

Finding bright spots in new economic study

Grant County cities have growth potential with buildable land

By Richard Hanners
Blue Mountain Eagle

John Day and other cities in Grant County are not short on land for economic development, but finding a way to get businesses to invest in the area is still an open question.

That was the take-away from a presentation at the May 28 John Day City Council meeting by Johnson Economics, which recently completed a draft 71-page economic opportunities analysis for Grant County and its cities.

The report includes economic and demographic trends, target industry analysis, employment and land forecasts and next steps to promote economic development.

Referring to the report's tables and graphs, City Manager Nick Green said Grant County was close to a 40-year low for employment, but the past four years in a row have seen some improvement.

That indicates the economy may be turning around, Green said. The rest of the nation is experiencing strong employment, but Grant County is just "late in the game," he added.

Consultant Brendan Buckley noted that Grant County has taken significant losses in past decades.



Contributed image

A conceptual map of the Innovation Gateway project in John Day made by landscape architectural consultant Walker Macy includes, left to right, a 150-170 room hotel, a water garden at the former sawmill building, a riverfront beach, a seasonal or permanent lake, a pavillion built from the former planer shed and a five-bay greenhouse complex.

However, using industry-specific growth rates and a regional forecast, the report projects 0.8% annual growth in the county and John Day over the next 20 years, which will bring 533 new jobs in the county and 330 new jobs in John Day over the next two decades.

According to the report, Green noted, John Day has five times the acreage for industrial development than the nearest other city in Grant County and seven times the commercial acreage.

Green said he saw that as a positive, as growth potential, but the

city was not attracting customers for its industrial park at the airport. The city was likewise well supplied with land for housing development, he said.

Phil Stenbeck, the Eastern Oregon regional representative for the Oregon Department of Land Conservation and Development, which provided a grant to pay for the study, said state legislators were aware of that potential. He said the city's industrial park had been discussed at state Regional Solutions meetings.

Buckley noted that John Day is not on a major rail or highway

route, but the steps the city has taken to improve its economic position puts it ahead of other Eastern Oregon communities facing similar difficulties.

Developing strategic plans was one thing, but finding the funding to promote economic growth was another matter, Green said.

Stenbeck agreed but noted that in places like Prineville, businesses that came to the community were willing to pay for needed infrastructure — but the city needed to have a plan ahead of time to take advantage of that.

In other council news:

- Conceptual plans by landscape architect firm Walker Macy for the Innovation Gateway project were presented to the council. The plans will be used to apply for USDA Rural Development and Ford Family Foundation grants needed to rehabilitate the former mill property.

Phase 1 of the plans includes roads, parking and trails connecting the new commercial greenhouses and the former Oregon Pine planer shed. Drawings of the planer shed suggest how it could be used as an open-air pavilion for farmers markets and other functions.

The rest of the former mill site south of the John Day River could be used for a 150-170 room hotel, a water garden around the former sawmill building, a riverfront beach and a

lake.

Green noted that the drawings represent a 20-year plan, not a two-year plan. Reclaimed water from the city's new wastewater treatment plant could be discharged into the lake to prevent scum formation.

Public Works Director Monte Legg referred to photos of the seasonal lake in the Eagle and the positive response by the public. Some people even suggested letting the lake freeze for winter activities.

The planer shed pavilion will be constructed in a way to allow for seasonal flooding. Part of the site will inevitably flood and is unbuildable, Green said, "so why not a lake?"

- The John Day fiscal year 2019-20 budget approved by the city budget committee has been reduced by about \$3.1 million from the proposed budget to \$10.8 million. The council will vote on the final budget at its June 25 meeting.

Green said the reduction mostly results from an expected agreement with Oregon Telephone Corporation to apply for a USDA ReConnect grant rather than the city to improve internet access in Grant County.

- The council recognized the extra work Officer Scott Moore took on during the transition between two police chiefs in 2018. Moore has been promoted to sergeant effective June 1.

Artist describes a Main Street vision for John Day

City accepting bids for Weaver Building

By Richard Hanners
Blue Mountain Eagle



Kim Randleas

Creating a unified and attractive look for John Day's Main Street by simply painting buildings and adding false fronts could maintain the city's historic character while increasing property values and enhancing John Day's small-town neighborhood spirit, local artist Kim Randleas told the John Day City Council May 28.

Randleas said she's been working on a Main Street vision for John Day for about 20 years. A successful look for downtown will increase foot traffic on Main Street, add charm and vibrancy, update storefronts and entice visitors to stop on their way through town.

There are challenges, she said. In addition to financial difficulties and the mix of architecture styles, Main Street businesses need to communicate with each other, Randleas said. A "cookie cutter" approach is not a good end result.

Randleas advised strategic use of color to create both unity and uniqueness, while employing false fronts to tie buildings together with different heights. She noted that a historic look can be created without looking too "Western."

The models Randleas looks to for establishing a coherent downtown look are the historic Grant County Bank building, now used by Eastern Oregon Realty, and the historic Johnson Bros. building, now occupied by Mosier's Home Furnishing.

The bank building's positive elements include beautiful color, sharp-looking white trim, canvas awnings and upgraded windows and doors, she said.

Painting buildings is a lower cost approach to upgrading Main Street that provides opportunities for individual expression and allows scheme changes as businesses change hands. Phasing in is possible, she said.

The challenge is to coordinate colors with neighbors. Cooperation will be key, she said, and repainting will become necessary. The goal is to add character while avoiding a tourist town facade or a fake look, she said.

Randleas has used Photoshop to change colors of images of current storefronts so owners can see different possibilities. She said she has met with many Main Street owners, and four have already committed to repainting.

The council was very supportive of Randleas' efforts. Councilor Dave Holland noted that the city intended to continue applying for state grants to support her effort.

The city recently submitted applications for state grants on behalf of two Main Street businesses. The city also acquired the Weaver Building in November 2017 so it could be remodeled into a mixed-use commercial and residential building.

The city used a \$100,000 Main Street Revitalization Grant to purchase the 120-year-old, 12,000-square-foot Weaver Building. At the time, four businesses operated on the

ground floor and a single tenant lived upstairs.

The city hired Alpine Abatement to remove asbestos and lead paint from the interior walls of one downstairs business unit and all 6,000 feet of the second floor. Many of the walls were stripped down to studs, with most of the \$75,000 abatement cost covered by a state Department of Environmental Quality brown-field grant.

The council held a public hearing on proposed con-

ditions for the sale of the building on May 28. Citing a 2018 property tax statement, Green said the real market value is \$32,250 for the lot and \$106,710 for the building, for a total of \$138,960.

According to terms agreed upon by the council, the city will take sealed bids from interested buyers on June 25. Buyers must include their plans for the building.

The city will entertain the option of owner financing — accepting installment payments — for the

sale of the building, which is included in the John Day Urban Renewal Area and qualifies for a 15% rebate on eligible improvements through the city's incentive program.

Sherrie Rininger, who owns the boutique on the ground floor, asked how the three current tenants would be protected from the new buyer. The council agreed to include some type of protections when the sale conditions are brought back on June 25.

TWELFTH ANNUAL

FAMILY FUN DAY

Saturday, June 15

11am - 3pm

John Day City Park



- **POOL OPEN - NO CHARGE!** (from 11-2)
- Arts, Crafts & Activity Booths (some activities at a minimal cost)
- Kid's Bike Helmet Exchange—bring your old one—or \$6 each
- \$1 Hamburgers and Hotdogs
- \$5 for All Day Waterslide, Ninja Warrior Wipeout Race, Spiderman Bounce House, FREE Snocones and GAGA Ball.
- If you need a **FREE Family Fun Pass** to be able to enjoy this event call 541-575-1006

ALCOHOL & TOBACCO FREE EVENT

SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR SPONSORS:

Local Community Advisory Council (LCAC) • Shelk Foundation
OTC Connections • Umpqua Bank • Bank of Eastern Oregon
Oregon Trail Electric Company • Mobile Glass • John Day Auto Parts
John Day River Veterinary Clinic



25th Anniversary Grant County Family Health Fair

Friday, June 21, 2019 from 7-1 pm at
Grant County Fairgrounds

Blood Pressure, Canyon Mtn Center, Community Counseling,
Child Care Referral, Dental, Dermatology, Emergency Operations, Families First,
Fire Prevention, Health Dept,
Hearing (small charge to vendor), Medicare, OSU Food Hero,
People Mover, Red Cross Disaster, Recreating on the Forest,
Reflexology, Saturday Market, St Charles Balance, Stroke and Trauma, Strawberry
Clinic, Veterans Services, Young Living and so much more

NEW FOR 2019: KIDS CORNER 9 - 1

There will be coloring books, rock painting, puppet show and other activities for your child to do while you attend the health fair

PRESENTATIONS

TAI CHI

Starting at 0800 & - going throughout the fair

STOP THE BLEED

0730 - 0830 - 0930 - 1030 - 1130

Pre-registration:

June 4 - Monument Senior Center
June 12 - Prairie City Senior Center
June 13 - John Day Senior Center
June 18 - Chester's 10 - 2
June 19 - Blue Mountain Hospital
foyer 10 - 3

Fasting Blood Draws* - \$17.00

Below costs paid directly to GCHD during Health fair:

HgbA1C - \$10.00
Iron Level - free

*See pre-registration for blood draw information