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Irrigon Council says no to truck route exceptions

-Continued from PAGE ONE

er might not.

"The other thing is that this has been going on since 2015," he said. "We have people who adhere to it. We have people who push against it just because they can."

"It becomes an enforcement issue not only for code but also for law enforcement," Palmquist added.

The city manager said they had people move into the city who owned larger lots in residential areas and would park trucks on the property or work on them there. That was when the council decided to designate truck routes. There are exceptions, such as emergency vehicles, delivery trucks and moving vans.

"You have to be careful. How do we meet the needs of everybody?" Palmquist said. "We have a lot of places that people can park trucks."

Irrigon Mayor Pro-Tem Daren Strong mentioned that the designated truck routes also have to do with keeping the city roads maintained.

"And those specific truck roads are thicker," he said. "So they're made for that."

Irrigon Councilor Heather Bishop said she saw a problem with making one allowance, because the city would run into problems if five more people from the street also asked for exceptions and the street ended up being taken up by trucks.

"It's either black or white. You can't accept it for one and then not for everybody else who shows up," she said.

"I think since we wrestled with this thing eight years ago and went through it pretty thoroughly and it's lasted all this time," added Strong, "I think it's fine the way it is."

There is space for truck parking between the Irrigon Shell and the Rustic Truck.

The issue of opening Eighth Street as an additional entry to the Irrigon Marina got a hearing but then stalled at the meeting.

The council had previously directed city staff to reached out to city engineering firm JUB for various scenarios for opening NE Eighth or NE Seventh streets, as well as a potential restroom facility and various options for signage, parking and vehicle movement.

JUB's report indicated no parking spaces would be hindered or removed. Meanwhile, city staff say that a second direct access point from US 730 to the marina is safer and increases the marina's capabilities. Funds have already been laid aside, and Columbia River Enterprise Zone (CREZ) funds could also be used.

City staff recommended the council adopt Option 1, which carries a cost estimate of \$375,700. It would include connecting Eighth St NE to the marina, improving traffic flow with signs and arrows, constructing a restroom and utility extensions.

However, some council members weren't so sure. Bishop said she didn't think it was necessary and questioned whether it was the best use of CREZ funds.

"It's definitely a discussion. I'm not sure I'm completely sold on opening Eighth Steet," said Irrigon Mayor Michelle Patton, adding that she had been talking with people around the marina. "So far, everyone has said they like it the way it is."

Patton also said she thought it might be too much traffic on Eighth, a street with houses on both sides. Both she and Bishop

have to parallel park on that street if the change were made, and even then, it would be a tight squeeze.

"There's no congestion going down Tenth," said Bishop. "It's a straight shot going down to the marina. I think it's more of a safety hazard to have it go down Eighth where everything is a house, where there are kids constantly, everywhere."

She did say that she liked the idea of an additional restroom.

"I think we need to look at this as a safety thing," replied Palmquist. He said that, during the watermelon festival, there were boaters who didn't pay attention to the marina signs and took a straight shot in. "They don't care," he added.

"It's up to the council to make some of these kinds of decisions," said councilor Benji Calvert, "but in this situation, everyone in the town is going to be affected."

"Personally, if I lived on one of those streets, I'm not sure I'd be really happy about it becoming a main thoroughfare," he added.

"My hesitation would come in that the park board isn't totally with us," said Strong. "If that's not resolved, I don't think we should push through."

Patton said the city definitely needs to talk with the public and the park board before moving forward. The council decided to table the issue for the moment and conduct a poll of Irrigon residents.

Earlier in the meeting, the council heard from a couple of Irrigon residents who were unhappy with their water bills.

"I want to know how many of you people here are paying \$300 water bills a month," Allen Tomkins said. "Because I'm really getting sick of this. I'm one person, and I've been getting a \$300 water bill for the last three months in a row."

"There's no leaks, and I'm not using 60,000 gallons of water," he added.

He said he'd been assured the meters aren't wrong.

"But I guarantee they are wrong," he said. "Because I'm one person, and there's no way I'm using 60,000 gallons of water."

"You're trying to say that we don't care, we're not trying to help you," Patton said, addressing public posts and comments Tomkins had made.

"I just want to make it publicly known...we have gone above and beyond," she said. "We have paid to check for leaks. We have checked your meter. We have sent staff over."

"And yet, I'm still getting \$300 water bills," he replied. "You're making up excuses."

Patton and council member Heather Bishop suggested part of the issue could be his use of a swamp cooler. Bishop also recommended he approach CAPECO, which might provide help with his water bill.

Barb Hulse also said her water bill was more than \$300.

"And I shut off everything," she said, adding that she uses a heat pump, which does not use water, "and my bill only went down three dollars."

"I'm getting to the point that if I have a load of laundry to do, I'm going to run down to the laundry mat and do it. It would be cheaper," she added.

Bishop again suggested CAPECO.

"Give it a try," she said. "That the best I can do. They said they could help."

"The city has gone over everything in their power to check for everything they can," Bishop added. "That's

the best I can do to help alleviate some of the hardship you're feeling. Please give it a try."

Palmquist told the gathered crowd that if their pipes had a hole that was a quarter inch, in a month that would use 393,000 gallons. He also said they were in the process of changing the town's water meters. The process is about two and a half years from completion he said, due to funding.

"They're not cheap," he said. "And we're not charging people. We're just saying we have to get this done."

Palmquist also added that the city has multiple residents who have water bills in excess of \$300 during the summer, sometimes because of unknown water uses like members of the household leaving hoses running.

The residents said they were told CAPECO would not help because Irrigon does not have a contract with CAPECO. Palmquist said the city's attorney advised them not to sign an agreement, but that did not mean CAPECO could not help.

"They will still give money to people and help them," he said.

In other business, the Irrigon council approved an application for a Dept. of Land Conservation and Development planning grant. The Grant Young Memorial grant, named after a DLCD Eastern Oregon regional representative who passed away in 2017, is made available to small cities every two years. Cities with a population under 2,500 are eligible to receive \$2,000. The city does not have to designate what it will use the grant for at this time, but a close-out report would be due in April of 2025.

The city council appointed Hector Canno to fill the vacant seat of former council member Alan Carnahan. The appointment runs through December

2024 and will be up for re-election in November of next year. Canno will be sworn in at the September council meeting.

The city council also discussed an intergovernmental agreement (IGA) with the City of Umatilla for Umatilla County's PATH (Practical Assistance through Transitional Housing) program. The goal of PATH is to help people transition out of homelessness.

Patton told the council the program offers small dwellings for people to live in, but residents will be required to be drug- and alcohol-free and to actively look for work. Plans are also being made for larger units for those who find work to continue their progress.

"It's going to be tough, no drugs, no alcohol, actively looking for a job," said Patton. "I'm just keeping positive thoughts and hoping that this will work and help people get back on their feet again."

Palmquist said the city's attorney wanted to make some changes to the IGA before the council approved it. The attorney is also working on an "anti-camping" ordinance in response to Oregon's recent homelessness legislation.

Patton also announced she had attended a mayor's conference and came out of it excited to "jump in with both feet." She said she had resigned her full-time position with the school district, switching to substitute, so she will have more time to devote to city business.

"I will be a lot more available and out there, which I look forward to doing," said Patton. "It something I've been wanting to do since I started as mayor."

ODOT will start work on the sidewalk ramp project in Irrigon Sept. 5. The project will include occasional road closures with diverted traffic.

A family fun night is planned Sept. 1 from 5:30-8 p.m. at Columbia View Community Church.

AWANA starts Sept. 12

Heppner AWANA Club will begin its 2023-24 club year Tuesday, Sept. 12, with registration and an ice cream social for club members and their parents. The club will meet at the Christian Life Center ("dome church") in Heppner.

The evening will begin at 6 p.m. with club registration and ice cream for everyone attending. The event will also include games and a short welcome from AWANA Commander Dale Bates.

Meetings will be held from 6 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. on Tuesdays throughout the club year.

The Heppner AWANA program is the combined effort of local churches to teach children what the Bible is all about. AWANA stands for "Approved Workmen Are Not Ashamed," based on II Timothy 2:15. Games, songs and a Bible lesson are included during a typical club meeting.

The Christian Life Center is located at 535 W. Morgan St. in Heppner. For more information, contact AWANA Secretary Andrea Di Salvo at awana.heppner@gmail.com, 757-285-5792, or via Facebook Messenger.

Data indicates BMCC has big economic impact in region

A new study has indicated the extensive impact that Blue Mountain Community College (BMCC) possibly has on the Eastern Oregon regional economy and its return of investment for students and taxpayers.

Data reveals that BMCC generated \$157.5 million in economic impact in the 2021-2022 fiscal year while supporting one out of 34 jobs in the Eastern Oregon region.

The comprehensive analysis was conducted by independent labor market research firm Lightcast, part of a larger project that was commissioned by the Oregon Community College Association (OCCA) and all 17 Oregon community colleges.

The focus of the report, primarily on the 2021-2022 fiscal year, dives deep into the regional economic impact of BMCC's operations, student spending and alumni, along with the benefit to taxpayers and students. The \$157.5 million impact is equivalent to approximately 2.2 percent of the total gross regional product within the region BMCC serves, which includes Morrow, Umatilla, Union, Baker and Grant counties, while bringing in a total taxpayer benefit of \$16.8 million.

"This report helps demonstrate what Blue Mountain Community College has been doing for over 60 years—serving and giving back to the communities we serve," said BMCC President Dr. Mark Browning. "The impact of alumni, current students and our wonderful staff and faculty, collectively supporting some 2,305 jobs and \$157.5 million annually shows a

most positive return on investment of public dollars."

For students, attending BMCC also apparently brings a 6.3 benefit-cost ratio. In other words, for every dollar students invest in BMCC, they receive a cumulative value of \$6.30 in higher future earnings. The rate of return for students annually is 21.8 percent, compared to the stock market 30-year average annual return of 9.6 percent.

Other key points from the report include:

- The net impact of BMCC's former students currently employed in the regional workforce amounted to \$137.9 million in added income in fiscal year (FY) 2021-22.
- The net impact of the college's operations spending added \$17.7 million in income to the regional economy in FY 2021-22.
- In return for their investment, students will receive a cumulative present value of \$44.2 million in increased earnings over their working lives. This translates to a return of \$6.30 in higher future earnings for every dollar students invest in their education. Students' average annual rate of return is 21.8 percent.
- In FY 2021-22, Oregon invested \$28.7 million to support BMCC. In turn, the Oregon economy will grow by \$156.2 million over the course of students' working lives. Society will also benefit from \$4.3 million of public and private sector savings.

For an in-depth look at the economic impact of Blue Mountain Community College, go to <https://www.bluecc.edu/economic-impact>.

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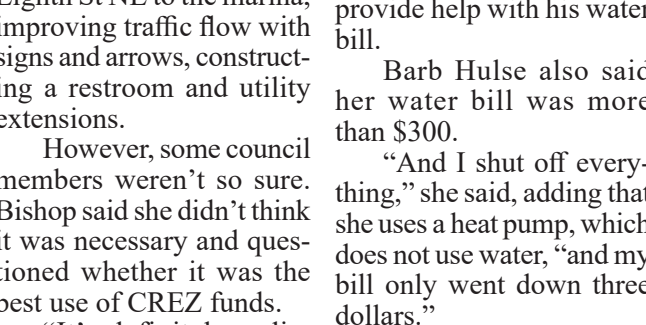
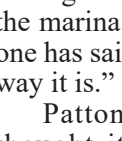
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