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## VOTERS WILL DECIDE ON POOL BOND

Rudy Diaz/Blue Mountain Eagle, File  
Gleason Pool in John Day has been closed for two years. A \$4 million bond measure on the May 17 ballot would help fund construction of a new aquatic center to replace it.

### \$4 million ballot measure headed to May 17 election

By BENNETT HALL  
Blue Mountain Eagle

JOHN DAY — A pool bond is headed for the May 17 ballot.

The John Day-Canyon City Parks and Recreation District board voted 4-0 on Tuesday, Feb. 22, to put a measure on the ballot that would raise up to \$4 million for the construction of a new aquatic center at the Seventh Street Sports Complex in John Day.

The decision was made during a joint meeting with the John Day City Council. The resolution

approved by the board also authorized accepting a \$2 million state grant to go toward the pool's estimated \$6 million construction cost and applying for an additional \$750,000 in grant funding.

In addition, the resolution approved an intergovernmental agreement that states the district will be responsible for operating and maintaining the aquatic center while the city will be responsible for covering utility costs.

The City Council approved a companion resolution that included the same intergovernmental agreement by a 6-0 vote.

Only voters who live within the district's

boundaries will be eligible to vote on the bond measure, which would add an estimated 70 cents per \$1,000 of assessed valuation to property tax bills in the district. For the owner of a property valued at \$150,000, that would mean an extra \$105 a year in property taxes for the life of the bond, which is expected to be 20 years.

The district includes the cities of John Day and Canyon City as well as unincorporated areas around both communities. The boundary extends almost to Mt. Vernon on the west, nearly to

See Pool, Page A11

**"WE'RE STILL DOING THE VALUE ENGINEERING. WE'RE CALLING (THE WARM WATER POOL) FUTURE, BUT FUTURE MAY BE PRESENT IF THAT GRANT IS AWARDED."**

City Manager Nick Green

## In the wake of the fire

Firefighters, company sort through aftermath of Shearer's Foods disaster

By ERICK PETERSON  
East Oregonian

HERMISTON — The day after an explosion and fire at Shearer's Foods, Hermiston, smoke still rose from the scorched ruins.

Umatilla County Fire District No. 1 firefighters, having spent a late night at the scene Tuesday, Feb. 22, returned at 10 a.m. Feb. 23, sorting through rubble to put out

remaining hot spots. Fire officials said they expected to remain working at Shearer's "for a while," stating they were not quite sure when work would be complete.

Jimmy Davis, operations chief for the district, said he was weary, and he was not the only one who felt this way.

"Our guys are exhausted," he said.

**A hard day at Shearer's Foods**

Davis said the work was especially difficult on the first day of the fire because the inside of the building collapsed. When

See Fire, Page A12



Erick Peterson/East Oregonian  
Tony Castro and Jason McCary of Emerald City Statewide set up fencing on Thursday, Feb. 24, 2022, around the wreckage of Shearer's Foods, Hermiston, two days after an explosion and fire destroyed the facility.

## Where have all the drivers gone?

Shortage frustrates trucking industry, ag producers

By GEORGE PLAVEN  
Capital Press

PORTLAND — Jason Nord poked his head out the window of a hulking Freightliner 18-wheeler as he practiced backing the rig between rows of orange cones at the Western Pacific Truck School in Portland.

The exercise required the rookie driver to use skillful maneuvers to coax the truck and its trailer into a slot that simulated a warehouse loading dock. One by one, students took their



George Plaven/Capital Press  
Harold Worth, an instructor and assistant manager at Western Pacific Truck School, guides Jason Nord during a driving exercise.

turn behind the wheel while instructors on the ground offered guidance.

After previously work-

ing in construction, Nord, 41, said he can make more money as a trucker. He enrolled in the school to

get the hands-on experience and training necessary to apply for his commercial driver's license.

"Everybody knows we're short truck drivers," Nord said of the industry.

For years, the trucking industry has suffered a debilitating shortage of drivers. With the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic, that shortage has mushroomed into a crisis. The American Trucking Association estimates the driver shortage peaked this year at 81,000 — up from 51,000 pre-pandemic.

With fewer trucks on the road and port bottlenecks plaguing the supply chain,

See Drivers, Page A11

## Sign stirs up bridge brouhaha in John Day

By BENNETT HALL  
Blue Mountain Eagle

JOHN DAY — For years, the city of John Day has tried to keep commercial vehicles from using the Third Avenue Bridge over Canyon Creek with a sign that reads "No Trucks" and another that reads "Weight Limit 15 Tons."

But that doesn't mean the span is in imminent danger of collapsing under the strain of a fully loaded 18-wheeler. As it turns out, the bridge can handle considerably more weight than its posted limit.

In fact, according to the most recent Oregon Department of Transportation safety inspection report on the bridge, it is rated to support up to 67 tons, or 134,000 pounds — more than four times the posted limit.

What's going on here?

According to City Manager Nick Green, the "Weight Limit 15 Tons" sign is part of a strategy to save the city — and local taxpayers — money on bridge repairs.

"The Public Works Department put that sign up there to discourage commercial vehicles from using that bridge," he told the newspaper. "The city's preference is for them to use Bridge Street."

Sometimes, Green explained, heavily laden trucks headed for the Grant County Fairgrounds will use Third Avenue, which puts a certain amount of wear and tear on the city-owned Third Avenue Bridge. If they take Bridge Street instead, the big rigs don't have to cross any bridges to reach the fairgrounds.

The issue came to light after the Blue Mountain Eagle published a letter to the editor from local resident Jon Meiling in its Feb. 23 edition, under the headline "City Leaders Ignore Bridge Safety Issue."

Meiling expressed concern that the city was failing to enforce the commercial vehicle ban, creating the possibility that the bridge could fall down under the weight of a fully loaded tractor-trailer rig.

"The Third Avenue Bridge has a sign that reads No Trucks and a 30,000-pound weight limit. Yet the city officials allow overweight trucks to cross that bridge on a daily basis with blatant disregard for the safety of the citizens of John Day," he wrote.

"The infrastructure of that bridge cannot carry an 80,000-pound load, let alone a 100,000-pound load."

Green responded to Meiling in an email, which he shared with City Council members and the Eagle, noting that the span's 67-ton load rating is more than adequate for the heavyweight trucks Meiling worries about in his letter.

"The bridge is safe. It can certainly handle those loads," Green wrote. "We post it at 15 tons to encourage larger trucks to re-route, but we're not in a position to cite trucks that violate that rule, and violation of the rule does not pose a safety hazard to the bridge or our residents."

In the email, Green points out that an ODOT inspection report from last August, which he also shared with the newspaper, rates the condition of the bridge's deck and substructure as good (7 on a 10-point scale) and its superstructure as satisfactory (6 out of 10).

The report goes on to state that the prestressed concrete bridge, built in 1989, suffered some damage that required patching in 2014 and that the abutments need to be monitored for scouring by gravel in the creekbed.

Apparently, the city strategy to reduce wear on the bridge by rerouting heavy trucks is as old as the bridge itself. Green said former Public Works Director Dave Holland told him the "Weight Limit 15 Tons" sign was installed at the same time as the bridge.

In response to an inquiry from the Eagle, an ODOT official confirmed that the 67-ton load rating for the bridge is still in effect, so it has "plenty of capacity for traditional legal vehicles."

Jon Rooper, a senior load rating engineer with the state agency's bridge engineering section, added that, as the bridge's owner, the city of John Day is well within its rights to post a lower weight limit than the rating allows.

"There is no rule that says they cannot," Rooper said. "In fact, we have many local agencies in the state that post bridges for less load than needed in order to preserve historic structures or to prevent truck traffic from using a specific route."



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