

Grants Pass

Daily Courier

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City of GP could help MINT buy building for shelter

By Vickie Aldous
of the Daily Courier

The Grants Pass City Council is moving swiftly to try to find about \$750,000 in city money to help a nonprofit group buy a low-barrier shelter site — even as many councilors are about to be swept from office or leave voluntarily in January.

At a Wednesday night meeting, most councilors agreed to direct city staff to present funding ideas at the next City Council meeting, which comes in early December.

The nonprofit Mobile Integrative Navigation Team is currently offering medical care, help connecting to resources like housing and a place to get out of the cold during the day at Parker's Place, the former site of a furniture store near Bi-Mart in south Grants Pass.

MINT's lease is up in February 2025. The owner is getting ready to retire and wants to sell the property, said MINT Executive Director Cassy Leach.

MINT is asking the city of Grants Pass for \$750,000 to help buy the property, she said.

That show of city support could help MINT win additional state and federal funding to start and operate an indoor shelter, tiny house cluster and urban campground serving about 100 people, Leach said.

MINT — which relies heavily on volunteers — estimates that hiring staff and running a supervised shelter site would cost nearly \$1.9 million per year. MINT isn't asking the city to fund operations, Leach said.

She said MINT wants to work with the current mayor and City Council, as well as the incoming elected leaders.

"I'm going to talk about the elephant in the room," Leach said. "We're going to have a new mayor and council coming in and our desire is to be really good partners with the mayor and council — but I do acknowledge that they may have different goals and strategic ideas on how to solve the problem. MINT's goal is to be around long-term."

In the Nov. 5 election, a conservative bloc backed by the Josephine County Republican Party defeated current Mayor Sara Bristol and two councilors, and gained two seats when incumbent councilors didn't seek reelection. Another councilor will leave in late December or early January to fulfill his role as a representative in the Oregon Legislature.

In January, five of the current eight City Council members will be new, along with incoming Mayor Clint Scherf, who has past experience as a councilor.

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Trump's pick for attorney general withdraws

Gaetz was under investigation by the House Ethics Committee

By Eric Tucker and Alanna Durkin Richer
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Matt Gaetz withdrew today as President-elect Donald Trump's pick for attorney general following continued scrutiny over a federal sex trafficking investigation that cast doubt on his ability to be confirmed as the nation's chief federal law enforcement officer.

The abrupt withdrawal is a setback to Trump's push to install steadfast loyalists in his incoming administration, but also a recognition of the resistance the Republican is already encountering from members of his own party to picks with checkered backgrounds. By bowing out, Gaetz averts what was shaping up to be a pitched confirmation battle that would have tested how far Senate Republicans were willing to go to confirm Trump's Cabinet selections.

The Florida Republican's announcement came one day after meeting with senators in an effort to win their support for his confirmation to lead the Justice Department.

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TIMOTHY BULLARD / Daily Courier, 2020

Attendance at school districts in Josephine and Jackson counties

Statistics provided by the Oregon Department of Education.

School district	Students who miss less than 10% of school days	K-2 students missing less than 10% of school days 2018-19	K-2 students missing less than 10% of school days 2023-24	9th graders on track to graduate 2023-24
Ashland	73%	86%	77%	89%
Butte Falls	63%	68%	63%	62%
Central Point	68%	84%	74%	80%
Eagle Point	71%	90%	73%	83%
Glendale	61%	70%	63%	78%
Grants Pass	72%	87%	73%	85%
Medford	66%	81%	71%	74%
Phoenix-Talent	65%	81%	67%	93%
Prospect	60%	81%	70%	85%
Rogue River	63%	75%	61%	83%
Three Rivers	64%	78%	64%	82%

Attendance at Oregon schools still well below pre-pandemic levels

By Chris Bristol
of the Daily Courier

In Medford, fully a third of all students in the school district last year were considered chronically absent from school. That was average for the state and hardly the worst rate in Southern Oregon.

Data officially released today by the Oregon Department of Education shows public school districts still struggling to correct a culture of skipping school that has plagued the efforts of educators for years and apparently was worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Chronic absenteeism is defined as missing 10% or more of school. The state education department likes to use the reverse term "regular attenders" to describe students who get to class 90% of the time or more.

Per the data, the Ashland School District's attendance rate of 73% in 2023-24 was the highest in Southern Oregon, just ahead of the rate of 72% in Grants Pass.

Put in reverse, that means that 27% of students in Ashland and 28% in Grants Pass were considered chronically absent. Better than a third, but more than a quarter.

Among other big school districts, Eagle Point was No. 3 at 71%, Central Point was next at 68%, followed by Medford at 66%, Phoenix-Talent at 65% and Three Rivers at 64%.

Rates tend to be even lower in rural areas.

The data released by the education department today does not include districtwide rates for 2018-19, the school year before the pandemic, but the rates for students from kindergarten through second grade were available for comparison.

Those rates show how bad the dropoff was and how bad it remains. In Ashland, for example, 14% of K-2 students were chronically absent in 2018-19, whereas last year the rate was 23%.

In Grants Pass, the K-2 absenteeism rate was 13% in 2018-19 vs. 27% last year. In Medford it was 19% five years ago vs. 29% now. In the Three Rivers School District, it was 22% then vs. 36% now.

As bad as they are, the numbers appear to be slowly improving. For example, Central Point's attendance rate last year of 68% was 4 percentage points higher than the year before. Grants Pass and Medford each saw 2 point increases.

Tyler Mylerly, spokesperson for the Medford School District, called last year's 2 percentage point increase "a positive step in the right direction" that reflects a number of initiatives undertaken by the district to improve attendance and what educators call "engagement."

"While we recognize there's more work to do, the slight improvement we've already

"By working together with families, we can ensure that every student has the opportunity to succeed, and that they are in school every day, ready to learn."

KRISTIN HOSFELT
Grants Pass School District spokesperson

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Josephine rural fire district approved by board

By Chrissy Ewald
of the Daily Courier

It doesn't have firefighters, stations, equipment or a tax to support it, but for the first time, a large area of Josephine County surrounding Grants Pass has a fire district.

After months of preparation, the county Board of Commissioners voted 2-0 Wednesday to create the Josephine County Rural Fire Protection District to cover an area from Wonder to Murphy and up to Sunny Valley and Galice.

Wednesday's board order says the Board of Commissioners will serve as the governing body of the fire district until May, when voters who live in the district will elect a five-member at-large governing board to take over.

The decision to create a fire district by statute comes after decades of failed attempts to get voters to approve one, most recently in a 2021 special election.

The Board of Commissioners attempted earlier this year to remove the requirement that new and significantly remodeled homes in rural and forested areas of the county outside a fire district show proof of structural fire protection coverage. A land-use group sued, and the change was rebuffed by the Oregon Land Use Board of Appeals, which disagreed with the county's argument that the Oregon Department of Forestry could fight house fires.

Commissioner John West emphasized that the new district doesn't come with any taxes, at least for now, and won't affect contracts with Rural/Metro Fire, a private company that for decades has provided structural fire protection and emergency medical services in roughly the same area as the new district.

Though it's dispatched by 9-1-1 and has mutual aid agreements with other fire districts and the city of Grants Pass fire department, Rural/Metro is a private company, currently the only private structural firefighting company operating in the area after its last competitor, County Fire Department, also a private company, shuttered in the summer of 2023. The area was previously the only highly populated place in the state not covered by a fire district, made even more unique in the past when multiple companies competed for customers.

People who live in Rural/Metro's service area can choose whether or not to subscribe for fire protection. Many choose to subscribe; others choose not to. Members of the Board of Commissioners, especially Commissioner

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Linn County city of Lebanon in national spotlight over fluoridation

By Zane Sparling
The Oregonian

The city of Lebanon, due east of Corvallis, is drawing national attention for its anti-fluoride fight, after a hairline majority voted to pull the chemical from the water system earlier this month.

The Washington Post on Wednesday published an article that tied Lebanon's anti-fluoride vote to Robert F. Kennedy Jr., the former presidential candidate and pharmaceutical skeptic who has been tapped to be President-elect Donald Trump's health secretary.

"Longtime denizens of this town of 20,000 recalled widespread tooth decay among children before the city council voted to add fluoride to the drinking water two decades ago," wrote reporter Fenit Nirappil, who previously worked for The Oregonian. "But a group of residents remained unconvinced."

Lebanon residents decided to stop adding fluoride to the water supply by a 52% to 48% margin with less than half the town voting, state election returns show.

In some ways, the vote was a moot point — as city engineers were already forced to stop adding fluoride to the pipes, in a bid to manage the influx of muddy water pouring into the municipal system.

While officials stress that the water is still safe to drink — and a boil-water notice is not in effect — the Lebanon City Council declared a state of emergency in early October,

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