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Blue Mountain Eagle, File

Grant County officials are considering whether to join a project to build a publicly-owned fiber optic network to provide high-speed internet access.

County mulls broadband expansion

By STEVEN MITCHELL
Blue Mountain Eagle

CANYON CITY — Grant County officials are mulling the pros and cons of having a publicly owned fiber internet infrastructure.

Last month the Grant County Digital Network, an Oregon municipal corporation formed under ORS 190 that includes the county, John Day and Seneca, was awarded a \$1.8 million community broadband grant to build a publicly owned fiber line to the courthouse, airport, fairgrounds and other community facilities.

Nick Green, John Day's city manager and the digital network's executive director, said the project would take roughly six months to complete.

During the Wednesday, May 4, session of Grant County Court, Eric Bush, the county's emergency manager, told the court that while Oregon Telephone Corp. could not install broadband fiber to the Grant County Regional Airport, it could link the courthouse to its network. He said the cost would be a one-time fee of \$150 plus \$250 per month.

Bush said OTC could run a point-to-point network from the office of the Grant County Education Service District, the network manager and IT service provider for the county. Bush said OTC could also meet the added network security standards that are required at the airport and sheriff's office.

Josh Walker, chair of the Grant County Digital Network, told the court that one of the benefits of being on the publicly-owned network would be access to an intranet — a self-contained network that would

allow participating government entities to communicate among themselves even if the internet goes down due to a natural disaster or other disruption.

The publicly-owned fiber, he said, and the fiber to the county courthouse through OTC is not an "apples to apples" comparison to the fiber through the Grant County Digital Network's fiber infrastructure.

Bush said the redundancy of an intranet is a nice capability to have and is something the county should consider.

Other public entities that would be on the shared network in the county would include the library, John Day Industrial Park and — if funded in the May 17 election — the John Day-Canyon City Aquatics Center.

Robert Waltenberg, Grant County Education Service District superintendent, said in an interview that when the county had the emergency operations center at the airport, the county paid Oregon Telephone Corp. to install a radio antenna on Holmstrom Mountain to give the airport a beefed-up wireless internet connection.

However, he said, the county needs to get away from reliance on wireless internet and convert to fiber optic lines. Fiber, Waltenberg said, provides a much more robust and reliable connection.

"I think the question before the court now is," Waltenberg said, "do you want to lease fiber from Oregon Telephone Corp. that has a cost year over year and month over month? Or do you want to build and own your fiber?"

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LEARNING THE ROPES



Steven Mitchell/Blue Mountain Eagle

A rappeller dangles above the ground on Thursday, May 5, 2022, during the U.S. Forest Service's national rappelling certification training at the Grant County Regional Airport.

Elite firefighters refresh their rappelling skills in the skies above John Day

By STEVEN MITCHELL
Blue Mountain Eagle

Helicopters hovering over the Malheur National Forest are a telltale sign that fire season has arrived in Grant County.

Last week, the Grant County Regional Airport was the jumping-off point for essential training for a select group of wildland firefighters as the U.S. Forest Service hosted its yearly rappelling certification training course.

Roughly 60 returning rappellers from Oregon and Idaho dangled from helicopters hundreds of feet in the air to practice rappelling, a method of descending rapidly using ropes and climbing hardware. They also participated in mockups and reviewed emergency procedures.

Adam Kahler, a national rappelling specialist who started as a rappeller in Grant County in the early 2000s, said the training from May 2-7 was one of two annual recertification events the U.S. Forest Service hosts each year. There's also a rookie training in Salmon, Idaho.

Rappelling-trained firefighters are an elite group. According to Kahler, there are just



Steven Mitchell/Blue Mountain Eagle

Rappel crews participate in Forest Service certification training at the Grant County Regional Airport on Thursday, May 5, 2022.

300 Forest Service rappellers nationwide.

Last week's training was for veteran rappellers. Some, Kahler said, were coming back for their 15th year, while others were coming back for their second or third season.

The training session, he said, is a

chance not only to come back and do crew training but it also provides an opportunity for multiple crews — rappellers, helicopter spotters, and pilots — to work together again.

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Smith trial postponed again

By STEVEN MITCHELL
Blue Mountain Eagle

CANYON CITY — A trial for the former Grant County sheriff's deputy accused of assault, attempted rape and child neglect set for Monday, May 16, has now been postponed to a later date.

A Circuit Court judge heard arguments on Monday, May 9, to postpone the trial of Tyler Smith, who was fired from the Sheriff's Office in December 2019 after being brought up on criminal charges.

One of Smith's attorneys, Andrea Coit, said Grant County's lawyer had delivered additional documents or materials the defense had requested in a subpoena.

It was not clear what the county's



Steven Mitchell/Blue Mountain Eagle, File
Tyler Smith, a former Grant County sheriff's deputy accused of assault, attempted rape and child neglect, appears in Grant County Circuit Court on April 20, 2022, at a hearing to dismiss the charges.

legal counsel had turned over. However, she said, the defense needed more time to evaluate the new material before going to trial.

Smith's trial, originally slated to begin in late October, was abruptly put on hold to give defense attorneys time to sift through hundreds of pages of discovery materials filed just one day earlier by the prosecution.

Smith's defense team then filed a motion to dismiss the charges against him, arguing that the prosecution had been withholding evidence that could exonerate him.

After two days of evidentiary hearings on that motion, Coit filed an April 29 motion to continue the trial based on what she argued were ongoing discovery violations.

She contends that the most recent violation was revealed during an April 27 evidentiary hearing when former Grant County Sheriff Glenn

Palmer testified that he kept a separate personnel file for Smith.

According to the motion filing, in that file there is an audio recording of Smith's Loudermill hearing — a due process right for public employees to present their side of the story before an employer decides on discipline.

In the Loudermill hearing, Coit argues, Palmer compelled Smith to respond to the criminal allegations against him.

Additionally, Palmer testified that there were notes that he took from an interview he conducted with Smith's accuser about the criminal allegations.

In her motion for a continuance,

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