



Nathan Howard/AP, File

The town of Warm Springs is seen here on Dec. 7.

Warm Springs grid could go solar

By MICHAEL KOHN
The Bulletin

WARM SPRINGS — An aging power grid at Warm Springs may soon get a 21st century upgrade.

The Warm Springs Community Action Team, a nonprofit that supports small business development on the reservation, has been accepted to a federal program that will offer consultancy work on solar energy and battery development. A second phase could see the installation of hard infrastructure.

Inadequate funding and years of neglect have left infrastructure on the Warm Springs Indian Reservation in a dilapidated state. Power cuts and water system breakdowns have become common in the community of 5,000 people. Working with the federal government could put Warm Springs on a path of infrastructure development that it has not been able to achieve on its own.

Climate change exacerbates outdated infrastructure, as heatwaves and wildfires take their toll on the Warm Springs community. More reliable power could help maintain the grid when air conditioning units are going full tilt, or if energy infrastructure is damaged by heat or wildfire.

“Electricity here is unreliable and the power can go out for hours,” said Chris Watson, director of the Community Action Team. “When that happens, when it’s hot, food goes bad in refrigerators. Those kinds of things happen because of the unreliability of the grid in Warm Springs.”

Frequent outages

The federal program could change that by offering the technical expertise and funds to develop solar projects and batteries to boost the grid’s resiliency. The program is organized by Energy Storage for Social Equity, a division of the Department of Energy.

Randy Nathan, owner of the Eagle Crossing restaurant at Warm Springs, said power outages shut down his business once or twice a month, for a few hours each time. A solar power backup could help small businesses like his avoid disruptions.

“I have looked into solar power for my building,” said Nathan. “I can’t do it because I

don’t own the building but I’d like to see that happen.”

Three Oregon communities are part of the program. The remaining 11 are located in other states. Most are Native American communities.

The goal of the project is to help underserved communities develop energy storage capabilities, and make the communities more resilient in the face of climate change, which impacts places differently across the country.

During the first phase, the communities will receive technical support to assess their energy challenges and find solutions. Five of the 14 will be selected to advance to the second round.

Rogue Climate, a nonprofit that supports communities impacted by climate change, is another Oregon group in the project. A third Oregon participant is Coyote Steals Fire Energy Group in Pendleton, a consultancy group that advises Pacific Northwest tribes on energy use.

Net-zero buildings

In phase two, the remaining participants will be able to tap into federal funds to help pay for the installation of solar and battery projects. Net-zero-energy buildings and solar-powered homes could be in the offing for Warm Springs if the community gets this far.

Solar and battery projects help communities deal with climate change in different ways. As the country experiences more coastal flooding and wildfire due to climate change, backup power will be necessary in case power stations and infrastructure are damaged.

Increasing heatwaves are another factor, as more power is needed when air-conditioning units are switched on.

And then there are droughts, all too familiar in Central Oregon. These create increased competition for water between energy production and other uses — having a backup energy supply reduces that stress.

In 2020, Warm Springs experienced over 630,000 minutes of community-wide time in which people were without power, according to Watson, the action team director.

“Having systems like this in place can provide an added level of protection should there be systemic issues with the power grid,” said Watson.

Irrigon plans a police force of one

East Oregonian

IRRIGON — Irrigon is not renewing its contract with the Morrow County Sheriff’s Office for law enforcement services.

The city council at its meeting March 15 voted instead for the city to establish a one-person police department.

City Manager Aaron Palmquist in a memo to the council explained this has been a topic of discussion in the town.

“As Irrigon grows and may desire to take charge of their destiny, should they continue down the road of contracting or begin the step in moving in the direction of having their own law enforcement,” according to the memo.

He said Mayor Margaret Anderson wanted the council to address the issue because “we are at a good time for all parties to make any adjustments if needed and desired.”

The Irrigon City Council voted unanimously not to renew.

The small town on the Columbia River has been

paying the Morrow County Sheriff’s Office more than \$95,000 a year in a contract for services, plus the purchase of a car for the sheriff’s office every three years, which the sheriff’s office returned to the city after three years.

Irrigon now is searching for a new chief, who will be the only officer in the department. The city also will purchase a new car and renovate an office in city hall for the new department.

Under the plan, there will not be 24/7 police coverage for the town of more than 1,800 people, but per Oregon law, the county still will have to provide some services. Code enforcement and complaints, however, would be solely the city’s responsibility.

“This may be an opportunity for Irrigon as we continue to grow and become more resilient,” Palmquist told the council in the memo.

Additionally, he continued, the Irrigon Municipal Court “has been a good addition and is working through to strengthen Irrigon’s presence and strength in the region.”



Blue Mountain Hospital District

Community Health Beat



What’s new at BMHD?

Let your voice be heard!

Blue Mountain Hospital District is asking for your help to identify important healthcare needs in our county.

We would appreciate if you would take the time to complete this short survey. It should take less than 10 minutes to complete, and your responses are anonymous & confidential.

Once you complete the survey you’ll have the option to enter a drawing for \$100 in Grant County Greenbacks.

Hard copies of the survey are available at the door screeners and front desks at BMHD & Home Health/Hospice if you are unable to complete it online.



To access the survey via the QR code, open the camera on your smart phone and hold it up to this image. If you’re reading online, simply click the QR code.

We appreciate your time and help as we continue to make improvements to healthcare in Grant County!

Scholarship Applications Open

Grant County graduating seniors looking to pursue a career in healthcare: visit our website to download our scholarship application.

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Fundraiser Golf Scramble
Saturday, July 16th, 2022
John Day Golf Club
www.bluemountainhospital.org

