

John Day gears up for Main Street facelift

By BENNETT HALL
Blue Mountain Eagle

JOHN DAY — City officials are working with downtown business owners on ideas for making Main Street a more inviting place to be.

Of course, projects like this take money, and the city is working on a two-pronged approach to financing.

Up to \$200,000 in competitive grant funding is available this year from Oregon's Main Street revitalization program, and owners of businesses and properties within the Main Street revitalization area are being encouraged to collaborate on an application for that money.

In addition, the city has a \$1 million grant to make infrastructure improvements in support of the planned expansion of the Kam Wah Chung State Historic Site on Canton Street, and some of that money could be used for Main Street improvements.

Ideas for Main Street

improvements were kicked around in a meeting on Jan. 12 at the John Day Fire Hall.

Among the suggestions were new signs, exterior lighting, façade improvements, awnings, better street lighting, and murals.

The Oregon Main Street grant program shut down temporarily during the pandemic but has now been restarted. Communities participating in the Oregon Main Street Network, such as John Day, can apply for grants of up to \$200,000 for revitalization projects.

The last grant John Day got went toward the remodeling and expansion of Len's Drug at the intersection of Main Street and Canyon Boulevard in 2019. Prior to that, the city obtained a grant to help with renovation of the Weaver Building at 131 W. Main St.

The consensus at the Jan. 12 meeting was that, this time around, the grant application should go toward improvements at multiple businesses



Richard Hanners/Blue Mountain Eagle, File
Len's Drug received a \$200,000 state grant in 2019 to help the business expand west into the area on Main Street that was then occupied by the Corner Cup.

and the Main Street corridor as a whole.

"One business gets \$200,000 or whatever, that just doesn't seem fair to me," said Janet Hill, owner of the Floor Store and Java Jungle. "I really would like to see it kind of be distributed through downtown."

Sherrie Rininger, owner of Etc., agreed.

"The past two grants have gone to individual projects,"

she said, "and I really think this one needs to be spread around."

City Councilor Heather Rookstool said she'd like to see better streetlights to improve downtown safety since the city shut down its police department.

"Lighting needs to be a priority," she said.

Downtown business owners with ideas about the Main Street revitalization grant were encouraged to contact 1188

Brewing Co. owner Shannon Adair, who also serves on the City Council and is taking the lead on the grant application.

"The availability of these funds is really exciting," she said. "Because we got Main Street funds before, I think we have a really good chance."

The application deadline is in March.

City Manager Nick Green said that, whether the Main Street grant application is successful or not, the city plans to use some of the \$1 million in state funding it received to make infrastructure improvements in support of the Kam Wah Chung expansion to enhance downtown.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Kam Wah Chung State Historic Site attracted around 10,000 visitors a year to John Day. But now the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department is planning a major expansion on the former Gleason Park property, including a multimillion-dollar interpretive center, and visitor num-

bers are expected to double or even triple when that happens.

"That's what we're planning for, but the reality is it's anybody's guess," Green said in an interview.

City officials want to take economic advantage of the influx of tourists by making it easy for foot traffic to move back and forth between Kam Wah Chung and the downtown business district a few blocks away. And once they get to downtown, the city wants to make the Main Street corridor as inviting as possible so visitors will spread their tourism money around.

A big chunk of the \$1 million in state money for infrastructure will go toward sidewalk improvements on Canton and Main streets between Kam Wah Chung and downtown, Green said, but some of what's left over can go toward enhancing downtown businesses.

"There's definitely a nexus between visitors coming to that site and visitors coming to downtown," Green said.

Monument School goes to distance learning

By BENNETT HALL
Blue Mountain Eagle

MONUMENT — Monument School District will transition from in-person instruction to distance learning for the week of Jan. 24, Superintendent Laura Thomas announced in a news release on Friday, Jan. 21.

The decision was made in response to "the rising count of positive COVID cases connected to the Monument School District and associated quarantines," Thomas said in the news release.

"In the coming week, the district will continue to work closely with the Grant County Health Department to determine when it is appropriate to return students to in-person instruction," she added.

Thomas said the district would keep parents updated through emails, social media and the district's website.

Late last year, the Oregon Health Authority reported a COVID-19 out-



Angel Carpenter/Blue Mountain Eagle, File

Monument School has decided to switch to distance learning for the week of Jan. 24, 2022, after a surge in COVID-19 cases associated with the school.

break associated with Monument School that totaled six cases among students, staff and/or volunteers, but that outbreak was declared resolved

early this month.

In the most recent OHA report, issued Thursday, Jan. 20, no active outbreak is listed for Monument School,

and there are no positive COVID test results connected with the school under the "recent cases" listing.

However, the Jan. 20 OHA report does include an active outbreak with two cases connected with Prairie City School.

In addition, the report notes there have been a number of COVID-19 cases involving students, staff or volunteers at two other Grant County schools. Within the last 28 days, OHA data show, there have been six cases each at Humbolt Elementary School in Canyon City and Grant Union High School in John Day.

Neither of those case clusters is currently considered an active outbreak, which OHA defines as two or more cases of COVID-19 in students, staff or volunteers that have a shared, defined exposure in a school setting.

Outbreaks are considered resolved when there have been no new cases in at least 28 days.

County logs 18th COVID death, shatters daily case count record

By STEVEN MITCHELL
Blue Mountain Eagle

JOHN DAY — COVID-19 has claimed another life in Grant County, public health officials announced on Wednesday, Jan. 19, the same day the virus shattered the county's single-day record with a staggering 41 new cases.

Meanwhile, four people are currently being hospitalized for COVID-19 at Blue Mountain Hospital, a Wednesday press release from the Grant County Health Department noted.

According to the department's press release, the Grant County resident who died with COVID-related symptoms was an 83-year-old male,



Blue Mountain Eagle, File

Grant County Health Department staffers sort COVID-19 rapid tests during a testing clinic in 2020.

and he passed away on Jan. 7 at St. Charles Medical Center in Bend.

The department asked the community to be respectful as the man's family grieves.

Kimberly Lindsay, the county's public health administrator, said in a Wednesday

phone interview that while she could not say with 100% certainty that the Grant County man died from contracting the omicron variant, it stands to reason that he did, given that it is the most common variant at play in Oregon.

Lindsay said the number

of positive cases reported on Wednesday was "staggering." The case count nearly doubled the previous daily record, which was 24.

"I just had to pause and say, 'OK,'" Lindsay said. Lindsay said she wants people to have a healthy sense of balance, but the community needs to be incredibly thoughtful about the risk of contracting the highly transmissible omicron variant.

According to Lindsay, the state has forecasted the peak of the omicron wave to be around Jan. 28, and, so far, state health officials have been spot on in those projections. However, she said, Eastern Oregon's peak is projected to come a little bit later.

Lindsay said while health

officials have seen an increase in pediatric hospitalizations, kids seem to bounce back from COVID-19 infections across the board.

Still, the older population, the immunocompromised and those who are not fully vaccinated are at risk of serious illness.

Lindsay encouraged people to take advantage of an offer to receive four free COVID-19 tests from the federal government. People can sign up to receive the tests online at covidtests.gov.

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