



Blue Mountain Eagle, File

This file photo from Aug. 15, 2019, shows the current John Day wastewater treatment plant. The city hopes to start work on a new plant this summer.

## Wastewater project moves ahead

Work could start this summer on new John Day sewer plant

By BENNETT HALL  
Blue Mountain Eagle

JOHN DAY — Preliminary construction could begin as soon as this summer on a long-awaited wastewater treatment plant in John Day.

The city's current sewer plant, located on the north side of the John Day River near the western end of Seventh Street, serves about 2,400 residential, business and institutional customers within the urban growth boundaries of John Day and Canyon City.

Built in 1949, the plant received its last major upgrade in 1978 and is in a state of disrepair. The facility's state operating permit expired in 1978 and cannot be renewed under current regulatory guidelines.

Plans have been in the works for more than a decade to build a replacement plant, but progress has been slow.

One of the last remaining hurdles before work can begin is a permit from the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality to dispose of the treated wastewater,

either by beneficial reuse or by discharging it into underground infiltration basins. DEQ has sent the city's permit application out for what the agency calls "global review," with public comment due by April 11 (see information box with this story).

"That's the last round of review," City Manager Nick Green said. "On the permitting side, we're at the finish line."

The city is gearing up to solicit bids for the "package plant," the prefabricated sewage treatment plant that would be the heart of the new facility.

If the wastewater discharge permit is approved, Green said, work could begin this summer on the access road to the new plant, which would be located in the northwest corner of the Innovation Gateway district, about a mile west of the current plant near Northwest Seventh and Bridge streets. Groundbreaking on the plant itself is projected for this fall.

"Our plan is to have the entire project finished by the end of 2024," Green said.

The latest budget estimate for the project is \$17.5 million. Of that total, the city has \$6.5 million in grant funding and has preliminary approval for an additional \$11 million

See Sewer, Page A12

# POISED FOR GROWTH



Pinnacle Architecture/Contributed Image

This conceptual drawing shows Option 2, one of two designs being considered for the new interpretive center at the Kam Wah Chung State Heritage Site. Park managers say they are "heavily leaning" toward this option.

## Oregon plans to invest millions in major expansion of Kam Wah Chung

By JUSTIN DAVIS  
Blue Mountain Eagle

One of Grant County's best known tourist destinations is set for a multimillion-dollar renovation and expansion that will better showcase the rich history of Chinese immigrants in the region and provide a boost to the local economy.

The Kam Wah Chung State Heritage Site in John Day is centered around a 19th century stone structure that was originally a trading post. The building was later purchased by Lung On and Ing "Doc" Hay and operated as a general store and Chinese apothecary.

The site was a longtime center of the Chinese community in Grant County. Plans call for a new interpretive center, additional parking and other improvements on an expanded, multi-acre site.

State financing for the project includes funds for additional improvements designed to link the Kam Wah Chung site with downtown John Day.

Identifying the need for an expansion began with the first restoration of the site in 1974-76 under former curator Carolyn Meisenheimer. In the years that followed, Meisenheimer began

to notice the deterioration of things like the epigrams on the walls, paper products and various artifacts within the apothecary and general store. A master plan created to address these deteriorations ultimately led to the conclusion that an expansion was necessary.

Park manager Dennis Bradley says that following the master plan's creation in 2004, various parcels of land adjacent to the Kam Wah Chung site on Northwest Canton Street were identified as being ideal fits for the expansion.

"We identified five properties within the master plan that were suited to the expansion of the interpretive center," he said. "Since that time, we have acquired three of those properties."

The Oregon Parks and Recreation Department is in discussions to finalize the purchase of the last two parcels for the expansion, Gleason Park and Gleason Pool.

"The agreement is already in place," Bradley said.

The city of John Day has agreed to demolish the pool, which is no longer in use, before the state closes on the land sale.

The demolition of the pool and an adjoining building is under review by the State Historic Preservation Office. The 64-year-old pool is no

See Expansion, Page A12

### A BRIEF HISTORY OF KAM WAH CHUNG

Loosely translated from the Chinese, Kam Wah Chung means "golden flower of prosperity," and it was a center of prosperity for many years.

The stone building that stands today near Gleason Park in John Day was constructed as a trading post and stagecoach stop between 1864 and 1865. Chinese immigrants founded Kam Wah Chung & Co. in 1871. Both the building and company name were purchased by Lung On, Ing "Doc" Hay and a third business partner, Ye Nem, from another Chinese businessman named Shee Pon in 1871. The building served a large and vibrant Chinese community in Grant County, numbering up to 2,000 at its height.

Hay and On ran a general store, apothecary and boardinghouse for migratory workers in the building.

The general store was in operation until the death of Lung On in December of 1940. Doc Hay continued to operate the apothecary until 1948, when an injury forced him to move to a nursing home in Portland. Hay died four years later, in 1952, having never returned to the apothecary.

The building was sealed from the time Hay left in 1942 until it was turned over to the John Day Historical Society in 1968, saving the structure from being torn down. The building was turned into a museum, which was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1973. In 2005 the museum was designated a National Historic Landmark.



Justin Davis/Blue Mountain Eagle

Kitchen shelves hold a variety of foodstuffs at Kam Wah Chung, which shut down in 1948.

### HAVE YOUR SAY

The Oregon Department of Environmental Quality is soliciting public comments on a water quality permit for the city's proposed new wastewater treatment plant.

For more information on the proposed permit, go to <https://tinyurl.com/aut8rnbu>.

Comments can be submitted to Patty Isaak by email at [patty.isaak@deq.oregon.gov](mailto:patty.isaak@deq.oregon.gov) or by mail at Water Quality permit Coordinator, Oregon DEQ, 800 SE Emigrant Ave., Suite 330, Pendleton, OR 97801.

The deadline is 5 p.m. April 11.

## 'Terrible Tilly' goes on the market

By KATIE FRANKOWICZ  
KMUN

CANNON BEACH — "Terrible Tilly," the historic 141-year-old Tillamook Rock Lighthouse off the coast near Cannon Beach, is for sale.

Mimi Morissette, the owner, listed the property for \$6.5 million. She had once hoped to turn the decommissioned lighthouse into a large columbarium, a place to store people's cremated remains. There was room, she said, for up to 300,000 urns.

But Morissette's plan never really took off.

Forty-two years later, the ashes of only 31 people, including Morissette's parents, have been laid to rest at the lighthouse. Morissette, who is 77, has concluded it is time for someone else to take over.

"It is time for me to pass the baton," she said.

An ad went out last week, and Morissette is confident she'll find a buyer.

"I think it's a given," she said. "I think I'll sell it and I think I'll close it by the end of the year."

She traveled last week to a conference in Las Vegas to seek out potential buyers. She told KMUN she connected with a large cemetery brokerage and consulting firm that has several potential buyers in mind.

### Challenges

Morissette bought the property with her business partners in 1980 and began selling spaces for urns, but cremation was less common at the time. Then, the columbarium lost its state license in 1999 and, despite a fight, she was unable to renew it.

She was also dogged by consumer complaints filed with the state Department of

See Tilly, Page A12



Tiffany Boothe/Seaside Aquarium

Sea lions roam the waters around Tillamook Rock Lighthouse. The historic lighthouse has been used as a columbarium for decades, but is now for sale.

