

Monument residents team up for city improvements

City leaders plan for improved water filtration system

By Angel Carpenter
Blue Mountain Eagle

Monument is a town where everyone waves hello. It may be a small, secluded city, but there is an abundance of positive news, including plans for an improved water filtration and irrigation system in progress, upgrades at the school, a new sidewalk in the park and renovations at the senior center, which is a community gathering spot.

Water filtration system planned out

Improving the drinking water in Monument has been on the city’s agenda for years, and Mayor Sahara Hyder and City Recorder Dorothy Jordan say they are hopeful to see the engineering plans move forward this fall.

Jordan said HECO Engineering of Payette, Idaho, already drew up plans to install a new filtration system for the city’s drinking water. Now that a plan is in place, city officials are waiting for news whether they will receive the \$1.4 million Community Development Block Grant needed for the work. “The water project has been ongoing for years,” Jordan said. “We have finally selected a solution to our situation.”

She said, during high water events, which don’t happen very often, the city’s turbidity level goes above what the state has set as acceptable levels for clean drinking water.

Monument’s well produces volumes of water, she said, so no new source was needed, just the filtration system. “It’s a little innovative,” she said of the new plan.

In addition to providing a filtration system that clears the water of any contaminants before it is pumped to the water tower, the plan includes a provision for residents to irrigate lawns and wash cars and garden.

“It’s going to come off a line that’s already existing,” Jordan said, adding the irrigation line captures the water before it reaches the filters.

She said the city will provide the infrastructure, and those who would like to add the irrigation line may.

“You can lead a horse to water ...,” she said.

“It’s available — it won’t cost the customer anything to have it installed, and it will be less expensive to use,” she said. “A lot of people in this town enjoy their yards and gardening, and we wanted to make sure those activities (are available).”

Hyder said they’ve never had a boil order for the water, but made sure they added enough chlorine to the water.

She said the biggest challenge with the process so far has been raising the water rates.

“I want them to be able to afford their bills,” she said. “In order to get funds from the grant, our rates have to be at a certain level. Working out the plan was difficult.”

Hyder said she was expecting “a lot of negative feedback” after raising the rates.

“The community support has been super nice,” she said, adding she thinks the residents appreciate having potable water.

City Councilors Heather Bowlus, Mary Cade and Marie Odien have been involved with the process of finding a water solution for awhile, and Phil Merrick, Sherry Allen and Stephanie Gilbert joined in the process just recently as new council members.

Hyder said, “We’ve all been trying to figure out what is best for the city.”

City park improvements led by students

The new water system is the biggest thing happening in Monument, but another exciting project was recently completed by a group of high school students.

A plan to add a sidewalk and picnic area to the J. Dempsey Boyer Park in the heart of the town was completed, led by Monument graduate Kyla Emerson and students Aubrey Bowlus and Miranda Cook at the end of the school year.

Eleven students, who are members of Monument School’s SkillsUSA chapter, helped come up with the idea while in Michele Engle’s construction class.

Then Emerson, Bowlus and Cook went before the city council to pitch their idea to make the park more accessible for seniors and people with disabilities. They then went to work with Cook



The Eagle/Angel Carpenter
Monument students Kyla Emerson, back left, Aubrey Bowlus and Miranda Cook help add the finishing touches to the new concrete sidewalk May 15 at Monument city park. The three girls planned the project as part of their construction class at school, in conjunction with the SkillsUSA chapter. The new pathway was designed to help visitors navigate through the park more easily, including seniors and people with disabilities.



The Eagle/Angel Carpenter
Children enjoy sliding on the playground equipment on May 15 at J Dempsey Park in Monument.

applying for grants, and Emerson and Bowlus, with help from Dan Emerson and Engle, did the math for the project and found the products and prices.

The Glen and Jean McKenzie Fund of the Oregon Community Foundation awarded a \$4,000 grant, and the Shelk Fund of the Oregon Community Foundation gave \$1,000 to the cause. Monument resident Suzi Mael also donated \$1,000, and more funds came from a benefit dinner.

Several students showed up during the week leading up to “pour day” to help with the preparations.

A ribbon-cutting ceremony was held on Friday, May 31, with residents enjoying a hamburger and hot dog dinner.

“That was pretty exciting,” Hyder said. “It’s very much appreciated by the city.”

Jordan said she’s proud of the students.

“They are just so fantastic,” she said. “They did everything — the only thing the city had to do was give permission.”

Monument School District receives grants

Monument School received three Technical Assistance Program grants, including a facilities assessment grant for \$20,000, which addresses the current physical condition of the buildings and determines needed renovations; a long-range facility plan grant for \$25,000 to prepare for the future; and a seismic assessment grant for \$25,000 to determine the condition of district buildings to withstand a significant earthquake.

Once assessments are made, the school district can apply for matching grants through the Oregon School Capital Improvement Pro-

gram in order to complete the work recommended by professionals for the long-range, facilities and environmental hazard assessments.

Recommended upgrades from seismic assessments are fully funded by the Seismic Rehabilitation Grant Program.

Monument Superintendent/Principal Donald Petersen said the main building of the school, which houses offices and high school classrooms, is 70-80 years old and made of sandstone.

He anticipates the professionals who assess that building for long-range planning will determine how much longer it will last.

Petersen said they’d likely need to pass a bond in 10-20 years to make long-term upgrades.

The conservative community hasn’t passed a bond “in a long time,” he said, but the grants will at least allow them to plan for the future.

Improvements for the short term include areas of the Monument elementary building where there is rotted siding, peeling paint and several large single-pane windows that need replacing, he said.

“We know we need certain repairs,” he said. “This (grant) establishes it professionally, so if we need to, we can get a grant from the state and apply for a matching grant to do the work that we need to do.”

Overcoming challenges

Lack of available housing and jobs make it a challenge for younger generations to stick around in Monument.

There is also no cellphone service in the town, although there is a booster at Boyer’s Cash Market, and internet service can be slow.



Donald Petersen



Judy Harris

“We just kind of deal with it,” Hyder said.

Boyer’s is one of several of businesses in town.

The owners of the Monument Motel & RV Park, Ron and Sherry Allen, opened a new eatery on their property a few months ago called North Fork Café & Espresso, serving breakfast, burgers, fries and sandwiches. They also offer smoothies, drinks and specialty coffees.

The Columbia Power Co-op has been a long-standing business, and other businesses include a second-hand store called Terry’s Rerun & Gift Shop owned by Terry Cade as well as some construction contractors, welders and hunt guides.

The Northfork John Day River, which runs through town, is a draw to visitors for fishing and floating.

Northfork Shuttle Service will give rides to rafters and floaters on the river, and Jeremy Boyer can be contacted for more information.

Though there are difficulties to living in a remote community, people work together to make things happen, and lofty individual and collective achievements are not a rarity for Monument folks.

In June 2018, Michele Engle was named Regional Teacher of the Year. She was one of 13 Oregon school teachers receiving the award.

Engle, who was born and raised in Monument, has taught at Monument School District for 24 years with one year at Dayville School prior to that.

She teaches English for grades 7-12, as well as courses in welding and agriculture, which includes wood shop, and a leadership class.

Grant County Education Service District Superintendent Robert Waltenburg presented Engle with the award and a check from the Oregon Lottery for \$500 at a school assembly.

“I have seen many teachers in my time in Grant County, but few show the dedication, the love, the commitment to kids, and community that Michele has shown,” Waltenburg said. “These are some of the reasons that she was selected as the 2019 Regional Teacher of the Year for the Eastern Region.”

Former Monument resident Skye Fitzgerald, 48, was nominated for an Academy Award this year for his short film documentary “Lifeboat.”

Although it didn’t win the Oscar, several locals in Monument remembered Fitzgerald, who graduated from Monument School, and were thrilled with the news of his nomination.

Monument is well known for their Fourth of July fireworks, and many say it is the best display in Oregon east of the Cascades.

Visitors are also drawn to the events held at the park, led by Lonnie Lawrence, which will be called the Monument Fun Festival this

year. Activities slated include a 4-H Color Run and pancake breakfast in the park, horseshoe tournament, parade, bobbing for apples and potluck dinner in the park.

Monument has two working emergency medical technicians, one emergency medical responder and eight volunteer firefighters.

Kevin Mitchell, the city’s fire chief, said the department recently received a donation of Jaws of Life from a man who owns a McMinnville towing company.

The man told Mitchell that the equipment he bought wasn’t what he wanted. He’d visited Monument a few years ago and decided to call and see if the city wanted it.

Mitchell said they will give their older Jaws of Life to the Dayville Volunteer Fire Department.

He said they are currently working on a rescue rig that was once an ambulance, which came from Umatilla County Fire Department, and they also received a donation of turnout gear, including boots, pants and coats as well as four AED monitors from the Alfalfa Fire Department.

Grants fund senior center upgrades

The Monument Senior Center is considered the hub of the city, which has a population of 125.

“Everything happens here, whether it’s a senior dinner, EMT fundraiser, funerals, weddings, soil and water board meetings or medical clinics,” said senior center fundraising chairwoman Judy Harris.

The facility has received several upgrades in the past year, most recently new ADA-approved bathrooms with an updated look, and new flooring through much of the building.

The Joyce Miller Owens Charitable Foundation gifted the center with \$39,541 about one year ago, and also paid for outside lighting and accessible doors with control buttons to automatically open one of the main doors.

Harris said Bob and Sylvia Cockrell “have gone way beyond” in the center’s library/meeting room, removing what was likely a truckload of library books from several shelves that line one of the walls.

They also disassembled the shelving so the wall could be painted and flooring installed, then replaced everything as it was.

Last spring, the Gorge Community Foundation gave the center \$21,000.

“We asked for \$16,000,” Harris said.

The funding allowed center leaders to purchase 20 new tables, 62 new chairs and cement flooring for an outdoor storage building and two garage doors.

The center’s annual rummage sale was held June 14-16. Proceeds from the event help pay for the center’s operation costs and go into a rainy-day fund, which covers anything that breaks down.

Another big event at the center is the annual Buckaroo Festival and Harvest Auction, scheduled for Sept. 21. A dinner of salmon and elk is traditionally served.

“We have a really good team, and that’s what it takes to make these things happen,” Harris said.