

Drill

Continued from Page A1

Communities Irene Jerome.

Other assistance came from Interagency Fire Dispatch, Department of Forestry, Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, Oregon Office of State Fire Marshal and Oregon Emergency Management.

Additionally, Blue Mountain Hospital Home Health and Hospice, Grant Soil and Water Conservation District and Long Creek Fire Department lent a hand.

“It was great to have four SAR rigs take part in the exercise and joined by Sgt. Dan Komning, USFS John Soules and BLM Ranger Jeff Weis,” Dobler said. “It is good



Contributed photo

Staff and volunteers from various emergency management services agencies gather for a ‘hot wash’ evaluation after the Galena fire evacuation exercise.

to see the list of participants ... working together to make our communities of emergency first responders.”



Eagle file photo

The John Day City Council will apply for a grant to pay for professional planning assistance to determine the future of public swimming pool in Grant County.

Vote

Continued from Page A1

The county court would be the governing body of a county service district, Green said. The governing body would begin by deciding which facilities would be constructed, maintained and operated, and how the construction, maintenance and operation would be financed.

Financing could be accomplished by a variety of methods, including assessments on property in the service district, sale of bonds, ad valorem taxes, a local option tax or any combination of these methods, Green said.

The planning grant would be used to pay the non-profit Special Districts Association of Oregon Advisory Services LLC to help guide the city through the process, Green said.

If the city’s grant application is unsuccessful, the city could continue the process on its own, Green said. The city has already spent money on consultants and acquiring new parkland as part of the overall pool project, he said.

Pool costs

Negotiations between the city of John Day and the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department for the sale of city park land adjacent to the Kam Wah Chung Historic Site and Gleason Pool have not concluded.

Sale of the land would support the state’s plans to build a world-class interpretive center at the historic site. The council has recognized in the past that the new interpretive center would boost the local tourism economy, but it also could mean closing the Gleason Pool for good at the end of the 2020 season.

The Gleason Pool is 61 years old and the second oldest public pool in Oregon. During a public informational meeting hosted by the John Day swim team April 2, John Day Councilor Dave Holland, the city’s former public works director, addressed whether the pool could be rehabbed economically.

Supply and drain pipes were likely steel or galvanized steel, he said, with a typical lifetime of 10-30 years. To replace rusted-out pipes, concrete decking, pool buildings and even the pool bottom would need to be demolished, he said.

Estimated costs for a replacement pool were provided at the April 2 meeting. The target figures are \$4.5 million for construction of a new six-lane, 25-meter outdoor pool with related buildings and about \$100,000 per year for operation, maintenance and a future pool replacement fund.

Election options

One option raised in the past as a way to increase annual revenue to meet the target operating costs was to expand the current John Day-Canyon City Parks & Recreation District to include Mt. Vernon and Prairie City. Board member Lisa Weigum, however, said at the April 2 meeting that the Parks & Rec board was definitely opposed to that idea.

If the city was forced to take over the pool’s operation when the Parks & Rec contract ends in 2020, the city might be forced to consider a local option levy in order to meet the pool’s annual costs, Green said at the April 2 meeting.

That would place an unfair burden on John Day taxpayers, Mayor Ron Lundbom noted at the time. People who don’t live in the city should pay higher pool fees to make it fair, but that might deter outside-district users from coming to the pool.

Green suggested to the city council May 14 that creating a service district including properties within 15 miles of the pool may be necessary to provide sufficient annual revenue for a public pool. The planning grant would support a careful evaluation of that option.

The best approach for the city is to put all the elements together, from master plan to financing mechanisms, and present the package to the voters possibly as soon as next spring, Green said. It’s smarter for the city to take its time developing a pool plan rather than rush something for this fall’s election, he said.

Councilor Paul Smith agreed, saying this was a professional approach. Lundbom also agreed, noting that if the city does all it can to keep a public pool in Grant County and the voters turn down the service district and construction bond, then at least the city had done its job.

Improvements

Continued from Page A1

“The categories of missions SAR has conducted and will likely conduct will require more specialized training and equipment,” he told the court.

Dobler said he expected to see more recreational visitors in Grant County as the Central Oregon areas have become more populated. He also noted that his SAR team spent three months planning and preparing for the May 11 evacuation exercise around Galena.

The SAR team responded to numerous flooding threats in April, including three days for Canyon Creek, one day in Mitchell and one day in Mt. Vernon. A recent mission was providing mutual aid for a lost hiker in the Black Canyon Wilderness on April 20.

The team also presented information to students at Humbolt Elementary in May.

Dobler listed improvements to the SAR program since he took over. These included monthly meetings with detailed agendas, monthly trainings focused on basic SAR skills, increased communications between SAR team members, closer coordination with various partners such as air search and amateur radio operators, better communication with 911 dispatch, increased SAR recruitment and new efforts to find revenue sources, such as fundraisers and grants.

Equipment needs cited by Dobler include a four-by-four off-road



The Eagle/Angel Carpenter

Grant County Search and Rescue volunteer Kim Kell shares tips with elementary students on how to stay safe if they become lost.

wheeled or tracked vehicle, off-trail snowmobiles, a lightweight litter for steep slopes, a lightweight rescue sled for snow, rope rescue equipment, handheld radios, iPads for mapping or mission planning and additional medical gear, including an automatic external defibrillator. He noted that Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management personnel use iPads for maps.

Dobler told the court he’s been

looking for revenue sources that don’t require a match from the county, such as fundraisers and grants. The Oregon Community Foundation can provide grants up to \$15,000, and grants from the Firehouse Subs Foundation range from \$15,000 to \$25,000, large enough to cover the cost of the four-by-four vehicle, Dobler said. He said he also is looking at a USDA Rural Development grant that could require a match.

Forecast

Continued from Page A1

“You use one-time money for one-time purposes,” Rayfield said.

Sen. Chuck Riley, D-Hillsboro, who sits on the Sen-

ate Finance and Revenue Committee, responded cautiously to Brown’s wish list.

“Those are all good things, and yeah, OK, sure, we can always use money in those places,” Riley said. “But I’m a bit of a realist and understand we’re going to have that (economic) downturn. We need to make sure that we have everything covered for that downturn.”

Riley and his committee chairman, Sen. Mark Hass, D-Beaverton, want to put as much as they can into the state’s reserves.

“In public finance, when you have a temporary phenomenon — a historic windfall — the position is you sock it away,” Hass said after reviewing Wednesday’s report.

Oregon has run up about \$27 billion in PERS debt. Pension costs are growing as more public employees

reach retirement age. While there’s no way for the state to erase its debt with a single move, the Legislature could put some of the overage toward paying it down.

It’s “very likely” the budget will include extra money for the PERS fund to help pay down the debt, Kotek said Friday. That would be an appropriate use of the windfall, Hass and Rayfield agreed.

Brown and Kotek also floated a less likely idea: diverting money from the personal income tax kicker itself.

At \$1.4 billion, next year’s kicker would be the largest in state history.

Kotek has proposed spending about half of it on transportation initiatives, including grants to replace or refit old diesel engines to reduce pollution, seismic upgrades to the Interstate 205 bridge between

Oregon City and West Linn, and a new program to build electric vehicle charging stations and other infrastructure for low-emission vehicles.

Brown hasn’t embraced Kotek’s kicker proposal, House Bill 3440. She said Thursday that if the kicker were diverted, it should be for something that benefits the entire state.

The Legislature usually leaves the kicker alone. Oregon only cashes the rebate out to taxpayers in good economic times, when tax collections over a two-year period are at least 2% higher than economists expect.

Brown said she’d support using kicker money to pay down more of the PERS debt, if the Legislature can cobble together a plan that has bipartisan support.

“I think that is good fiscal sense,” said Brown.

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