

Main Street revitalization includes events

By Richard Hanners
Blue Mountain Eagle

Several downtown John Day businesses have expressed interest in Main Street Revitalization grants from the state worth up to \$200,000 apiece, City Manager Nick Green told the city council Feb. 12.

Green said he met with downtown merchants several times since December to discuss the program. The grants support downtown improvement projects for communities that belong to the Oregon Main Street Network, which means the city will be the designated applicant. The applications were scheduled to be reviewed by the council on Feb. 26.

The money can be used for acquiring, rehabilitating

and constructing buildings and facilitating community revitalization that will lead to private investment, job creation or retention, establishing or expanding viable businesses or creating a stronger tax base, Green said.

Special events

The council also discussed event planning proposals presented by Councilor Shannon Adair. A street fair intended to increase foot traffic downtown and bring visitors to John Day could mean closing Main Street from the stoplight to Dayton Street during the weekend of March 22-23.

Approval by the Oregon Department of Transportation would be needed



The Eagle/Richard Hanners

The John Day City Council considered plans to close part of Main Street for a March street fair during their Feb. 12 meeting.

to close Main Street. A newly formed art council has expressed interest in the idea, and the John Day-Canyon City Parks and Recreation Department might participate, Adair said. The council gave its consensus to move ahead on the proposal.

Adair also said she has been talking to RC Huerta, the program director at the parks and recreation department, about holding a 3-on-3 basketball tournament in summer. The event could be held at the Seventh Street Complex or down-

town, as other communities do, Adair said.

City projects

In other city council news, the council approved a \$75,924 payment to Alpine Abatement Assoc. of Bend for asbestos and lead abatement at the Weaver Building on Main Street.

The payment will be covered by a Department of Environmental Quality brownfield reclamation grant and a Main Street Revitalization grant. The city purchased the building in 2017 using a \$100,000 Main Street Revitalization Grant.

Following DEQ and federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration guidelines, Alpine Abatement removed the skim coat

and plaster from framing, floor coverings and a water heater cover that contained asbestos. They will return in the spring to remove exterior paint that contains lead.

Green said now is the time for the council to discuss the disposition of the Weaver Building before electrical or other work proceeds. The city could sell the building by bid or set a price based on criteria. The city could also enter into a partnership with a new owner that would terminate once all the rehabilitation conditions had been met.

The council also approved a \$49,987 payment to L&L Excavating of Mt. Vernon for excavation, backfill and concrete curb work for the Canton Street improvement project.

Getting the word out on Firewise communities

By Richard Hanners
Blue Mountain Eagle

Residents and landowners in the Dog Creek and Marysville area concerned about wildfire risks might want to contact Grant County Firewise Coordinator Irene Jerome.

The area east of Canyon City and John Day is a perfect candidate for a Firewise community, Grant County Judge Scott Myers told the county court Feb. 13.

Rules governing use of federal Title III Secure Rural Schools funding to protect homes and property from wildfires has been tightened up since 2008. The funding is only available to authorized Firewise communities, Jerome said.

Firewise process

Grant County is home to the first Firewise community in Eastern Oregon, established in the Pine Creek area about two years before the Canyon Creek Complex fire bore down on the area, threatening people, livestock and property.

The residents, led by Pine Creek Firewise board chairman Howard Gieger, a former arson investigator, worked together pruning branches, mowing tall grass and weeds, thinning trees, improving access routes, building an emergency bridge for ATVs and locating water sources ahead of the 2015 fire.

"After the fire passed



The Eagle/Richard Hanners
Irene Jerome, the Grant County Firewise coordinator, updated the county court on the program at their Feb. 13 meeting.

through and the smoke subsided, all of the Firewise participants' homes survived," Bill Dean, the public information officer for the Canyon Creek Complex fire, wrote at the time.

Since then, Firewise communities have been established in the Ritter, Middle Fork and Laycock areas. Firewise is a community-driven program, Jerome explained shortly after Pine Creek was recognized.

"Our population is so sparse and so scattered it is difficult to form a group that can fulfill the few small steps necessary to get the Firewise recognition," she said.

The process begins with a risk assessment conducted by a local fire chief and an Oregon Department of For-

estry representative, Jerome said. After she writes up a report, the community develops a timeline and project list and the documents are sent to Salem and the National Fire Protection Association for approval.

Firewise projects

Gieger told the court how he removed "tons of brush" around his home in Pine Creek before the Canyon Creek Complex fire. He said his neighbors thought it was excessive, but as the fire blew in from the east and south, it "fell to the ground" and didn't destroy the home he built in 1978. Since the fire, Pine Creek residents have upgraded bridges and helped neighbors and seniors remove "thousands of tons of slash."

The speed of the wind-blown fire caught many Pine Creek residents by surprise, Gieger said, resulting in confusion about evacuation routes. The Firewise group is now using GPS units to identify bridges, water sources, turnouts and other important features to mark on a printed map to be provided to residents and fire-fighting agencies, he said. Gieger noted that Pine Creek residents back the GPS project 100 percent.

The Firewise group in Ritter has held a fire emergency simulation that focused on how to evacuate residents on a 20-mile long road with poor cell-phone coverage where a

major vehicle accident could block access. A live drill is planned in the Middle Fork area in April, Jerome noted.

Organizing Firewise communities can leverage the influence of residents when dealing with govern-

ment agencies, Jerome said. A fuel reduction project on public land adjacent to the Laycock Creek area, for example, was scheduled to take place about eight years from now, but the newly formed Firewise community

there has prompted the Forest Service to move the project up.

"It's been documented that the Firewise program saves lives," Jerome said. "But it also helps build communities."

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Grant Soil & Water Conservation District's 2019 Annual Meeting

Thursday, March 7th, 6-7:30 p.m.

Grant County Airport Meeting Room in John Day

Aquifer Storage and Recovery Presentation

Water is abundant within the stream systems of Grant County, but is seasonally consolidated to times when out-of-stream water demands are at their lowest. The result of receiving seventy percent of annual precipitation in the winter, these streams normally reach their peak flow in early spring fed by melting snow. Water discharge then declines rapidly to its lowest levels in late summer as precipitation diminishes and air temperatures rise. In contrast, agricultural irrigation increases to its highest level, creating a seasonal water deficiency that is suppressive to agricultural production, limits area development opportunities, and represents an ongoing concern to ecological conditions.

Managed groundwater recharge is a practicable option to retain surface water at times of surplus to enhance stream flows and supplement irrigation withdrawals during shortage periods. These types of systems further avoid the significant costs and environment impacts of above ground storage projects, making their authorization and implementation much more feasible.

Hydrogeologist Phil Brown will be presenting information and professional experiences in the design and implementation of groundwater recharge and recovery projects, along with his accomplishments to successfully address water supply imbalances throughout the Pacific Northwest.

Please join Grant Soil and Water Conservation District for this informative event as part of its 2019 Annual Meeting. Complimentary refreshments will be served. Contact Jason Kehrberg at 541-575-0135 ext. 110 or <mailto:jkehrberg@ortelco.net>