

County asks lawmakers to take up border move

By STEVEN MITCHELL
Blue Mountain Eagle

On Wednesday, Dec. 1, Grant County Court members agreed to send state lawmakers a letter requesting they bring an initiative to the Legislature that proposes moving a large chunk of Oregon into Idaho.

The plan's backers believe that rural Oregon would fare better in reliably red Idaho.

Mike McCarter, president of Move Oregon's Border, the grassroots group behind the border shift, said the liberal supermajority in Salem has long left conservative Oregonians behind.

"They've got a freight train agenda that focuses on Northwest Oregon," McCarter said, "and the heck with rural Oregon. If they have already let us go, then hey, let us become part of Idaho."

McCarter told the court that the group believes rural Oregon is better aligned politically with residents of Idaho than people in Northwest Oregon.

The court's letters will go to Sen. Lynne Findley, R-Vale, and Rep. Mark Owens, R-Crane, as an official request to begin the discussion at the state level.

Those discussions have already started at the local level.

Grant is one of eight counties to require county officials to study or promote joining Idaho. The others are Harney, Wasco, Malheur, Baker, Jefferson, Sherman and Union.

Wednesday's meeting was one of three meetings the county commissioners are required to conduct each year.

Under terms of the initiative voters passed in May, the county will meet the first Wednesday of April, August and December "to discuss whether it is in the best interest of Grant County to promote the relocation of the Oregon-Idaho border."

Shifting the borders would require the approval of both the Oregon and Idaho legislatures as well as Con-

gress. Findley told the Eagle last month during an editorial meeting that the move would be a "heavy lift." However, Findley said he would bring it to the Senate floor on behalf of his constituents.

Rick LaMountain, a Mt. Vernon resident, pointed out that it benefits the group to see the big picture of rural Oregonians' effort to join Idaho within the broader, national political framework.



Steven Mitchell
Blue Mountain Eagle

Sandie Gilson, a key backer of the idea to move a large chunk of Oregon to Idaho, addresses the Grant County Court Wednesday.



Steven Mitchell
Blue Mountain Eagle

Rick LaMountain addresses the Grant County Court.

LaMountain said intelligent, informed people are becoming convinced that social and political upheaval has brought the country to a tipping point over the last year. America, LaMountain said, may no longer be a viable and functioning polity like it was before.

LaMountain cited an excerpt from a book titled "The Stakes: America at the Point of No Return" by Michael Anton, writer and former national security official in the Trump administration.

While Anton paints a bleak and pessimistic picture of the country's future, LaMountain said, he also offers an optimistic solution. Allow counties, cities and towns unhappy with their state governments to join one another.

Anton's book notes that there are examples in history and around the world of countries redrawing internal lines to suit shifts in population and interests, according to LaMountain. Not only would these population shifts improve civic harmony, Anton argues, but they also would extend the life of the republic.

"For our county and others in Eastern Oregon," LaMountain said, "the move to Idaho might not only help us in the near term, but provide the impetus for a new enduring political template that enhances local autonomy and popular sovereignty and could make America as a whole a less polarized, longer-lasting and more peaceful country."

Paving work adds trail link

By BENNETT HALL
Blue Mountain Eagle

JOHN DAY — Contractors last week completed a small but significant piece of the emerging John Day trail network.

A paving crew from Tidewater Contractors, working for general contractor Iron Triangle, put down a layer of asphalt on a short segment of trail from Hill Family Park to the Seventh Street Complex by way of the new pedestrian and bicycle bridge over the John Day River.

The paved trail segment provides off-street access from the south side of the river to the Seventh Street Complex, which has a paved walking path of its own. The 23-acre property houses baseball and softball fields, pickleball, tennis and basketball courts, a fishing pond, children's play area, a skatepark and a bike park. It is also the site of a proposed new swimming pool.

While that connection is already providing benefits to local residents, the short ribbon of asphalt can also be seen as a key link in the city's plan for a future trail system.

Parts of that system are already beginning to take shape.

From the bridge, an unpaved trail heads west along the north bank of the river. So far, the trail has been roughed out for only a short distance, but plans call for it to be graded and rocked as far as Patterson Bridge Road by June 30. It will also connect with the existing trail network at Davis Creek Park, giving the Charolais Heights neighborhood a link to the riverfront trail.

A good deal of work remains to be done at Hill Family Park, but the parking lot has been paved, restrooms are under construction and a fresh crop of grass is growing. Eventually, a footpath will circle the park, and the city is negotiating with prop-



Bennett Hall/Blue Mountain Eagle

A paving crew from Tidewater Contractors works on a new path linking Hill Family Park to the Seventh Street Sports Complex in John Day. From left are Lee Duckett, Lorin Hodge and Scott Fitzhugh.

erty owners to try and secure right of way for a trail that would run south along Canyon Creek to the Kam Wah Chung State Heritage Site, where the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department is planning a major package of improvements that will include a new interpretive center.

"Once that's finished, we will have just over 5 miles of in-city trails," said John Day City Manager Nick Green, adding that the trails will form a kind of "connective tissue" between downtown and the riverfront.

"That entire reach of the John Day was not accessible to the public for about 100 years, and now it's theirs, literally theirs — it's in the public trust again," Green added. "We gave them back their river. I feel pretty good about that."

Over the winter, the city will work on creating trail markers and informational signs about the history of the area to make using the trail system more enjoyable.

City Councilor Elliot Sky is a supporter of expanding the trail system.

"I really like the idea of living in a city that has good walkability and bikability," he

said. "That just really adds, I think, to the livability of a city."

But in order to reap the full benefits of the trail network, people need to be able to get to it easily, Sky added. To make that happen, he said, the city needs to create access points that people can drive to and park their cars.

Among other things, he'd like to see Seventh Street extended to the west side of town to improve accessibility, as well as the addition of at least one more pedestrian and bicycle bridge over the river so the trail system could expand still further.

"It depends on the outcome of (grant applications) for a portion of that," Sky said.

"My vision for a trail system would be one that can really weave through the city and provide connections to as many sections of the city as possible."

WHAT'S HAPPENING



members and elect a vice chair and secretary. There will be information shared on senior program funding. The public is welcome!

Tuesday, Dec. 7 Grant County Senior Citizens Advisory Council

• 11 a.m., Monument Senior Center, 269 Main St., Monument

The purpose of the semi-annual meeting is to introduce a new member of the council appointed by the Grant County Court, entertain new business proposed by council

Friday, Dec. 10 Grant Union High School fundraiser

• 5 p.m., Elks Lodge, 140 NE Dayton St., John Day

This event is a fundraiser for Grant Union's eighth grade trip. It starts with a spaghetti dinner at 5 p.m. and features bingo starting at 6. There will also be a dessert auction and a raffle for a smoker and a gun safe. Tickets for the dinner are \$8 per person, and raf-

Saturday, Dec. 11 Timber Truckers Light Parade

• 6 p.m., downtown John Day

The annual holiday log truck parade returns with a theme of "Light Up the Night." The entry fee is \$10. Entrants are encouraged

to preregister by calling Leslie Traylor at 541-620-4032. Winners will be announced following the parade at the John Day Elks Lodge, 140 NE Dayton St.

Sunday, Dec. 19 Deck the House 2021

• 6 to 8 p.m., Canyon City Annual holiday lighting contest sponsored and judged by the Whiskey Gulch Gang. First place wins \$500 and a

trophy, and second place wins \$250. To enter, call or text Jenna at 541-620-1673 with your address. Entries will be accepted until Dec. 18. Be sure to have your lights on the evening of Dec. 19.

Do you have a community event in Grant County you'd like to publicize? Email information to editor@bmeagle.com. The deadline is noon Friday for publication the following Wednesday.

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Domestic Violence
#STOPVIOLENCE
The Blue Mountain Eagle would like to thank all the participating businesses who helped make the Domestic Violence ad a huge success. Between all the business we were able to donate \$1,170⁰⁰ to the Grant County Victim Assistance program. Way to go Grant County Businesses!