

Another round of grants available for small businesses and sole proprietors

By Steven Mitchell
Blue Mountain Eagle

Roughly \$35,000 in grant funding will go to nearly 20 small businesses in Grant County impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Stephanie LeQuieu, Grant County rural venture catalyst with Oregon RAIN, said the Business Oregon grants are for businesses that did not receive emergency assistance under the federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act.

She said the federal assistance programs include the Small Business Administration's Payroll Protection Program, Economic Injury Disaster Loans or other federal programs for emergency pandemic funding.

LeQuieu said Community Lending Works, a community development financial institution, entered eligible businesses into a random lottery and worked with those selected to complete the process.

She said another round of Business Oregon grants for small businesses are still available, and she expects the application window to open up by Friday.

LeQuieu said the requirements for the grants would be the same as the first round. The funds are for businesses affected by the COVID-19 pandemic that didn't receive federal funds.



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Stephanie LeQuieu, Grant County rural venture catalyst with Oregon RAIN, updates Grant County Court members regarding grants for businesses who have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic that didn't qualify for federal funds. LeQuieu said almost 20 local small businesses qualified for the first round of grants from Business Oregon.

LeQuieu said there is approximately \$35,000 of Business Oregon funds remaining, and there is a 45-day window to disperse the money.

She said she is funneling businesses that do not meet Business Oregon's qualifications into a pool for a separate grant program through the county.

She said the amount of money available from the county grant would depend on how many companies qualify for the Business Oregon grant.

LeQuieu said small businesses with fewer than 25 employees that have not received CARES Act funding that have been impacted by the pandemic could apply for grant money.

A third grant is available from the Greater Eastern Oregon Development Corporation in Pendleton.

The GEODC's press release said it allotted \$25,000 for Grant County small businesses.

She said Business Oregon funded a portion of GEODC's grant program that is for businesses with less than 25 people and sole proprietors that did not receive CARES Act money.

According to Business Oregon's application, eligible small businesses must meet the following conditions: A business would need to demonstrate a decline in revenue more significant than 50% in March 2020 or April 2020 compared to sales in January or February of the same year. Or, the business must show that it could not operate due to the COVID-19 shutdown orders.

Documents that may be needed include a 2018 tax return, year-over-year profit and loss documents and an employee identification number.



The Eagle/Rudy Diaz

John Day City Manager Nick Green and Mayor Ron Lundbom listen to an update regarding the Highway 395 sidewalk project.

Sidewalk project along Highway 395 in John Day moves forward

By Rudy Diaz
Blue Mountain Eagle

Discussions continued regarding the Highway 395 South sidewalk project in John Day as plans have been adjusted.

Sean Maloney, the transportation project leader for Oregon Department of Transportation Region 5, gave an update on the project, which will provide a sidewalk from Southwest Sixth Street to Grant Union Junior-Senior High School, during a city council meeting on July 14.

The update focused on revisions made to the concept plan from winter and stormwater treatment.

The plan presented in winter was to have a curb and gutter with breaks in it, then a swale and then the sidewalk for the project. The swales would help with the stormwater treatment.

Maloney said that stormwater treatment has been the struggle in the design. He said the team found out that the swales could not have stored all the water, so they were going to store the water in a vault along Southwest Sixth Avenue. However, due to low spots in the ground and being close to ground water, the team wasn't able to do that.

"So, really, we spent a fair amount of time since then trying to figure out what to do with our stormwater," Maloney said.

Maloney said the plan is for two-thirds of the project, from the north end of the high school to the car wash, to have a curb-tight sidewalk design.

"So the water essentially is going to run into that (curb-tight sidewalk) for about two-thirds of the project and then it's going to go into the separated sidewalk infiltration ditch (at the car

wash)," Maloney said.

The water from the high school would travel north to the car wash where it would enter the infiltration ditch, according to Maloney.

"Mostly, this is for treating the water, and then it will go into an infiltration pond ... which will be behind the alleyway behind the soil conservation building," said Maloney.

He added that there will be a couple places where they have a transition zone where they have separated sidewalk buffers.

When it comes to the work on the sidewalk near the high school, Maloney said ODOT has been working closely with the school district.

"Essentially, there's no sidewalk there, and people can kind of pull in and out," Maloney said.

Plans have the sidewalk wrapping around the corner of the first entrance of the high school traveling from John Day heading towards Canyon City. The sidewalk would then connect with the high school with a crosswalk.

John Day City Councilor Dave Holland asked if the cost of the project will be too high to finish, something that has hampered progress in the past.

Maloney said that a combination of funding from a Safe Routes to Schools grant and ODOT Enhance funding from previous planning for this project will be enough to cover the plan.

"We seem to be in pretty good shape this time," Maloney said. "I feel pretty comfortable that we're covered on this project now."

The city council agenda states that the right-of-way acquisition will continue this summer, and construction is scheduled to begin next year.

Special assessments reduce property tax burden for agricultural land

By Rudy Diaz
Blue Mountain Eagle

When it comes to property taxes, owning more land does not necessarily mean paying more in taxes.

In Oregon, farm and timber land is assessed differently than residential and commercial land, significantly reducing the tax burden for agricultural land.

Grant County Assessor David Thunell said property taxes are based on assessed value — not real market value, which is what a property is actually worth or the amount for which it would be expected to sell.

In 1997-1998, assessed values for most properties, including homes, businesses and nonagricultural land, were set at 90% of the 1995-1996 real market value, and limited to a 3% increase each year. Unless there is a change to the property, such as new construction, zoning changes or subdivision, the assessed value for these properties typically increase 3% each year, as long as the real market value exceeds the assessed value.

"The assessed value is the lesser of the maximum assessed value and the real market value, and that maximum assessed value can only go up 3% a year as long as it is less than the real market value and something new hasn't been built on the property," Thunell said. "How you figure out someone's tax is you take their total assessed value, divide it by 1,000 and then you multiply that by the tax rate."

All improvements, such as homes and other buildings, are assessed the same way — whether on a farm, or a business or residence in a city — so all building owners pay taxes equally based on the assessed value of those buildings, Thunell said.

However, the land is assessed separately, and for farm and timber land, Thunell said special assessments reduce the assessed value to well below the real market value to encourage agricultural production, which typically requires more acreage than other industries.

"If people had all of this land and they had to pay their property taxes based on the market value, (no agricultural producers) could afford to pay their property taxes," Thunell said. "One reason why the state did this was to incentivize ranchers and farmers to keep their land in an agricultural use."



Eagle file photo

Grant County Assessor David Thunell looks at one of the many books containing all of the properties in Grant County and their owners.

Although farms with large amounts of land have high real market values, the assessed values that taxes are based on are much lower than those for comparable amounts of land used for other purposes.

For example, EO Media Group owns the 0.28-acre lot that houses the Blue Mountain Eagle and Department of Motor Vehicles. The building has a real market value of \$223,780 and an assessed value of \$195,676. The land has a real market value of \$45,020 and an assessed value of \$40,590. In total, the property has a real market value, or selling price, of \$268,800 and an assessed value of \$236,266 on which taxes must be paid. Last year, property taxes totaled \$3,881.

In contrast, one farm property of about 1,000 acres in Grant County has a real market value for land of about \$921,000 with an assessed value of about \$67,000. The buildings on the property have a real market value of about \$248,000 and an assessed value of \$233,000 — assessed identically to buildings or improvements not receiving special assessments — but the overall property has a real market value of \$1,169,000 and an assessed value of \$299,000. Last year, property taxes totaled about \$3,900.

Thunell said the special assessment values for farm land vary based on differ-

ent soil classes and timber land rates are provided by the Department of Revenue.

Another 2,400-acre property in Grant County with no buildings has a real market value of about \$1.3 million but an assessed value of about \$41,000. Last year, property taxes totaled about \$500.

"They're under farm use, and not only are they under farm use, it's all range land, which is the least productive type of land," Thunell said. "So the soil class determines the value."

Thunell said tax rates also vary within the county, depending on which taxing districts a property is in. Although every property in the county pays the same rate to Grant County, rates vary between the different school and cemetery districts, and city residents pay an additional rate to the city.

The Assessor's Office also collects fire patrol fees for rural properties on behalf of the Oregon Department of Forestry, which show up on property tax bills but do not get distributed to the local taxing districts, Thunell said.

Thunell noted that special assessments, like regular assessments, are also limited in how much they can increase annually through a formula calculating maximum specially assessed value, which typically restricts the assessed values to a 3% increase per year.



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Planning continues for construction of a sidewalk along South Canyon Boulevard from Sixth Avenue to the high school.

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