

John Day business owner shares concerns over COVID-19 relief fund expenditures

By Rudy Diaz
Blue Mountain Eagle

A business owner in John Day shared her concerns regarding the city's use of COVID-19 relief funds and why the funds were not offered to businesses or community members.

"Etc. A Unique Boutique" business owner Sherry Rininger said she felt the city could have done better with the relief funds and that the city could have helped the businesses.

The state awarded John Day with \$52,796 in COVID-19 relief funds, which was used on city hall, broadband support at Humbolt Elementary School and food security initiatives.

"Yes, the broadband to Humbolt (Elementary School) was important, and I'm not taking away from that," Rininger said, "but I really think that this city has to think about their businesses and residents."

Rininger said she felt like the city using relief funds for business owners would go a long way for their constituents, if more funds were received in the future.

Councilor Shannon Adair said, when the city received the relief funds, there was a wide range of what the money could be used for and the city had to think about getting the best return for the community since funds were limited.

"To be told we didn't do anything for our city, I think it's not accurate because I think that's all we ever think about," Adair said. "Our concern at that time was, 'Are our kids going to have to be online and have decent internet so they can function and continue to learn?'"

Mayor Ron Lundbom asked about the organizations that were already available to provide financial relief for businesses through grants and programs.

Rininger said the grants were not a guarantee and some people did not receive money to help cover expenses such as utilities. She said she was also lucky to have won the lottery since many grants are awarded on a lottery basis.

"All I'm saying is that it needs to be looked at, and it needs to be something considered in the future," Rininger said of city business relief.

Councilor Elliot Sky said, if the city does receive more relief funds, he will bring up this conversation again and discuss how the city could provide support that will help supplement resources already available from the county and other grant programs.

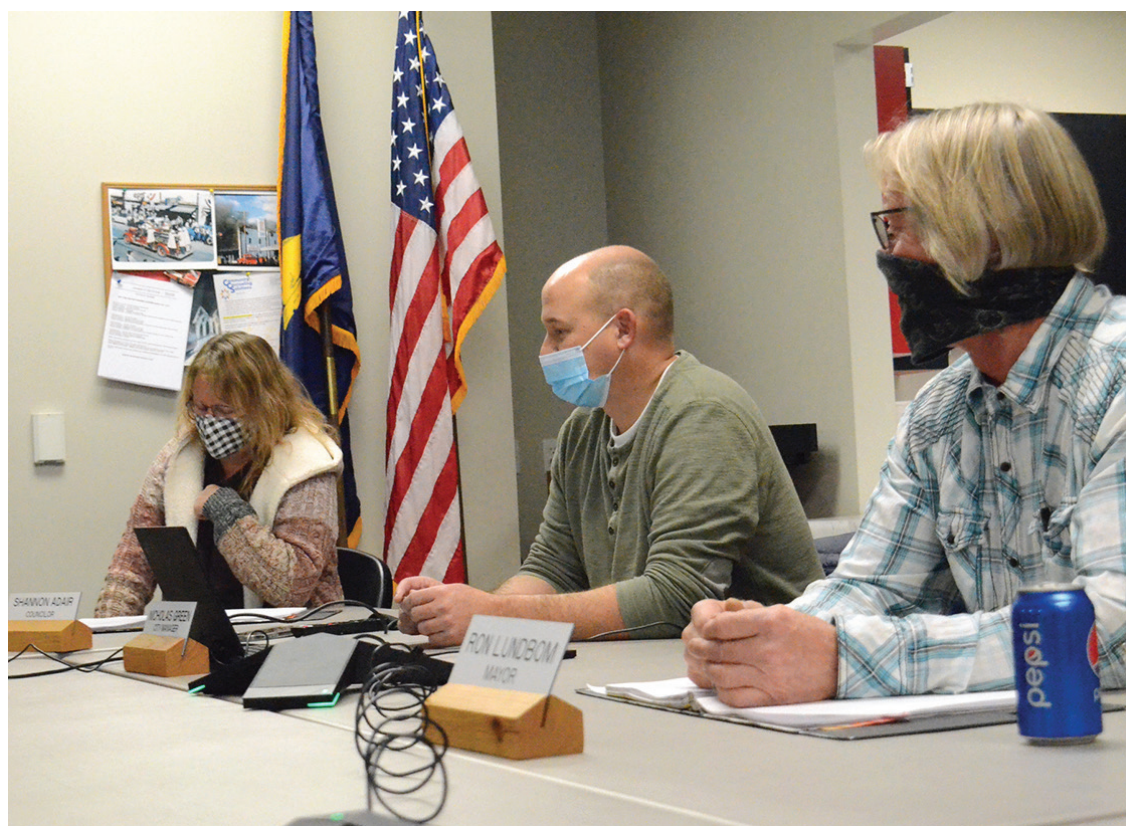
Rininger came to the city council as one of three business owners that requested reimbursement for water and sewer bills from the city from March to May.

"YES, THE BROADBAND TO HUMBOLT (ELEMENTARY SCHOOL) WAS IMPORTANT, AND I'M NOT TAKING AWAY FROM THAT, BUT I REALLY THINK THAT THIS CITY HAS TO THINK ABOUT THEIR BUSINESSES AND RESIDENTS."

—Sherrie Rininger, owner of 'etc. A Unique Boutique'



'Etc. A Unique Boutique' business owner Sherrie Rininger talks to the city council about using future COVID-19 relief funds for businesses.



From left, John Day Councilor Shannon Adair, City Manager Nick Green and Mayor Ron Lundbom during the city council meeting Dec. 8.



Eagle file photo
Prairie City School District Superintendent/Principal Casey Hallgarth.

Prairie City School District announces positive COVID-19 case

School plans to continue with in-person education

By Rudy Diaz
Blue Mountain Eagle

Prairie City School District had a positive case of COVID-19.

Prairie City School Superintendent Casey Hallgarth said in a press release that the individual notified the school of their positive test on Dec. 8. That individual was asked to stay home and self-isolate, he said.

Hallgarth said the school did contact tracing, and several students had to be quarantined.

Classes will continue to be in person as the school district continues to work with the Grant County Health Department and guidelines from the Oregon Department of Education to monitor COVID-19 in the community.

"We've only had one positive case so it's not like we have an outbreak," Hallgarth said. "...If we have a concern to where it's an outbreak then we're going to distance learning, but we're not close to that yet."

Hallgarth said the biggest concern is the health and safety of the students and staff as the guidelines are re-evaluated daily.

"We're going to stay with our routine and continue based on the guidelines that ODE and our health authorities provided for us," Hallgarth said.

Hallgarth said the school would shut down for an outbreak, but he said he has to also consider the ramifications of distance learning on students and parents.

"There's a fine line there, and that's why I'm working with the health authority closely to determine if we can keep them at school or need to go to distance learning," Hallgarth said. "Our No. 1 concern is the safety of the students on both sides: health-wise for COVID-19 and health-wise for the social and emotional health outlay if they go to distance learning."

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