

# Pool appeal up for discussion again

By BENNETT HALL  
Blue Mountain Eagle

JOHN DAY — The John Day City Council has rejected an appeal of the conditional use permit for a proposed aquatic center for a second time, but that still won't be the last word on the subject.

After the John Day Planning Commission approved the John Day/Canyon City Parks and Recreation District's permit application on Nov. 9, John Morris appealed the decision to the City Council, laying out his objections in a 15-page document.

At a public hearing on Jan. 5, the council voted 3-2 to uphold the permit. The dissenting votes came from Councilors Heather Rookstool and Elliot Sky, who wanted to hold the record open for additional testimony, as Morris had requested.

The council reversed that decision on Jan. 11, voting unanimously to reopen the record to allow anyone who had participated in earlier public meetings about the pool project to submit additional written testimony through Jan. 19, with Morris being given the opportunity to provide a written rebuttal.

No one provided any additional written testimony by the deadline. With that in mind, at its next meeting on Jan. 25, the council voted unanimously to uphold the conditional use permit, rejecting Morris' appeal.

What the council did not know, however, was that even though no additional testimony was submitted, Morris had filed a written rebuttal statement just hours before the meeting.

On Saturday, Jan. 29, the city announced plans for a special



Blue Mountain Eagle, File

**Gleason Pool has been closed since the end of the 2019 season. A permit for a new pool is under appeal.**

City Council meeting on Tuesday, Feb. 1, to discuss a number of matters, including Morris' rebuttal statement.

In the agenda packet for the meeting, City Manager Nick Green writes that Morris submitted the statement to City Hall at 2:22 p.m. on Jan. 25, the day of the meeting, but that his

staff did not pass the statement on to him before the meeting that night.

"This document should have been provided to the City Council for their review prior to the council's (decision), and had I known it had been submitted, it would have been," Green states. He goes on to recommend

that the council review Morris' statement and redeliberate on the appeal.

"There is no signed written order and no notice of decision has been mailed to participants," Green writes in the packet. "Nothing becomes final until a written decision is made. Therefore, councilors may amend their votes (or not) based on this information."

The proposal calls for a six-lane, 25-yard outdoor pool with an 8,000-square-foot structure housing locker rooms, a lobby and office space to be built at the Seventh Street Sports Complex in John Day.

But even if the conditional use permit is upheld yet again, a lot still has to happen before the pool can be built.

The project has an estimated price tag of \$6 million. The city has obtained \$2 million in state funding and is considering up to

\$1 million in cash and in-kind contributions. The John Day/Canyon City Parks and Recreation District is pursuing plans to put a \$3 million-\$4 million bond measure on the ballot this year to cover the remaining costs of the project.

Registered voters who live within the parks and rec district's boundaries would have to approve the measure by a simple majority. The district covers the cities of John Day and Canyon City as well as a substantial amount of unincorporated land outside the city limits.

The district extends almost to Mt. Vernon on the west, nearly to Magone Lake on the north, almost to Keeney Forks Road on the east and as far south as Starr Ridge.

Parks and rec district officials have said they hope to place the bond measure on the May 17 ballot.

# Senate hopefuls make John Day stop

By STEVEN MITCHELL  
Blue Mountain Eagle

JOHN DAY — Two U.S. Senate candidates vying for the GOP nomination courted voters on Thursday, Jan. 27, during the Grant County Republican Central Committee meeting at the John Day Fire Hall.

Darin Harbick, a small-business owner from Rainbow in the McKenzie River Valley, and Ibra Taher, a self-employed philosophy teacher from Eugene, both spoke at the meeting.

Both are running in the May 17 primary for the GOP nomination to oppose Ron Wyden, the Democratic incumbent.

As of Monday, Jan. 31, five other candidates have filed to run in the Republican primary, including Grant County Commissioner Sam Palmer.

### Ibra Taher

Taher, who made a bid for Jeff Merkley's seat in 2020 as both a Green and Progressive Party candidate but since left those parties over disagreements regarding the pandemic, told the Eagle that Progressives and Republicans share more common ground on core issues than many realize.

He said those issues include decentralizing the country's financial markets and a non-interventionist for-



Harbick

Taher

eign policy approach.

Taher said the answer to many of the problems the country faces, be it internationally, financially or domestically, would be to decentralize the markets, localize governments, and allow for independence and self-reliance.

"Let people decide for themselves," he said. "We have different cultures. Do you want someone from Eugene to tell you how to live your lives?"

Taher sparked a sharp debate with his views on COVID-19.

In March 2020, during the second week of the pandemic lockdowns, Taher told the audience, he published an article highly critical of the government's response to the virus.

The coronavirus, according to Taher, is not as dangerous as it was made out to be by the federal government.

Taher said the pandemic protocols violate fundamental freedoms, and the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government have allowed those violations to

continue.

Rhonda Stephens, a Prineville resident who attended the John Day meeting, told Taher that discounting the severity of the virus is dangerous.

"If you're telling me that some 800,000 people that died from COVID is fake news that didn't happen, then I have to disagree with you," she said.

Taher said he questions the actual number of deaths and how health officials classify the deaths.

While Stephens said there might be some "bad apples" who may have signed off on a death certificate in bad faith, she noted that local hospitals are run by respected personnel and have good doctors who are accredited.

She reminded Taher that he himself told the audience that he was not a scientist. With that, Stephens said, she asked that he not spread "propaganda" that science and health officials are committing fraud.

"So, if you're going to sit here and tell me that you know more than that pool of brainiacs, then I'm going to put my money on the pool of brainiacs any day of the week," she said.

Grant County resident Athena Moline asked Stephens if she had heard that nasal swabs included with COVID-19 tests contain ethylene oxide, a colorless type of gas used to

sterilize medical equipment.

Moline's claim was from a widely debunked conspiracy theory that began circulating on social media and claimed that the nasal swabs used for COVID-19 testing could cause lasting harm, potentially even cancer, according to information from Reuters Fact Check.

While the gas commonly used to disinfect medical equipment such as COVID-19 nasal swab tests is carcinogenic, it has been used for decades and is highly regulated.

Frances Preston, the committee's secretary and chair, asked that the rest of Taher's speech not touch on COVID-19 and requested that the conversation get back to a "peaceful place."

### Darin Harbick

Harbick, a longtime small-business owner who initially entered the 2022 election as a candidate for governor, said he is better suited for the Senate.

He said he was always under the impression that to run for political office someone had to have gone to law school or have previous political experience.

However, he said, he was inspired by Glenn Youngkin's win in the 2021 Virginia gubernatorial election, where he defeated Democratic former Gov. Terry McAuliffe.

"When I saw Youngkin as a business owner, and then that (President) Donald Trump never held office anywhere ... there are some people that have been in office that haven't been in that political scene their whole life, but they know what people want," Harbick said.

Harbick is not a complete newcomer to elected office. He served on the McKenzie School District's board for 14 years. He also coached the high school's basketball team and led them to a state championship.

Harbick said when people ask him if he is vaccinated against COVID-19, he tells them, "It's none of your damn business," a line that garnered applause from the audience.

While some in the GOP have been criticized by fellow Republicans for refusing to say they are vaccinated to avoid alienating the conservative base, Harbick said he genuinely believes someone's vaccination status is personal.

# Man arrested in machete incident

By STEVEN MITCHELL  
Blue Mountain Eagle

MT. VERNON — Grant County sheriff's deputies arrested a man who allegedly attempted to steal a vehicle and brandished a machete at patrons of Suds Pub in Mt. Vernon in the early morning hours of Friday, Jan. 28.

Sheriff Todd McKinley told the Eagle that Christopher Ryan Hoppe, 38, stole a bartender's vehicle and threatened customers with a machete before fleeing in the stolen car. A bystander attempted to stop Hoppe, who was under the influence of an "illicit drug," McKinley said. The sheriff said Hoppe ditched the stolen vehicle a short distance away and ran from two deputies.

The deputies used a pepper ball gun to subdue Hoppe behind the Presbyterian Church in Mt. Vernon and took him into custody, McKinley said. The gun shoots pellets that look like paintballs but are filled with oleoresin capsicum powder, which causes significant eye irritation, pain and temporary blindness.

Deputies booked Hoppe into the Grant County Jail on charges of unauthorized use of a motor vehicle, disorderly conduct and probation violation.

## WHAT'S HAPPENING

WEDNESDAY & THURSDAY, FEB. 16 & 17

CyberMill open house  
• 4 to 8 p.m., CyberMill, 300 Barnes Ave. (Highway 395), Seneca

Located in the heart of Seneca, the CyberMill is a free-to-use internet cafe with broadband access. With three computer terminals, big-screen video monitors, a conference room and other amenities, the facility is available for remote workers, entrepreneurs or anyone who needs a high-speed internet connection. Visitors can tour the CyberMill, learn



what it has to offer and enjoy free refreshments. For more information, go to gocybermill.com.

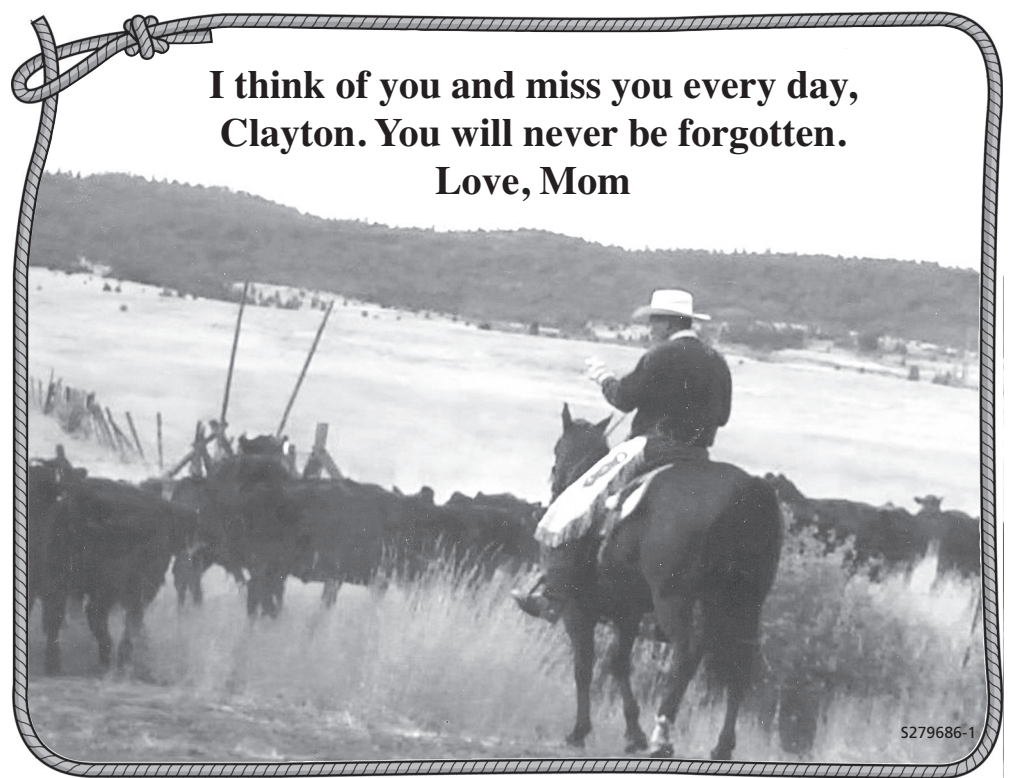
SATURDAY, APRIL 2  
Lake Creek Youth Camp Gala

• 5 p.m., Trowbridge Pavilion, Grant County Fairgrounds, 411 NW Bridge St., John Day

This third annual benefit for the nonprofit youth and family camp in Logan Valley features a tri-tip dinner, games, live music, drinks by Spitfire Cocktails and live, silent and dessert auctions. Tickets are \$25 at the door or \$20 in advance, available at several locations in John Day and Canyon City. For more information, call Aimee Rude at 541-206-2421.

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.

I think of you and miss you every day,  
Clayton. You will never be forgotten.  
Love, Mom



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**Benefit Dinner -**  
Spaghetti/Salad/Bread  
Silent Auction & Dessert Auction  
**FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 11<sup>TH</sup>**  
Mt. Vernon Community Center (on Ingall Street)  
5:00pm to 7:30 pm  
Silent Auction 5-7/Dinner 5:30-6:30/  
Dessert Auction 7

**NICHOLE (RUSTY) RULE**  
Nichole has been diagnosed with bladder cancer and is receiving chemo treatments in Bend and eventually will have surgery to remove the bladder.

Contact  
Patty Ross  
541-620-4841  
if you want to help or donate!

Buy your Valentine a sweet dessert all for a GREAT CAUSE

We can't make the cancer disappear but together WE CAN ease their FINANCIAL WORRIES and let them focus on getting better.

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