Monument/Long Creek, on a rotating schedule from October through May.

The main stop in each community was the local school. No service was scheduled during the Christmas and spring breaks, but extra trips were scheduled on Mondays in the two weeks before Christmas break.

School populations, however, are about a quarter less than they were 30 years ago, Bond told the Eagle. On top of that, schoolchildren now can read books on computers, laptops, tablets and smartphones.

There are several ways schools can request books, Bond told the schools in a Dec. 3 email.

“Call us anytime and we will mail directly to the schools,” she wrote. “You can also order with



The Eagle/Richard Hanners
Grant County Library Director Vicki Bond with the sidelined bookmobile in its garage on Dec. 6.

your library card and you have 17 different libraries to choose from. The books will arrive in John Day, so we can either mail to the schools or there are patrons that drive daily to the schools.”

Students and adults with a library card and access to the internet can order an eBook. The county pays about \$12,000 per year to provide its patrons access to 17 libraries in the Sage Library System.

Bond said patrons can choose from more than 10,000 eBook titles, ranging from academic works to reading for pleasure. Mailing printed books from John Day to the rural communities costs about \$2 to \$3, which beats the \$150 to \$200 spent each month on fuel for the bookmobile, she said.

In her email to the schools, Bond cited falling bookmobile checkout figures, weather conditions and rising fuel and maintenance costs for the library’s recommendation. She said she needs to hear back from

schools by March when the county budget process begins.

Library board member Kathy Smith provided more details in a Nov. 19 email to the county court.

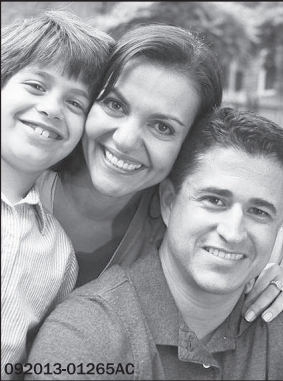
“Winter travel can be dangerous going over mountain passes because you can’t put chains on the bookmobile,” Smith said. “When roads are bad, the bookmobile trip has been canceled.”

The vehicle has low clearance and is weighed down by all the books it carries. She also noted that exhaust fumes have leaked into the cab when the bookmobile traveled uphill, causing headaches and nausea.

The current bookmobile has been in use in Grant County since June 2012, when it replaced a modified 1970s-era Chevrolet that had been used for 40 years. The earlier bookmobile threw a rod on Highway 395 near Fox, and the county court opted not to spend \$3,000 to \$4,000 to replace the engine.


Library staff found a used bookmobile for sale online for \$18,500, and Bond picked up the vehicle from the Troy-Miami County Library in Ohio. The vehicle featured a diesel engine and shelf space for 2,000 books.

Funding for the replacement vehicle came from a special fund earmarked for bookmobile purchases and repairs. The fund was created with an anonymous \$10,000 donation in the late 1980s. By 2012, the fund had grown to \$36,000 from general fund transfers, Bond said.




Balance Today with Retiring Tomorrow

No matter where you're starting from, COUNTRY can help you achieve financial security in retirement. It starts with listening to your situation. Then we help you build a straightforward plan with step-by-step guidance. Call me to get started today.



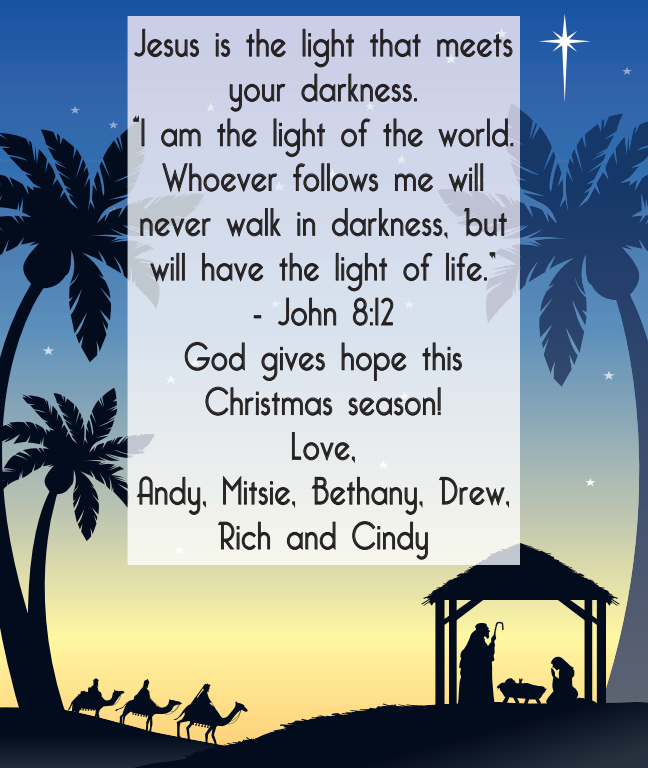
Debbie Ausmus
245 South Canyon Blvd.
John Day, OR 97845
OPEN WED. & THUR.
9 am - 5 pm
541-575-1113
24 hrs/7 days wk

debbie.ausmus@countryfinancial.com



09/2013-01265AC 95984

Jesus is the light that meets
your darkness.
"I am the light of the world.
Whoever follows me will
never walk in darkness, but
will have the light of life."
- John 8:12
God gives hope this
Christmas season!
Love,
Andy, Mitsie, Bethany, Drew,
Rich and Cindy



Merry Christmas
and a
Happy
New
Year!



541-932-4428



JOHN DAY RIVER
VETERINARY CENTER

For more information or to place an ad
please call Kim Kell at 541-575-0710



Office will be
closed Dec. 24th
and 25th

Blue Mountain Eagle

Early Deadlines

for the December 26th edition



**Classified,
Legal and
Display
Deadline is
Wednesday,
December
19th at 5 p.m.**

195 N Canyon Blvd., John Day ~ www.bluemountaineagle.com

Please call Kim Kell at 541-575-0710



Blue Mountain Eagle

Early Deadlines

**for the January 2nd
edition**

**Classified, Legal and Display
Deadline is Wednesday,
December 26th at 5 p.m.**



195 N Canyon Blvd., John Day • www.bluemountaineagle.com