

John Day supports allowing voters to decide on aquatic center

By Rudy Diaz
Blue Mountain Eagle

The details on the proposed aquatic center are out, but the conversation during a recent John Day City Council meeting focused on voting and what would happen if cities decided to vote against establishing a new county service district.

The John Day City Council passed a resolution on June 9 to support Grant County initiating a ballot measure to establish a county service district for the purpose of providing and operating a new public swimming pool for the residents of central Grant County.

While John Day passed the resolution, Mt. Vernon city council voted against a similar resolution during a meeting in April.

One of the factors in Mt. Vernon's decision was a survey the city sent out to 200 residents, according to Mt. Vernon Mayor Kenny Delano, where 30% sent a response back to the city with 81% of respondents saying they would not want to participate in the pool venture, according to City Recorder



The John Day City Council and audience on June 9.

Tami Kowing in April. The survey focused on the proposed aquatic taxing district, which would encompass Prairie City, Mt. Vernon, Canyon City, Seneca and their rural fire districts. Delano confirmed that the city council is staying firm on their decision. "We've had some discussions (since the vote), but we didn't think it was necessary to revisit that decision," Delano said. "The hospital bond is expiring, but to place a never-ending tax burden along with the bond, the citizens I've talked with don't want that. If they want to do that, they're going to have to go about it and redraw those district lines."

John Day Mayor Ron Lundbom said he asked several of his employees from Mt. Vernon what they did with their ballots. One said he left it in his pickup and doesn't vote on surveys anyway, and the other employee said he will vote when it's time to vote on an actual ballot. Lundbom added that it would have been nice to have gone to Mt. Vernon and present the numbers to them with the final draft of the report because he feels there are misunderstandings going around. "I don't think 40% of people responding to a survey is an accurate response, and whether 80% of those people said no,

that's still not the majority of the 200 people in Mt. Vernon that got the ballot," Lundbom said. Lundbom asked how this would affect the tax rate, and if the rate would go up if other cities like Mt. Vernon said no to supporting the proposed plan. "No, if they opt out, they're out, and the financials don't work anymore," said John Day City Manager Nick Green. The city council then talked about giving people in the county a chance to vote if they support or disagree with the pool. "I think it should be put on the ballot, no questions asked,

and it's up to the people to vote on it," said Councilor Gregg Habberly. "It's not the city council or the county telling them they're gonna pay it if the citizens didn't get to vote on it." Delano explained why voting also played a factor in turning down the resolution. He said that Mt. Vernon could easily be outvoted by John Day residents alone to be a part of a project that many Mt. Vernon residents are not interested in. Dusty Williams of John Day also asked during the June 9 John Day City Council meeting if the ballot were to move forward with Mt. Vernon not wanting to be a part of the district, wouldn't John Day out-vote them and force them to be a part of the district. Green said there are more voters outside of John Day in the initiative than there are within the city. "John Day would not carry the vote," Green said. "There are more people in Prairie City and Canyon City combined than there are in John Day, and when you add Mt. Vernon, Seneca and all the area in between,

there's quite a few more people outside the city than within it." Grant County Commissioner Sam Palmer was at the June 9 meeting and said he did some community outreach for feedback on how he should vote or approach the situation. "The question I pose to business owners, property owners, taxpayers is the governor imposed a lot of new taxes on taxpayers, I take that into account, but I think it's everybody's right to vote on something," Palmer said. "I'm leaning towards the camp of voting to put it on the ballot if it comes to us." The John Day Swim Team plans to attend the Canyon City City Council meeting on June 23, past press time. Their goal is for Canyon City to pass a resolution stating they support Grant County initiating the formation of an aquatics district by placing it as a ballot measure for the voters to decide in the November election. "We want an opportunity to campaign and vote," reads a message on the John Day Swim Team Facebook page.

Grant Union shop and gym projects nearing completion

By Rudy Diaz
Blue Mountain Eagle

While school's out for the summer, work continues for several projects at Grant Union Junior-Senior High School. The gym and the new automotive shop continue to see progress as both projects look to be finished prior to the new school year. The gym is looking at an addition of new flooring and bleachers for visitors and students to enjoy.

Grant Union Principal Ryan Gerry said the bleachers have been in the works for several years because the current bleachers were installed in 1974. "They recognized the need for an update with the bleachers system we currently had in place," Gerry said. Two years ago the floor was re-sanded, and last summer, while seismic upgrade work was underway on the gym and other areas of the building, the entire floor was damaged when a rain storm came through. Repairs were made on the damaged areas prior to the 2019 basketball season, but now the floor is being replaced through insurance. "We took the opportunity to pair them both up at the same time, and if we're going to get a new floor, this is the time to get new bleachers as well," Gerry said. "We're really excited for the opportunity to get it all done in one



The Grant Union High School gym floor and bleachers are almost complete.

fell swoop." While COVID-19 shifted education to distance learning and left school buildings closed with less traffic than before, the silver lining was that it did allow the time frame of this project be bumped up while saving the district money. With the closure, the district didn't have to pay to have the bleachers removed, which saved quite a bit of money, according to Gerry. Hiring out to have the bleachers removed would have cost about \$50,000. They were able to have the district's maintenance staff help get the bleaches out and remove the floor. "The whole COVID situation has not been great, but this has allowed for some projects to take place, and so we were able to remove the

floor and the bleachers on our own," Gerry said. Currently, Hicks Brothers Wood Floors of Meridian, Idaho, are installing the floor and finishing the sanding. They will also work on painting and striping of the line. In the first part of August, Nor-Pac Seating Inc. will be putting in the bleachers, and the facility should be ready by the start of the school year. The new bleachers will be ADA compliant, and each section will have four walking aisles with handrails, according to Gerry. The funds for the new shop came from High School Success — funds from Measure 98 — to build this facility to provide more space for the growing career and technical education automotive program at Grant Union. This project started in

October, and the plan is to have it ready to go for the start of the 2020 school year. "This is really going to free up our metal shop, because right now, we're running our metals program with Mr. (Wayne) Suchorski and Mr. (Jason) Miller's automotive classes out of the same building," Gerry said. "This will free up a lot of room for our students and allow each program to flourish." Electrical work, adding three-bay garage doors, completing the firewall, adding a restroom and moving the equipment are some of the last things to complete the project, according to Gerry. "We put a lot of energy into these projects, and we're excited for the completion and the unveiling of these projects for our students and community," Gerry said.



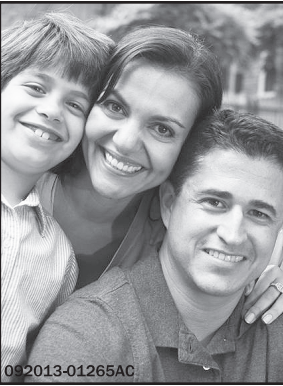
Eagle file photo
Grant School District Superintendent Bret Uptmor said Humbolt Elementary will need \$5 million in repairs.

Grant School District will look into building new high school

By Steven Mitchell
Blue Mountain Eagle

Grant School District board members plan to address its facilities needs in the fall, which include looking into building a new high school and making major repairs at Humbolt Elementary, Superintendent Bret Uptmor said. The cost to replace Grant Union High School would be \$45 million, while major improvements at Humbolt would be \$5 million, Uptmor said. BLRB Architects, a firm certified by the Oregon Department of Education to conduct the district's assessment, wrapped up the evaluation May 19. The facility assessment was conducted on the district's four buildings through the ODE's \$20,000 Technical Assistance Program facilities assessment and long-range planning grant. ODE awarded the district the grant last year to assess

the physical condition and determine the level of deficiencies and provide an estimate for repair or replacement costs of the district's schools and administrative office. The study found several critical problems that need to be addressed, according to BLRB's assessment. Uptmor said a committee made up district staff, community members and other stakeholders decided that the best use of the funds is to look into replacing Grant Union High School. "Is there a definitive plan? I would say no," he said. "The board will review the BLRB assessment and planning information, and with guidance from the document, the board will begin the next phase and making decision on next steps." Uptmor said the school district is included in a flood plan with John Day. "We will need to include that in our discussion as well," he said.



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