

# Fourth of July cornhole, fireworks planned in Monument

By Steven Mitchell  
Blue Mountain Eagle

While the Fourth of July will look much different this year with big gatherings and many fireworks shows being canceled, residents will be able to celebrate the holiday in Monument.

The annual festivities will be held privately along the North Fork of the John Day River at North Fork RV and Camping Park.

North Fork RV and Camping owner Steve Mills said registration for cornhole is at 10 a.m., and the tournament kicks off at noon.

Mills said, through donations from several ranchers and others who had been involved in the event in the past, the fireworks show at dusk will be 20% larger than last year.

Mills said there have been approximately 70 people at the park in previous years, but he is not sure how many people will show up this year.

"I can't say that's going to happen in our park this year," he said. "But you know it sounds like there's going to be quite a few people."

Mills said it was important to keep the tradition of the Fourth of July going this year.

He said when events in small Eastern Oregon towns get canceled for even just one year they run the risk of not coming back the following year.

"I'm not saying that this would happen on the Fourth," he said. "But they don't seem to come back because the towns have such a struggle with money."

Mills said he is not sure if there will be booths set up this year and that they are "playing it by ear."

He said this is the first year that he and his wife, Susan, have hosted the event so he does not want to "over-promise."

For more information, contact Mills at 541-693-3087.

# Canyon City weighs in on proposed aquatic center

City council will make decision in July

By Rudy Diaz  
Blue Mountain Eagle

Discussion on an aquatic center in Grant County continues as residents in Canyon City talked about their thoughts on the pool and voting.

During the Canyon City City Council meeting on June 23, proponents and opponents of a proposed aquatic center and taxing district shared their thoughts as the city council listened to the concerns of their constituents.

The proposal would create a new aquatic taxing district that would encompass Prairie City, Mt. Vernon, Canyon City, Seneca and John Day, and their rural fire districts. The district would have a permanent tax rate of 20 cents per \$1,000 of a property's assessed value for operations costs, as well as a 20-year construction bond with a rate of 71 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value.

Lisa Weigum, a resident in Canyon City, shared her concerns on a survey sent out by Canyon City. The survey about the proposed pool was sent out to 250 residents through the water and sewer bills.

There were 113 (45%) surveys returned with 51 (45%) respondents saying yes and 62 (55%) residents saying no. Of the feedback from the survey, 109 were property owners and nine were renters.

Weigum asked if the city council would base its decision on the survey.

"Our concern is that we are representing our constituents, so the best way to do that is the people we do have access to, we can send out a questionnaire and those are the ones typically paying the bill," said Canyon City Mayor Steve Fischer.

Weigum said, if the city is going to base it on the population of the people they serve, the 250 surveys with the water and sewer bills are not an accurate reflection of the voting population in the town and in each household.

A council member asked Weigum what the city should have done differently. Weigum said, while it was difficult to have meetings due to COVID-19, she would have liked to have seen more town hall meetings and more opportunities for people to understand what they are voting on instead of just a survey. She said it was not just Canyon City's fault and that there should have been participation from the steering committee that proposed the taxing district.



The Eagle/Rudy Diaz

Mayor Steve Fischer and the Canyon City City Council listen to what members of the audience had to say about a proposed aquatic district June 23.

Fischer said the town hall meetings were planned, but he got a notice to cancel the meetings until further notice due to COVID-19.

"I brought it to the council saying we aren't going to be able to have those town hall meetings, but we need to have some kind of idea to have input from our constituents," Fischer said.

Fischer shared a concern that large landowners in Grant County have more at stake when it comes to the amount in taxes they would have to pay, but would not have as big of a say when it comes to voting.

"Keep in mind that somebody who owns a single-wide ... that pays \$30 a year in taxes... My point is that that person has the right to vote. That person may be paying \$30 a year in taxes," Fischer said. "Now we're talking about people who have thousands of acres worth millions of dollars, and they're paying thousands of dollars a year... All I'm saying is that the people who have the most at stake is not the bulk of those that are living in poverty."

Fischer added that he received a letter from the Grant County Farm Bureau with statements from people who own large amounts of land in Grant County.

"I do have somebody paying \$30, \$40, \$50 for a \$2,500-worth manufactured home, and they're gonna have just as much say," Fischer, who works in the Grant County Assessor's Office, said.

Weigum asked if Fischer was saying that people who own property have more of a right to vote than people who don't.

Fischer said no, but those are the ones bills are sent to.

"But their vote doesn't

matter anymore than if you own a trailer house and pay \$10 in taxes," Weigum said. "That vote has the same weight as someone who pays \$10,000 in taxes because they own a multi-million dollar ranch. That's what a vote is... We shouldn't be discriminated against because we don't own property."

Fischer said, "The thing is, your portion of payment is not going to be the (same)."

Although the rates would be the same for every property owner in the proposed taxing district, the amount owed by each owner would vary based on the amount of property owned and its assessed value. Farmland and timberland is assessed differently than other properties.

Land owner John Morris said he is one of the ranchers and farmers that would be impacted if the rural fire districts were included in the district boundaries as planned. He said it would be paying for something not needed.

"I'll admit, I raised kids here, but I don't have any kids anymore," Morris said. "Is it benefiting me? Not in the least."

Fischer said he was concerned with the lack of information provided on the possibility of repairing Gleason Pool and the focus on building

a new pool. He added that he does not believe that the state of Oregon would back out of plans to build a new Kam Wah Chung interpretive center — in the current pool's location — because of the swimming pool.

"Again, it boils down to the very thing I brought up at several meetings, and the only thing I heard is 'No, we're not moving backwards, we're only moving forward,'" Fischer said.

Fischer read the letter from the Grant County Farm Bureau, which represents local agricultural producers and other landowners in Grant County, which suggested that Canyon City follow Mt. Vernon in the decision to vote down the resolution until a third reasonable option is considered. This option is to repair Gleason Pool and update it for an extended life of five to 15 years to allow sufficient timing to develop a reasonable alternative for its replacement in a location that benefits youth as a priority.

"In either case, however, John Day secures potential economic benefits to themselves while the external cost inherit to tourism is bore by others. Rural landowners and agricultural producers will not be immune to these negative impacts," Fischer read

from the letter. "Although our board has not wrapped up our review or prepared our public position on this matter, we have reviewed sufficient background material to determine that the city's proposal does not appear to reflect the interest of most area residents nor is it timely."

Another concern Fischer had is the effect on the tax rate due to Mt. Vernon already voting against a resolution supporting the pool, which would require adjustments to the tax rates or district boundaries to bring in the funding necessary to operate the pool.

Sena Raschio, a property owner in Canyon City, voiced her support for the pool being on the ballot and its importance for the kids in the county.

"I have two children, and I can really use a pool to not only keep my kids physically active... but it is a challenge this summer to keep my kids physically active," Raschio said. "We would want to have a pool, and we would be willing to pay."

Raschio added that the closure of Gleason Pool this year because of COVID-19 restrictions showed her just how important it is to have a pool and activities for her family.

Fischer said he agreed about the importance of a pool in Grant County, but said the point that he is trying to make is that repairing the pool was never examined.

According to the final report on the pool presented to the city of John Day, the city's consulting team estimated the cost for repairs could be between \$540,000 and \$810,000 or more, which could extend the life of the pool another 10-15 years at most, at which point it would need to be replaced.

As the discussion began to wrap up, Fischer clarified that he had voiced his opinion, but the city council as a whole will make the ultimate decision. The resolution will be brought up during the next Canyon City City Council meeting in July.

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