

School struggles with tough decisions

Blue Mountain Community College Board approves budget, faculty layoffs

BY JOHN TILLMAN
Hermiston Herald

The Blue Mountain Community College Board of Education has approved the administration's retrenchment plan, laying off five full-time faculty members.

The board voted on the plan Monday night, June 6, in a special meeting.

The college laid off the instructors in business, criminal justice, English, music and chemistry, according to Blue Mountain Faculty Association President Sascha McKeon.

The board also passed adjustments to its current budget and changes to the proposed 2022-23 budget, then adopted the new budget. Board member Kim Puzey of Hermiston voted against adoption. All other agenda items passed unanimously.

Six board members attended in person and Bill Markgraf of Baker City remotely.

The board had met in executive session at 5 p.m. to conduct deliberations with the college's labor negotiations team.

FACULTY UNION NEGOTIATORS, ADMINISTRATION MET JUNE 3

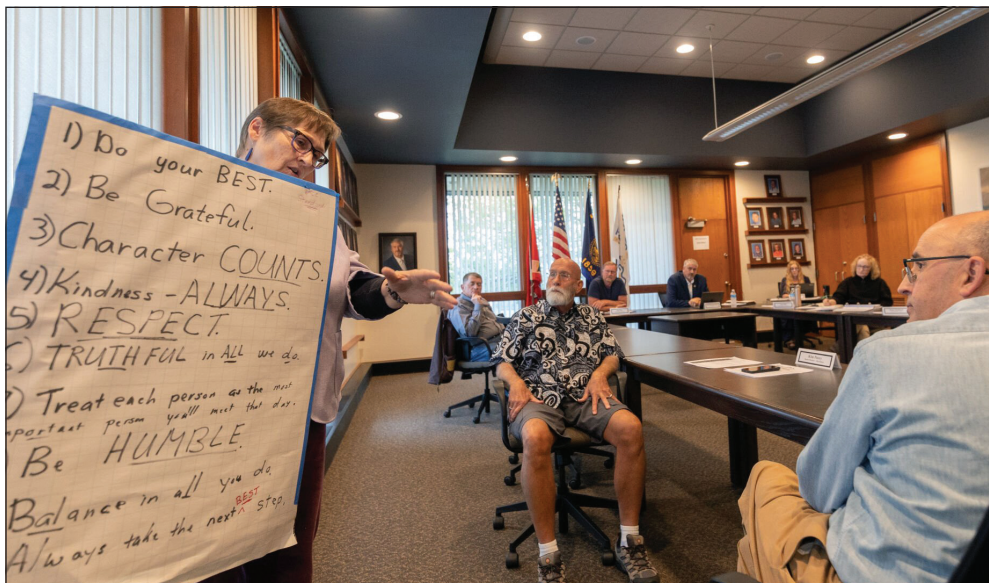
BMCC administration met with the faculty union team for a final time June 3 to negotiate layoffs in the new budget.

"The meeting was short and not unexpected," BMCC President Mark Browning said. "The union did not bring any new ideas. They just wanted to know who is on the layoff list."

But it's not the role of the union to notify employees, he said, but rather the college's because it's the employer.

Layoff notices go out June 7, Browning noted.

"We need to move forward," Browning concluded, "and ad-



Kathy Aney/Hermiston Herald

Marie Ekin, former middle school teacher and Blue Mountain Community College tutor, talks to BMCC board members about character during the public comment portion of a meeting Monday, June 6, 2022, before the board approved a retrenchment plan that laid off five faculty members.

dress student needs. It's time to wrap this up."

McKeon regarded the meeting as an implementation session.

"We came to the table for a polite conversation on options to save jobs," she said. "The administration didn't act on them back when there was time."

Faculty at risk of losing their jobs would have liked a timeline of what to expect, biology instructor McKeon added.

"The administration gave us reason after reason for not taking our suggestions to save money elsewhere, without providing any ideas themselves," she continued. "We tried to maintain a relationship. We could have had three days of turnaround, but the administration said there were lots of moving parts."

The union's collective bargaining agreement with the college requires meetings to discuss alternatives, but also for implementation, McKeon explained. No implementation meeting had been held, so the June 3 session satisfied that contract requirement.

And the \$627,000 Amazon gift out of Morrow County won't help much, McKeon said.

With the board's approval of the budget, she said the faculty

association could file grievances.

"It's frustrating to do good faith bargaining when we don't have the full picture," she said. "For whatever reason, the administration couldn't or wouldn't share their plans with us."

COLLEGE SAYS AMAZON MONEY SAVED TEACHER JOBS

Most of the 11 speakers during the 30 minute public comment period June 6 were full or part time Blue Mountain faculty members.

"It's time to grow the college, not cut it," math and computer science instructor Gary Parker said.

McKeon was the final speaker. She noted other schools dedicate 40% of their budgets to full-time instruction, but BMCC administration thinks 12% is sufficient.

"Our greatest asset is high-quality instructors who have honed their craft here," she said, "which makes them uniquely suited to serve our students' needs."

Board Chair Don Rice of Hermiston recognized Browning after the public comment period.

"This has been a journey and process no one has enjoyed,"

Browning said. "Reducing faculty is not something anyone wanted to do. But we have to face economic reality. We have significantly lower enrollment, and a fiduciary responsibility to craft a budget that reflects that fact."

Browning explained why increased expenses in some line items were justified, and why other apparent hikes were just warranted accounting changes. For instance, even before \$5 gas, the administration knew travel expenses would increase, as athletic teams would travel more than during the pandemic years.

"We started with a \$2 million hole," he added, "of which \$1.3 million was faculty. It's difficult to overcome. We need to offer students what they need. The world is changing. We need to change with it."

Browning stated the Amazon gift in lieu of Morrow County property taxes helped to reduce proposed layoffs from 10 to five.

PUZEY CALLS FOR SELLING COLLEGE PROPERTY, MORE

Rice asked for comments from fellow board members. Chris Brown of Heppner responded to comments from some speakers.

"This proposed budget was not drafted in isolation," he said. "The budget committee met three times, rather than the usual once, and with citizen and faculty involvement. It was forthright fact-seeking. I believe that our students are our greatest resource."

Puzey noted actual cuts don't have to go through until 120 days after notifications. He suggested selling or leasing buildings, seeking scholarships from business partners, county governments and the ports of Umatilla and Morrow. He also urged faculty members to leverage the channels to the community that they've developed to help increase enrollment.

"I'm hopeful it's not over yet," he said.

Kent Madison of Echo stressed the importance of outreach to high school juniors and seniors, who might not even know that their parents taxes support the college.

"BMCC is not for profit," he said. "The layoffs aren't to provide dividends to shareholders. We just don't have the money. Enrollment has dropped 65% in 10 years."

Vice Chair Jane Hill of Pendleton also held out hope that more money could be found and enrollment increased before classes start in September.

"Every faculty member is important," she said. "I hope we can all come to the same table."

Hill noted that adjustments up to 10% can be made to an adopted budget. She asked Browning if the faculty cuts would fit under that share. He said they would.

"At least having the names will help with our grievance cases," McKeon said in the hall outside the conference room after the meeting.

She lamented the revised fall schedule and need to notify students who signed up for classes, which now may have to be cancelled.

"Now there is more pressure on teachers," she concluded, "if we're going to be recruiters as well, and fill in until the marketer in the budget is hired."

ODFW confirms Umatilla County wolf attack

Hermiston Herald

Wolves with the Ukiah Pack killed two sheep in late May on private land in Coyote Canyon, a ravine tributary to McKay Creek, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife reported.

A sheepherder found a dead 180-pound ewe and 70-pound lamb in a 5,000-acre pasture about 1 mile from his camp on May 30. The sheep had bedded down for the night in the private pasture.

The ewe had been mostly consumed, while the lamb was entirely intact. ODFW estimated both sheep died no earlier than the evening of May 29 or the morning of May 30.

ODFW personnel shaved, skinned and examined the carcasses. Both sheep suffered multiple bite punctures and pre-mortem hemorrhaging, indicating a predator attack.

The ewe had pre-mortem tooth punctures up to 5/16-inch diameter on the neck, with pre-mortem hemorrhaging in the remaining muscle tissue, according to the state wildlife department report.

The lamb had numerous 1/4-inch pre-mortem bite punctures and multiple tears in the hide on the neck, throat and left hindquarter above the hock. Trauma to the neck penetrated to the bone on both sides and dislocated the neck. Pre-mortem hemorrhage on the left hindquarter was up to 1.5 inches deep.

According to Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, the severity and location of injuries to the sheep are consistent with wolf attacks.

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