

John Day looks to convert greenhouse operations to a cooperative

By Rudy Diaz
Blue Mountain Eagle

John Day's greenhouse may soon be a co-op.

John Day City Manager Nick Green gave a presentation on the greenhouse to the city council during a study session on March 31.

Green said they recommend the greenhouse convert into a cooperative formation to reduce operating costs and open up revenue opportunities that are not available to cities such as grants specific for co-ops.

"It's really more about accessing other revenue sources and helping the community feel like this is their asset and not some government project," Green said.

Transitioning to a co-op

would not heavily impact the current employees, but would require a manager for the operation.

Green said that entering a co-op would allow the greenhouse to hire additional staff at normal wages without needing to pay PERS and the added cost of a government employee.

This also provides a chance for members of the co-op to volunteer their time to do the harvest in exchange for produce, if they want.

"There's options, and we can start looking into how we can structure the co-op to include other users and other groups," Green said. "If we go down this road, we just need to start exploring these various interest groups that could participate."

Laurabeth Wallenstein, the



Eagle file photo

A variety of produce at the John Day greenhouse can be bought online.

project manager at the greenhouse, said she loves the interest that people have in the greenhouse and the work they do. She added that there is a lot of work to be done, and the additional help would be appreciated.

"I'm totally in support of

the co-op," Wallenstein said. "It would help with the funding, the structural issues that we have and getting a little bit more help with the work."

Green said, in the past year, sales have been consistently low due to the restaurant restrictions and lack of tour-

ism in the summer because of COVID-19, which they had not anticipated.

"We've averaged about \$2,500 in net sales a month, and we're growing quite a bit more food than that," Green said.

Tomatoes and leafy greens continue to be the most requested items from the greenhouse in their lineup of 24 products. Online, 261 customers have been acquired since the start of the online website nine months ago, but Green said the increase in customers would slow down as they run out of product.

"We're already starting to lose customers because they see sold out on almost every product line when they come to our website," Green said. "That's a function of how much space we have and several other factors."

The greenhouse completed their first internship program with Zachary Ostberg, a high school student who started his freshman year. Ostberg worked with the greenhouse crew for a month in August. Jesse Douglas, a junior from Grant Union, just started his internship at the greenhouse and works closely with Wallenstein, learning about hydroponic crop production.

The city also met with Eastern Oregon University and the Rural Engagement and Vitality Center to partner up and create an academic opportunity and internships, according to Green.

Modifications continue to be made at the greenhouse to accommodate issues with climate controls, keeping bugs out of the produce and redesigning several aspects of the grow operations for efficiency.



Eagle file photo

Fourth Avenue in John Day is in need of repairs after spring flooding in 2019.

City requesting funding from county for Fourth Street repairs

By Rudy Diaz
Blue Mountain Eagle

John Day is sending the Grant County Court a letter asking for money to help fund repairs of Fourth Street, which leads up to the Grant County Regional Airport.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency approved the scope and cost report on March 30 for the Fourth Street repairs and estimated the cost to be \$1.6 million.

FEMA will cover 75% of the cost with a 25% match, \$398,281, required, according to the letter sent from John Day City Manager Nick Green.

The city is requesting the county budget \$398,281 in the coming fiscal year for the match for construction.

The letter states that John

Day obligated \$270,000 for the initial design and construction oversight and plans to cover the final design, permitting and single-scope audit for the federal cost share.

The design for the project is a 95-foot soldier pile retaining wall. This design would drive steel into the ground until it reaches bedrock to where the soldier piles are stable and a concrete slab could be placed on top.

A portion of the road base would have to be cut back, but this design will avoid closing the road to emergency traffic between the hospital and airport.

"Preliminary design is complete, and the environmental permits have been approved for the project to be constructed within the in-wa-

ter work window, July 15 to August 31," Green said.

The council said they hope Grant County can cover the match since it is the main road used to access the Grant County Regional Airport and the industrial park.

Fourth Street repairs were also discussed between the city and county last November in a study session, but no decision was made afterward.

"The reality is that that road is not only in the city of John Day, but that is the arterial road going to the Grant County Regional Airport," Councilor Paul Smith said. "They have a stake in the maintenance of that road."

DEQ creates additional hurdles for wastewater treatment plant project

By Rudy Diaz
Blue Mountain Eagle

The Department of Environmental Quality is requesting a third groundwater site analysis at the location of the future wastewater treatment plant in John Day.

The city is currently working with an expired Water Pollution Control Facilities permit, which needs to be renewed for the future wastewater treatment plant.

Bob Long, a consultant from CwM-H2O, said this is an interesting permitting challenge for the city on this project due to a recent Supreme Court decision from Maui, Hawaii.

"This is a brand new permitting system that DEQ has not run through their agency yet," Long said. "The Supreme Court made a decision last year, and the EPA then propagated some guidance to the states."

Long said the Maui decision was based on a situation on the island where the state issued a WPCF permit, which allows for wastewater to be discharged to land.

"Unfortunately, they were discharging directly to a lava tube, which ran down to a coral reef and acted like a pipeline," Long said.

The Oregon state website defines two types of waste-



Eagle file photo

City Manager Nick Green stands in front of a holding pond for John Day's wastewater treatment plant in 2017.

water permitting documents for two different types of systems: the National Pollution Discharge Elimination System and the Water Pollution Control Facility. The site says that NPDES-permitted facilities discharge pollutants from any point source, such as a pipe, to state waters. If a facility discharges to land, it is a WPCF facility.

The U.S. Supreme Court directed the EPA to develop new rules that defined when a regulatory agency may use a state-issued WPCF permit or when the federal permitting path for an NPDES permit is required, according to a letter submitted by Long.

To renew the permit, the city needs to show DEQ that the future disposal method for the new treatment plant will not create the functional equiva-

lent of a direct discharge to state water, or DEQ would have to issue an NPDES permit according to the agenda. This would cause a problem due to the lack of preparatory work with the city's reach to the John Day River.

The city council motioned to award a contract not to exceed the amount of \$150,000 to CwM to perform the site investigation to proceed with permitting, provided DEQ approves the scope of work and agrees that this will be the last site investigation required.

John Day City Manager Nick Green said the water/wastewater loan and grant can be amended to remove the cost of the site investigation from the design and place the funds into the permitting or site analysis line item.

"We're setting the bar very high being the test case for DEQ," Green said. "This is going to cost our ratepayers almost \$300 per account holder, just to do this study. ... We're going to take almost \$200,000 right out of the gate and shift it from engineering to permitting, but we've got to do it because our ability to spend that \$5.2 dollars (from grants) hinges on DEQ issuing a permit so we can operate the facility. I don't see a way around it: I am just really unhappy with the way this has been handled."

Mtn. View Mini-Mart 211 Front St., Prairie City 541-820-4477
Weekly Specials
Sunday - Family Style Joy's Choice | Thursday - Asian | Saturday - Sushi

Your Rural Family Health Clinic

Grant County HEALTH Department
528 E. Main, St. E.
John Day

Monday - Thursday 7am - 6pm
Friday 8am - 5pm

Appointments available

Call and schedule your appointment today!
TOLL FREE 888-443-9104
or 541-575-0429

Services Provided:
• Primary Care
• Acute Care
• Women's Health Exams
• Men and Children Exams
• Immunizations
• Family Planning
• Contraception
• Pregnancy Testing & Referrals
• HIV Testing & Referrals
• Cocoon
• WIC
• High Risk Infants
• Maternity Case Management

AGCO PARTS **MASSEY FERGUSON** **HESSTON**

Robbins Farm Equipment

3850 10th St. Baker City 541-523-6377
62302 Pierce Rd. La Grande 541-963-6577
1160 S Egan Burns 541-573-6377
86812 Christmas Valley Hwy. Christmas Valley 541-576-2160

Haven House Retirement Center

Apartments available!

714 Main St.
PO Box 386
Fossil, OR 97830
541 763-4651
havenhouse3@wix.com

PAINTED SKY CENTER FOR THE ARTS

118 S. WASHINGTON STREET, CANYON CITY, OR 97820
(541) 575-1335 | PAINTEDSKYCENTER.COM

Leather Belt Making
Beginner - Intermediate | 5 Session Class
Starts Wednesday, April 7, 2021

Spring Time Bike Paint Night
Beginner - Experienced | 1 Session Class
Starts Thursday, April 8, 2021

Painted Sky Writers Club
Starts 2nd Monday of every month at 5:30 p.m.

How To Write A Cookbook
Ages 12 and up | 4 Session Class
Starts Tuesday, April 13, 2021

DOUG'S MOTOR VEHICLE REPAIR

Let your GRADUATES' accomplishments SHINE

With college commencements being cancelled and uncertainty with high school graduations, **HONOR YOUR SENIORS** in this special way on a Yard Sign. These 18" x 24" signs can be made in your graduates' school colors.

Order by May 8th! ONLY \$30

FROM A DISTANCE... WE STAND TOGETHER

FROM A DISTANCE... WE STAND TOGETHER

FROM A DISTANCE... WE STAND TOGETHER

FROM A DISTANCE... WE STAND TOGETHER

2020 SENIORS

2020 SENIORS

2020 SENIORS

2020 SENIORS

Blue Mountain EAGLE

Kim Kell • 541-575-0710
kim@bmeagle.com