

Brown drops special session on death penalty law

GOP leaders say it's a 'lost opportunity' for victims

By Claire Withycombe
Oregon Capital Bureau

Gov. Kate Brown will not call a special session to change a controversial bill limiting the state's death penalty before the law takes effect on Sept. 29.

Senate Bill 1013, which lawmakers approved this year, changed when prosecutors can charge someone with aggravated murder — the only charge in Oregon for which the death penalty can be sought. During legislative hearings, lawmakers supporting the bill said it wouldn't apply to old cases where defendants had already been sentenced. But, after the legislative

session ended, the Oregon Department of Justice said the law could apply to people on Oregon's death row who have been granted a new trial on appeal.

Brown said in late August that she would call a special session if lawmakers could round up support for a change to clarify the law. But by Sept. 18, it was apparent that there wasn't enough support for that change, she said.

"While it is clear there is a misunderstanding regarding the intent of the words in Senate Bill 1013, it is also clear there is not sufficient support for a special session to pass a fix," Brown said in a Sept. 18 statement, as lawmakers wrapped up three days of interim committee meetings at the Capitol. "When announcing my support for a special session, I said that it was conditional on stake-



Oregon Capital Bureau/Sam Stites

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown reflects on 2019 session during Lake Oswego appearance Sept. 12.

holders and legislators crafting bill language that had the votes to pass. That has not been achieved.

"I cannot justify the additional cost and time a special session requires without that support, and I will not be calling the legislature into a special session this month before the law goes into effect," Brown said.

A 'lost opportunity'

Late last month, Sen. Floyd Prozanski, D-Eugene, said he sought a change to the law to have it apply only to offenses committed on or after Sept. 29, 2019, when the law takes effect. Reached after the governor's announcement, Prozanski said that a special session to pass the tweak had support in the Senate,

but not in the House.

"When we are faced with these type of situations, we look at it, we measure it, and then if we determine that something needs to be done, that we are willing to put politics to the side and actually finish and make certain that the policy we actually passed is actually interpreted the way we intended it to be," Prozanski said of his colleagues in the Senate. "We were not willing to play the politics that apparently is being played in the House."

Brown's announcement was met with criticism from Republicans.

"I am disappointed the governor did not take the opportunity to call lawmakers into session to fix the bungled death penalty bill," tweeted new House Republican Leader Christine Drazan. "This was a lost opportunity to protect victims' families, achieve a bipartisan solution

and uphold the will of the voters."

Senate Republican Leader Herman Baertschiger Jr. of Grants Pass claimed the bill "will inflict even more pain on the victims' families who have already been horribly damaged and traumatized."

"Their horrific experiences will be public again as the worst criminals are given the chance of parole," Baertschiger said.

Advocacy groups like the American Civil Liberties Union of Oregon have opposed changes to Senate Bill 1013. The ACLU of Oregon has said that capital punishment is disproportionately applied to people of color and doesn't deter people from crime. The group has also pointed to errors and biases in the criminal justice system that lead to innocent people getting convicted and sentenced to death across the country.

County Court approves fairgrounds parking lot lights, repairs

Sam Palmer gives 'hats off' to SAR crew

By Angel Carpenter
Blue Mountain Eagle

Work is moving forward on several projects at the Grant County Fairgrounds in John Day.

Fairgrounds Manager Mindy Winegar updated the Grant County Court Sept. 18 about plans for upgrades and repairs at the facility.

The court approved the installation of five 33-foot metal light poles for the fairgrounds' main parking lot for \$20,000, which includes the cost of bases for each.

Winegar said 50-amp service at each pole will be added, using the fairgrounds' reserve account, at a cost of \$5,500.

"Eventually, we can get a pump for that front lawn — which would pay for itself pretty quickly — and summer irrigation," she said, adding electricity would also give them an option to expand vendor booths and overflow from the RV park.

County Judge Scott Myers said Winegar should move forward with the bid.

Plans are moving forward for concrete work on approximately two-thirds of the pavilion floor affected by tree roots.

Levi Voigt of Strux Engineering recently assessed the pavilion and determined the building is structurally sound, Winegar said.

"That is good news," she added.

The court approved by consensus to move forward with engineering drawings for replacing a large portion of the pavilion floor and constructing updated, ADA-accessible bathrooms. The work also includes fixing the stem walls and flooring near the large roll-up door on the north side of the building.



The Eagle/Angel Carpenter

The Grant County Court discusses items on the agenda Sept. 18, including Commissioner Sam Palmer, left, County Judge Scott Myers and Commissioner Jim Hamsher.

The court also suggested Winegar move forward quickly on hiring a concrete finisher.

"Time is of the essence, so we don't interfere with your events," said Commissioner Jim Hamsher.

Both Hamsher and Commissioner Sam Palmer recommended Winegar continue to work with Voigt since he is "prompt" and familiar with the project.

Four trees will be removed on the north side of the pavilion and their roots killed, Winegar said after the meeting. A tree at the flower circle, which is near the small animals barn, is dead and will also be taken out.

Winegar noted that she had reached out to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, and they will assess the building with Ryan Palmer in October.

Winegar and the court had discussed the problem of the pavilion being down from two heaters to one.

A solution arose when Grant County Roadmaster Alan Hickerson, appearing before the court with lead mechanic Joe Bennett, requested a backup propane heater for their shop on Lower Yard

Road. The court resolved the issue of heat for both buildings, calling on Winegar and Hickerson to seek a package deal for the fairgrounds and road department to have their heating needs addressed by one local business.

On Friday, Winegar said they were looking into heating sources, and they plan to stick with oil heat. She said Ed Staub & Sons recently looked at the current heating system.

She hopes the replacement will be done before winter and said, depending on when the work is completed, she may have to cancel some events.

"The majority of people, I think, will be understanding," she said.

In other county court news:

- Grant County Regional Airport Manager Haley Walker requested \$3,000 to pay an independent consulting engineer as part of the process of receiving the federal funding for the runway decoupling project.

- A \$6.25 million grant was secured through the federal Department of Transportation's Airport Improvement Program, funded at 100% with no match needed.

The independent consulting engineer works out an estimate for the project and compares it to the estimate of the airport's consultant of record.

The two fee estimates "have to be within 10% of each other before we can move forward," Walker said at the meeting.

Friday, Walker said the two estimates were within 2.2% of each other, so she expects work will move forward during the 2020 construction season.

- The court approved increasing Planning Director Hilary McNary's work hours from 30 hours a week to 35 hours a week through the end of the year. McNary's request was read in the court.

"She has several different things that came in, including the new mapping with water in Silvies Valley and other water locations for flood maps. A lot of things are landing on her office at once, and I think she makes a good case for us to temporarily increase her hours," Myers said, adding that if a specific accounting of how the extra hours are spent is wanted, they can make that happen.

- The court discussed and approved the signing of a \$4,000 Grant Young Memorial Planning Assistance grant that can be used for staff time and staff pay but not office equipment.

- The court approved continuing with Sally Bartlett, who now lives in the Burns area, to provide their Title III administrative services through December. Myers said Bartlett is "very good" at coordinating the Title III, and Hamsher said during the extension period he would like Bartlett to prepare the new Grant County Economic Development Coordinator Allison Field to take over the Title III duties. Palmer said he would like to have an accounting of Bartlett's

time, adding the taxpayers would expect that.

- Myers picked up a 350-pound letter-board sign Sept. 4 from Bend for the Grant County Library. The height of the sign will be taller than the city of John Day allows, so a variance was obtained for \$475.

- Palmer said Grant County Search and Rescue helped find a central Oregon man in his 70s who had been missing for 10 days in the area of Fields Peak. "He was alive, but on his last legs," Palmer said. "Our hats off to our SAR."

- Judy Kerr, in the audience, asked when the court discussed a new rule banning the use of used personal thumb drives to download the court proceedings via the court administrative assistant. Myers said it wasn't discussed in court, but a new rule was made by human resources and Myers after a cyber security audit was made for the building. "We've been advised to either sell them a CD with the information on it or have them bring in a still-packaged, brand-new thumb drive each time," he said. Hamsher said the rule is set up to prevent viruses from being introduced into the court's computer system.

- The Veterans Service Office is planning a "Veterans Stand Down" fair for November 2020. The activity will connect veterans with helpful local resources.

- Myers attended a Northwest Housing Authority Board meeting, as chairman of the board, Sept. 17 in La Grande. There are 860 low-income housing units in Grant, Wallowa, Union and Baker counties, which are 96% full.

- A meeting about the future of a potential public pool was scheduled, past press time, Tuesday, Sept. 24, at the Grant County Regional Airport in John Day.

BLUE MOUNTAIN HEALTHCARE FOUNDATION PRESENTS:

CAMPFIRES & COCKTAILS

SATURDAY OCTOBER 19, 2019 5:30PM
GRANT COUNTY FAIRGROUNDS

TICKETS: \$30 EACH
OR 2 FOR \$50

5:30 SOCIAL HOUR/AUCTION ITEM VIEWING
6:30 DINNER/SILENT AUCTION BIDDING

- STEAK DINNER
- DOOR PRIZES
- SILENT AUCTION
- LIVE AUCTION
- GAMES
- COSTUME CONTEST

TO RSVP BY PHONE OR FOR MORE INFORMATION:
JENA KNOWLES 541-575-1311 EXT. 2213
JKNOWLES@BLUEMOUNTAINHOSPITAL.ORG



Please join us for our



ANNUAL INSTALLATION DINNER

Wednesday, October 2, 2019

at the John Day Elks Lodge 1824

No Host Social Hour 5:00-6:00PM

Dinner 6:00PM

Program to Follow

Several Guest Speakers will be presenting important information about "The Future of Grant County"

Everyone welcome! 'Bring a spouse or friend'

Choice of Tri-tip or Salmon Dinner will be provided by the Chamber

Please RSVP your dinner choice and number of guests by September 25th.

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