



Jade McDowell/Hermiston Herald

A firefighter from Umatilla County Fire District 1 battles a fire along the Oxbow Trail on March 26, 2021.

Fire district bond would pay for equipment, vehicles, facilities

By JADE MCDOWELL
NEWS EDITOR

In addition to races for board and commissions, voters in the May 18 election who live in Umatilla County Fire District 1's boundaries will have a choice on backing a \$13.1 million bond.

The bond would assess up to 23 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value on properties for the next 20 years. The money would be used on equipment, vehicles and facility upgrades for the fire district.

Fire Chief Scott Stanton said the projects focus on improving firefighter and EMT/paramedic safety. One of the first purchases if the bond passed would be new turnouts, which are the protective, fire-resistant suits firefighters wear.

"They're only supposed to be good for five years and we have folks wearing eight- to nine-year-old turnouts," Stanton said.

The district would purchase additional radios, to improve communication and coordination on the scene of large fires, Stanton said. It would also purchase new loading systems for ambulances, designed to not only help load patients into the ambulance faster but

also to reduce incidences of back injuries for those doing the loading. Another project, which includes expanded vehicle bays and upgraded engine exhaust systems, would reduce staff's exposure to diesel exhaust carcinogens.

The department would also replace or refurbish old vehicles, including a 31-year-old brush truck and 25-year-old ladder truck, and replace aging equipment used to extract patients from vehicles at the scene of a crash. New cardiac monitors for emergency medical services are also on the list, which includes a variety of other items.

"Some of the equipment we're looking at is very expensive but also very critical to our mission," Stanton said.

UCFD1 is also planning to spend some of the bond money on upgrades to its buildings. Two stations have leaking roofs that need replaced, Stanton said. The district wants to add living quarters to the Stanfield station, add new bays to the station on Westland Road and create a separate living quarters for female personnel at the main station in downtown Hermiston.

Stanton said the bond will

offer an opportunity to refinance old debt service the district carries, saving more than \$200,000 a year, and he hopes to use the bond dollars to help leverage state grants to work on seismic upgrades to the district's stations.

The UCFD board already created a bond oversight committee that would oversee spending of the bond dollars, and Josh Burns, who sits on the committee, said as he has spent time with UCFD personnel and in the district's facilities he has been impressed by the need for better living conditions and better safety equipment for firefighters and other personnel. He said the area has seen "tremendous growth" since the district was first formed, and funding has not kept up with it. He also pointed out that outdated equipment can reduce a fire district's ISO rating, which affects home insurance rates.

"I think this is probably the most common sense bond measure I have ever seen," he said.

Voters will choose whether to fund the 20-year bond by voting on Measure 30-148. At 23 cents per \$1,000, the bond would cost the owner of a home valued at \$250,000 about \$57.50 per year.

Local demand for COVID-19 vaccine dropping 'dramatically'

By JADE MCDOWELL
NEWS EDITOR

As Umatilla County is headed back into the "high risk" category for COVID-19, Umatilla and Morrow counties are turning away vaccine allocations from the state because supply has outpaced demand.

Umatilla County Public Health Director Joe Fiumara said the county told the state it could send last week's allocation for Umatilla County to a county with higher demand, and will likely do so again this week.

"Our demand level is dropping dramatically," he said.

Fiumara said Umatilla County Public Health currently has about 6,000 vaccine doses on hand, but is hearing from partners in the county that they don't need more doses yet. Last week, the county itself administered less than 500 doses total, and most of those were second doses. At some points during their most recent free clinic, Fiumara said, staff were just sitting and waiting around for anyone to arrive — a stark difference from the long lines a few weeks ago.

According to Oregon Health Authority's vaccine dashboard, Umatilla County is the least vaccinated county in the state, with just 23% of its population at least partially vaccinated, compared with 41% statewide.

The dashboard shows an incomplete picture, however. Some Umatilla County residents have been vaccinated through federal vaccine allocations directly to the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, and information about those doses goes to the federal government before making its way to the state. Others have received

the OHA database.

Fiumara said from the information he has been given, it appears the CTUIR has administered about 5,000 doses of the two-dose Pfizer vaccine so far, and yet only 2,819 Pfizer doses given to Umatilla County residents are listed on OHA's website, suggesting that some data from CTUIR clinics has yet to make its way to the state. Fiumara also noted, however, that the CTUIR opened up its latest clinic to all of its ceded territories across 11 counties, meaning not everyone vaccinated by the Tribes is a Umatilla County resident.

"We think our rate is higher, but we don't know how much higher," he said.

In Morrow County, the OHA dashboard shows 29% of county residents have been vaccinated.

As area health departments, hospitals, medical clinics and pharmacies work to increase the local vaccination rate, they did get some good news over the weekend — Oregon counties were once again cleared to begin administering the Johnson & Johnson version of the vaccine.

The vaccine was paused temporarily in the United States after six women out of nearly 7 million people vaccinated experienced dangerous blood clots. Since then, panels of experts at the state and federal level has determined the benefits of continuing with the vaccine far outweigh the risks.

Fiumara pointed out that many over-the-counter medications sold in grocery stores have higher risks of serious side effects.

"It's still, relatively speaking, a very safe vaccine," he said.

Before the pause, he said, the county heard from many Umatilla County workers, particularly in agriculture and food pro-

county has about 800 doses of the vaccine on hand now, and Fiumara said it remains to be seen whether the demand has changed at all.

During the county's Friday, April 30, clinic at 2260 S.W. Court Ave. in Pendleton, Umatilla County Public Health will have all three vaccine options — Pfizer, Moderna and Johnson & Johnson — available for anyone ages 16 and up (the Pfizer shot is the only version available to people ages 16 and 17).

"We're hoping that will generate some additional demand, but we're very nervous that the pause (on Johnson & Johnson) may have impacted the way people see the vaccine," he said.

In Morrow County, Commissioner Melissa Lindsay said the county is also struggling to find people to get vaccinated, although she hopes that resuming the Johnson & Johnson shot will help.

"We've definitely seen demand dropping," she said. "It used to be we had a long list we could call when we had an extra dose in a vial, and now we are struggling to find someone."

She said the county currently has about 1,400 Johnson & Johnson doses, 300 Pfizer and 240 Moderna. They are planning on doing some targeted efforts to use those doses, including working to get students ages 16 and 17 vaccinated with the Pfizer. Lindsay said that effort could make a big difference in preventing outbreaks as schools attempt to start indoor sports.

If the county can't find enough local residents to get vaccinated, she said, they have discussed inviting people from metro areas who are still struggling to get an appointment to come and get vaccinated in Morrow County.



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