City Receives Budget Award

Grants Pass was awarded for its 36th consecutive year.

The City of Grants Pass is pleased to announce the Government Finance Officers Association of the United States and Canada (GFOA) has presented the city with the GFOA Distinguished Budget Presentation Award for its budget document for the current fiscal year.

This is the 36th consecutive year the award has been presented to the City of Grants Pass.

“The strategic plan and budget processes are a success thanks to the collaborative efforts of citizens, city council members, city committees, and city staff,” said Finance Director Adam Shults.

In order to receive the budget award, Grants Pass had to satisfy nationally-recognized guidelines for effective budget presentation. The award is considered the gold standard for government budgeting.

“This award represents a significant achievement by the city and reflects our commitment to meeting the highest principles of governmental budgeting,” said Shults.

Council Community Connection

Join members of the Grants Pass City Council for discussion and conversation about various city programs, agenda items, and other issues of public interest at Council Community Connection events 10 a.m. to 11 a.m. every second and fourth Friday of each month.

Each Council Community Connection session will feature two city councilors who will be available to answer questions, receive comments, and exchange ideas with members of the public.

The next event is March 26 at the City Hall Ridge Room, 101 NW A St. Refreshments will be served.

For more information, visit the city’s website: https://www.grantspassoregon.gov.

Take a Tour of Headquarters

Virtual video tour allows members of the public to see the inner workings of Grants Pass DPS Headquarters.

Members of the public are invited to take a virtual video tour of the City of Grants Pass Department of Public Safety Headquarters.

The approximately five-minute video features interior and exterior footage, including overhead drone footage.

The prepared video gives viewers an inside glimpse into the new facilities and inner workings of the department, including subject interview rooms, the records division, administration, investigations division, 911 call center, patrol division, advanced technology, wellness center, training room, and more.

Prior to construction of the new headquarters, DPS was housed in the aging county building adjacent to City Hall. The size and technology constraints of the old building had various divisions of the department nearly stacked on top of each other.

A closet that was converted into a technology center was beneath a second floor bathroom and regularly leaked water that threatened valuable equipment.

The 911 call center was in a dark corner of the building where employees installed blue-sky-and-clouds ceiling panels to help alleviate feelings of claustrophobia.

The detective division consisted of desks crammed together with cubical dividers that failed to provide a barrier against sound and forced detectives to silence one another while trying to conduct investigative phone calls.

The new headquarters has alleviated these issues and provides a better base for providing public safety to the community.

To view the informative video of the building, visit this link: https://bit.ly/3ki3cFV
Strategic Planning Focuses Council Goals

By Aaron Cubic
City Manager

At the start of each new year, the Grants Pass City Council engages in a three-day strategic planning session designed to review the city’s long-term goals and how to achieve them.

Strategic planning is a tool that helps the city focus and analyze its financial prospects and make strategic decisions about city services and capital projects – particularly as they affect community goals and objectives.

Community participation is an important aspect of the process, as councilors want to make their strategic planning decisions with the confidence that they are responding to residents’ desires.

The council invited residents to a Strategic Planning Forum in December to ask about residents’ goals and dreams for Grants Pass. Those who missed the forum, were able to participate by emailing their suggestions to City Recorder Karen Frerk.

Community-suggested priorities and actions were placed into the strategic planning process for consideration. Those suggestions became a part of the tools used by the council to set budget and action priorities for the future.

The Council also heard from the chairs of city committees and commissions and received reports from city staff.

The initial phase of strategic planning involved Council review of the “state of the city” through Council, community, and staff input. Council then developed strategies through the planning process, analyzing data and identifying issues.

Once Council adopts a Strategic Plan for the year, staff develops a Strategic Work Plan. The city’s budget is developed to reflect the goals in the Strategic Plan. The city’s Budget Committee approves resources aimed at implementing the plan. Council approves the budget and staff implements the Work Plan.

Throughout the year, progress is monitored, and staff issues quarterly reports to Council and the community.

The Work Plan is developed following the SMART format – Specific Action, Measurement, Achievable-Assignment, Resources, and Time. This helps improve achievement and success, clarifies expectations, and clarifies resources required to meet objectives.

Objectives are created with five key goals in mind:
- Ensure community safety.
- Provide cooperative shared leadership involving Council, staff, and community.
- Encourage economic opportunities.
- Facilitate sustainable, manageable growth.
- Maintain, operate, and expand our infrastructure to meet community needs.

This year, Council identified 23 objectives and more than 104 actions have been assigned thus far, making the Work Plan a living document.

Of the 23 objectives, Council identified five essential priority actions known as three-star items:
1. Explore Urban Renewal Agency opportunities for developing Caveman Plaza in downtown.
2. Implement a Housing Action Plan.
4. Trail development and recreation.
5. Create a city climate taskforce or committee.

A number of desired objectives known as two-star items include:
1. Pass Public Safety levy.
2. Develop an Urban Interface Wildfire Resilience Plan.

(See “STRATEGIC” page 10)

GP Now

GP Now Goes Digital

As a cost-saving measure, the Grants Pass City Council recently voted unanimously to cease the printed publication and direct mailing of GP Now.

This March issue will be the final printed version of the city newsletter, which will be converted to a monthly digital-only format beginning in April.

All past and current city newsletters dating back to 2017 are available at the city’s website, where new issues will also be posted each month: https://www.grantspassoregon.gov/604/City-Newsletters.

Members of the public who wish to be notified when new issues of GP Now are available at the website, can join the city’s email subscriber list, where preferences regarding the receipt of notices can be personalized by each recipient: https://www.grantspassoregon.gov/list.aspx

Contacting The Council

The mayor and councilors are volunteers and do not keep regular office hours. They can be contacted by:
Phone, mayor and city councilors’ email, or by regular mail at 101 NW A Street, Grants Pass, OR 97526.

The City Council appreciates hearing from citizens. Your questions are handled as follows:
Questions sent by email that are technical in nature will receive a direct response from staff.

Questions regarding policy decisions will be referred to Council for their consideration and response. The mayor and council members can be emailed collectively at: mayorcouncil@grantspassoregon.gov.

Council will only respond to emails with a disclosed name and address.

Please note that all emails become a part of the public record.

TYPO TALLY!

A wise old editor once said: “Typos are here for those who won’t be happy until they find one.”

Thousands of words composed of thousands of letters means we are bound to get a few out of place. Let us know when you find them!

We didn’t receive any notes from readers of the January issue of GP Now. That doesn’t mean typos didn’t exist, just that nobody found any to alert us to.

Can you find any typos in this March issue?
Email us to let us know, and we’ll thank you in print right here in the next issue! ssabel@grantspassoregon.gov
Faszer Selected Council President

The Grants City Council selected Councilor DJ Faszer to be the council president for a one-year term. Faszer and Councilor Joel King were both nominated to the post at the council’s meeting Jan. 6.

“I’m honored to be nominated. You can’t make a bad choice between the two of us. We would always be honest, open and professional,” said King before the vote.

Faszer was selected by unanimous vote after a motion from Councilor Rob Pell, seconded by Councilor Vanessa Ogier.

“Thank you. I’m honored. I truly am,” said Faszer in accepting the position.

“It’s not about eliminating disagreements, but about ensuring that respect and professionalism are maintained even in the face of those disagreements.”

Faszer said he sees the position as a liaison between his fellow councilors, and he hoped to foster increased communication between them.

“My intent is to build trust in each other among the council,” said Faszer.

He said his goal is more about unifying the council’s focus, and less about forming a consensus.

“It’s not about eliminating disagreements, but about ensuring that respect and professionalism are maintained even in the face of those disagreements,” said Faszer.

He said he will also address some council “efficiency issues to be entertained.”

Faszer said as council president, he wants to facilitate increased communication between the council and the Josephine County Board of Commissioners. In order to do that, he says he will pay close attention to his colleagues’ positions.

“I need to understand the overall position of the council in order to represent them well,” Faszer said.

He said he believes he is fully prepared to fulfill the role at this point in his tenure on the council, and he hopes to bring that experience to the position.

“I have a more complete understanding of the needs of the position,” Faszer said.

Ultimately, Faszer said his primary focus is on helping the council serve the people of Grants Pass.

“It’s our job to implement the will of our constituents,” he said.

City Hosts Housing Needs Community Forum

The City of Grants Pass Community Development Department will host a Housing Needs Community Forum 6 p.m. Tuesday, March 30, to address the city’s housing needs.

In fulfillment of state laws subject to recent House Bills 2001 and 2003 (2019), city staff will present the housing needs projection and proposed policies to provide needed housing.

Staff will also present proposed code changes to accommodate middle housing.

The public forum will include exploring ways to expand housing choices in Grants Pass, a review of the Housing Needs Analysis identifying the number and type of housing units needed, and the Middle Housing Code update aimed at removing barriers to developing middle housing types such as duplexes, tripleplexes, quadplexes, townhomes, and cottage clusters.

Participants will have an opportunity to ask questions and share comments at the meeting.

The forum will be held in City Council Chambers, 101 NW ‘A’ St. Those wishing to participate remotely will be able to do so through Microsoft Teams online: http://bit.ly/2O4YP72.

Those who wish to join the meeting by phone can call in at (971)279-6431 and use meeting ID: 730 099 212#.

For additional information, contact the Community Development Department: (541)450-6060.

Opening on Bikeways & Walkways Committee

Applications are being accepted for one position on the Grants Pass and Josephine County Bikeways & Walkways Committee due to a resignation. This term expires June 30, 2022.

The purpose of this committee is to implement the “Non-Motorized” Chapter of the Master Transportation Plan, seek input from the community, coordinate and disseminate information for public education about biking and walking routes and rules, and serve as a resource and advisory group regarding bike and pedestrian trails for the city and county.

Applicants for this position must reside within Grants Pass City Limits.

Applications are available at the City Administration Office, 101 N.W. A Street, or online at www.grantspassoregon.gov/committee-application. Applications must be received no later than 5 p.m. Friday, April 9.

Applications will be reviewed by the committee Tuesday, April 13. Appointment will be made by the city council at the City of Grants Pass council meeting Wednesday, April 21.
2nd Annual Drinking Water Week Poster Contest

Local students can win $100 for their creative artwork based on the theme: “There when you need it.”

For more than 40 years the City of Grants Pass and the American Water Works Association have celebrated Drinking Water Week as a unique opportunity for communities to come together and recognize the vital role water plays in our daily lives.

“Every year during Drinking Water Week, we celebrate, recognize, and protect our great water source, the Rogue River,” said Public Works Director Jason Canady.

To help promote the celebration and conservation awareness, the city will sponsor its second annual Drinking Water Week Poster Contest for local students, grades K-12. Students are asked to create an original poster design using the theme: “There when you need it.”

Student poster design entries will be accepted in four categories: grades K-2, 3-5, 6-8, and 9-12. Thirteen winning posters will be selected, and each winner will receive a $100 prize. The entry deadline for submissions is 5 p.m., Friday, April 30.

Contest winners will also be recognized at a city council meeting, and be featured in the city’s community outreach efforts, including social media recognition campaigns, and Drinking Water Week promotional activities.

Full contest rules and submission information are available at: https://www.grantspassoregon.gov/1408/Drinking-Water-Week-2021

For additional information, contact Public Works Department Support Technician Di-anne Phelan at (541)450-6110.

The Dollar Value of Water

National Drinking Water Week will be recognized May 2-8 this year. Consider the value of water in comparison to the average cost of other household services.

The average Grants Pass Utilities bill is $76.

Water unit charges account for approximately $26 of each monthly bill.

The average monthly trash collection bill in Grants Pass is $35 per month.

The average monthly electric bill is $99 per month.

The average household spends $110 per month for cellphone charges, and cable TV/internet charges average $144 per month.

DID YOU KNOW?

Grants Pass has more than 187 miles of water distribution piping to transport fresh drinking water throughout the city.

The city’s eight reservoirs hold 20.5 million gallons of water.

Public Comment Open for Review of Local Wetlands Inventory

When the city added lands to the Grants Pass Urban Growth Boundary, it became necessary under state planning rules to survey the new lands for the existence of wetlands.

The city contracted with Pacific Habitat Services in 2017 to conduct the field survey work and produce a wetlands report and mapping. Information from that survey is now available for public review and comment.

Links to the pertinent documents are available at the city’s website: https://www.grantspassoregon.gov/1409/Local-Wetlands-Inventory.

Documents include an interactive web map of identified wetlands, probable wetlands, and properties abutting wetlands or probable wetlands; the Wetlands Technical Report; and Individual Wetlands Maps that accompany the technical report.

The Department of State Lands (DSL) is the agency with authority to determine if the wetland survey work meets the requirements of the state planning rule.

Once the DSL determines the wetland survey meets state requirements the survey and mapping will be added to the city’s existing Local Wetlands Inventory (LWI).

When added to the LWI the information will be used to guide city decisions on conservation and development of these lands.

Public comments on this survey work are being solicited before the DSL makes decisions on the acceptance of the work.

Public comments and/or questions can be sent by email to: planning@grantspassoregon.gov. All public comment must be received no later than March 31.

Property owners of lands containing wetlands or probable wetlands and abutting properties will be notified by U.S. mail.

Those persons wishing to speak with a wetlands specialist may call the Community Development Department: (541)450-6060.
Trees & The Right-of-Way

By Tony Mecum
Urban Forester

When you think of Grants Pass, what do you picture in your mind? For most, they see the surrounding hills, the Rogue River, and our towering trees.

Grants Pass would be a completely different place without these assets. We all play a part in keeping the environment of Grants Pass a treasure for its residents, visitors, and future generations.

The waters of the Rogue River are protected by rules and regulations, and so are many of our trees. This article is intended to familiarize residents with the right-of-way and some of the regulations that right-of-way trees face.

The Right-of-Way

The right-of-way is an area that allows for vehicle and pedestrian traffic, as well as the placement of certain infrastructure and utilities. The right-of-way often includes a street, sidewalks, and green space.

Even without sidewalks, the right-of-way can extend beyond the curb and its extent may not always be obvious.

For some homeowners, this is a surprise they encounter when facing a development project from a utility company or a governmental agency, or even when the homeowner decides to do work in this area, including the removal or pruning of a tree.

The Josephine County Assessor’s office holds maps that show the rights-of-way throughout town. Trees, sidewalks, and other infrastructure that exist in the right-of-way have regulations associated with them.

You may be familiar with the term “street tree.” These are trees in the right-of-way which are protected by the city’s Municipal Code.

In order to perform any work on these trees, a Tree Permit must be obtained by the city.

Most work on these trees can only be done by a certified arborist who is a prequalified contractor.

Removing, pruning, or planting a tree in the right-of-way is not allowed unless a Tree Permit is issued.

Fortunately, as the city’s urban forester, I can assist applicants by assessing each tree or potential planting location to determine if the requested work meets the requirements set forth in the Municipal Code.

Tree Planting

As a Tree City USA, and recipient of the Oregon Tree City of the Year for 2020, Grants Pass actively encourages landowners to plant trees.

In order to plant a tree in the right-of-way, you will need to obtain a free Tree Permit from the city. This is to ensure that the desired tree species is suitable for the growing space.

For example, we do not want large canopy tree species to be planted underneath power lines.

We also do not want small tree species to be planted in locations that can accommodate larger trees.

I am here to assist you with species selection and will visit the site upon request. There are more than 100 species approved for our rights-of-ways.

A certified arborist is not required to plant the tree (the applicant may plant the tree), but the tree must be planted according to proper planting specifications.

I will provide that information and answer questions upon issuing the Tree Permit.

Tree Pruning

It may not be apparent, but improper tree pruning can eventually lead to many headaches in the future.

For example, a large pruned branch can cause decay that might not present a problem for a few years. A pruned root can also cause significant decay if not done correctly.

Improper pruning can also weaken the structure of the tree, causing a greater risk of failure during a storm.

The city requires residents to submit a Tree Permit application for any pruning (branches or roots). If a branch is larger than three inches in diameter, or if any sized root is to be pruned, the work must be done by a certified arborist who is prequalified with the city.

A certified arborist is qualified to make appropriate pruning cuts to minimize negative effects. Although the adjacent landowner may prune branches less than three inches in diameter themselves, A Tree Permit is still required in order to ensure the work is appropriate and done according to best practices.

The cost for pruning is the responsibility of the adjacent landowner.

Trees must be pruned for clearance above sidewalks, streets, and at intersections. Make sure your tree branches are at least eight feet above sidewalks, 15 feet above streets, and not obstructing vision for pedestrians and cars (including school buses that sit much higher up in the air) at intersections.

If you suspect a branch of a right-of-way tree is within these clearance minimums, contact me for confirmation. A Tree Permit to clear branches from streets, sidewalks, and intersections can be issued right away. (See “TREES” page 10)

Right-of-Way Scenarios

The diagram above shows an example street intersection with different right-of-way scenarios. The grey area is the right-of-way.

Number 1 shows a right-of-way with no sidewalks. The tree with white flowers is a street tree protected by the Municipal Code. The little conifer is on private property and does not fall under the same regulations.

Number 2 shows a sidewalk along the side of the house, but the front of the house does not have a sidewalk. The homeowner’s fence extends into the right-of-way. The tree between the curb and sidewalk, and the tree with light grey flowers, are protected by the Municipal Code. The tree between the sidewalk and fence is not.

Number 3 shows a “curbright” sidewalk, where the sidewalk is connected to the curb. The right-of-way extends past the sidewalk and the tree is protected by the Municipal Code.

Number 4 shows a sidewalk and planting strip on both sides of the house. The right-of-way in front of the house extends a few feet beyond the sidewalk and therefore the tree is protected by the Municipal Code. The conifer between the sidewalk and curb to the right of the house is also protected. The small tree in the yard is not (it is a private tree).

The owners of each property in the diagram above are called “adjacent landowners” of the rights-of-way bordering their properties. They are responsible for the maintenance of the trees in the right-of-way adjacent to their property.

The Grants Pass Municipal Code (GPMC) Section 6.34, requires all sidewalks be in good repair and places the responsibility for repairs on the adjacent property owner. To lessen this burden on homeowners, the city has a program to pay up to 50 percent of repair costs.

Take A Tree Walk
Use this interactive map at the city’s website to take a Tree Walk through 77 specimens at historic Riverside Park: https://bit.ly/3rwMZPX
On Patrol With Sgt. Josh Nieminen

A firsthand account of a ride-along with a 20-year veteran of GPDPS.

By Steven Sabel
Information Coordinator

Sgt. Josh Nieminen is a 20-year veteran of the Grants Pass Department of Public Safety. Recently, I spent an afternoon on patrol with Sgt. Nieminen to get an idea of what a day in the life of a GPDPS officer is like. It was a very rewarding and eye-opening experience.

A day on patrol in Grants Pass is not “cops and robbers” or filled with a lot of high crime responses. Though major crimes do occur in the city from time to time, most days on patrol are filled with standard, but highly important public safety activity.

Our afternoon began with an immediate call of disorderly conduct at the local Home Depot. Reports from the scene indicated that a confrontation occurred inside the store when a woman’s ex-boyfriend saw her in the store with her current boyfriend. Words were exchanged, leading to a physical confrontation.

By the time we arrived, another unit was on the scene, but the perpetrator had already fled. The other unit took the report and filed it into the on-board computer system.

The computer system inside patrol units is highly sophisticated. Various screen options indicate open calls, unit responses, filed comments from complainants and officers, the locations of various units in the city, and more.

There are generally six officer units assigned to each patrol shift or team at any given time. In January, the department instituted a shift schedule including two main shifts; 6 a.m. to 6 p.m., and 6 p.m. to 6 a.m., with a cover shift that overlaps the highest call volume times, usually between 2 p.m. and 10 p.m., said Nieminen.

“That’s still in its infancy. This is the first time we’ve done it,” he said.

The new system was put into place by Chief Warren Hensman in cooperation with the police association and union support, Nieminen said.

The city limits are divided into four beat areas, or quadrants. Patrol units remain in their assigned quadrant unless needed to answer a major call or provide backup assistance to another unit. A roving supervisor unit helps cover calls where needed, keeps an eye on the call log, and monitors unit activity.

Nieminen has been a supervisor for seven years. During our shift together, another officer was serving as acting supervisor to complete some final steps in his training. Nieminen was serving as training supervisor to oversee and advise the trainee along the way.

While reviewing the call log, Nieminen observed there was a logged complaint from an elderly woman who wanted to have her son arrested for trespassing. According to the log, several follow-up calls to the complainant resulted in voice-mail only with no actual contact.

That raised a concern for Nieminen, who then brought it to the trainee’s attention, and they determined that a welfare check should be conducted to make sure the woman was safe.

Welfare checks are a common activity for officers in Grants Pass, due to the city’s large population of elderly residents. Nieminen reports that he conducts several checks each week as part of his regular duties.

Some of the calls involve navigating between older residents and their loved ones who are dealing with the aging process together. Ultimately, after several tries, Nieminen was able to reach the woman on the phone and take her report. After speaking with her at length, using his training and personal communication skills, Nieminen determined the woman was not in any real danger and that the conflict resulted from her loved ones being concerned about her ability to continue living on her own unassisted.

Nieminen was able to contact the loved ones, assess the situation focused on protecting residents and their property in the most effective way possible during an incident or major disaster.

Community Connect is a secure, user-friendly platform allowing residents to share critical information about their household in order to aid first responders and emergency service personnel to respond more efficiently and effectively; ultimately resulting in better incident outcomes.

In addition to the residential portal, Community Connect also helps business owners and managers keep people at their commercial properties safe by giving first responders access to critical documents such as evacuation procedures, occupant rosters, hazardous material lists and more.

Additionally, designated contacts at properties joining the program will receive immediate alerts via text message whenever first responders are dispatched to their building address.

Community Connect is completely voluntary and residents are individually able to decide which information they are comfortable sharing.

Residents simply create a profile and enter critical property and occupant information which is then made available to public safety agencies at the
Standing On The Shoulders of Giants

The city’s Water Restoration Plant is a multi-faceted engineering marvel.

City of Grants Pass Water Restoration Plant Superintendent Gary Brelinski has been working at the WRP since 2008. He came to the plant through an occupational program connected to Rogue Community College.

Brelinski has a firsthand understanding of the importance of vocational programs, and that’s why he is working in coordination with Youth Pathways Partnership to create a video tour for students to demonstrate what it’s like to work in wastewater management.

“It’s an effort to introduce students to real careers in the city, including city government operations,” said Brelinski.

The original plan was to provide live, interactive tours of the WRP for students of various age groups, something Brelinski used to do from time to time for area schools.

“This magnified image shows a “happy” microorganism doing its work digesting solids at the city’s Water Restoration Plant.

― COVID conditions preclude that now,‖ Brelinski said.
The video tour concept is the best available alternative. Brelinski will work in conjunction with the city’s public information office to create what may become a small series of tours aimed at different audiences.

“I’ve learned to tailor my tour to my audience – anywhere from K-6 graders and college students, to city council members and new employees,‖ said Brelinski.

Some groups require more details than others, he said. “You learn how much your audience truly want to see and what they’re interested in,‖ said Brelinski.

He said younger kids aren’t as interested in the specific details of how the systems work, while college students are most interested in the biology behind the treatment processes.

“Our goal is keeping the microorganisms alive and happy,‖ he said.

“Middle schoolers want to learn about the icky stuff,‖ he said.
Tours generally begin in the lobby of the plant, which has been at its location since 1934.
In the lobby is where the brain of the plant resides. Known as the Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition, or SCADA system, the complex computer allows plant operators to make many changes and corrections to the overall system directly from the terminal.

Five pump and lift stations pump the city’s wastewater to the highest level in the system.

“It’s all gravity from that point,‖ said Brelinski.

On average, the plant processes a flow of 3-4 million gallons per day (MGD). During heavy winter rain events, that total can increase nearly five times to more than 15 MGD.

The plant is able to treat up to 15 MGD of processed flow per day with enough ultraviolet light to release it safely back to the river, but when the flows increase beyond that maximum, a second channel has to be operated requiring 24-hours manned supervision of the plant.

All plant operators are certified with the state. State certification must be maintained through each operator completing 20 hours of continued education every two years.

The treatment process is completely biological, using microorganisms to digest the solids in the wastewater.

“We’re glorified ranchers,‖ Brelinski says in jest.

“Our whole goal is keeping the microorganisms alive and happy,‖ he said.

(See “PLANT” page 11)
What is a Stormwater Utility?

Stormwater is a utility that deals with wet weather issues and is necessary to the community. Every property owner’s bill is calculated the same way and everyone pays based on how much their property contributes to the stormwater system.

After a heavy rain or snow the ground can only soak up a limited amount of water. The rest of the water goes into the stormwater system.

Our city relies on a stormwater system of pipes, creeks, ravines, culverts and more to manage wet weather.

This storm system constantly needs upkeep to work as it should, and this requires funding. The stormwater utility is a funding stream that is dedicated to the stormwater system.

What makes up the City of Grants Pass stormwater system?

When stormwater runs off your property, it has to go somewhere – it goes into the stormwater system.

The City of Grants Pass covers 27,000 acres of drainage and there is more than 138 miles of underground pipe.

For years, erosion, flooding, other damage from runoff, and time have taken their toll on our infrastructure. Because we all depend on it every day, no matter where in the city we live, we all share responsibility for making sure the system is working and well maintained.

How much is my Stormwater Utility Rate?

The Stormwater Utility Rate is based on the impervious surface of a property. The impervious surface of a property is land that can not absorb water runoff.

This surface is calculated as an Equivalent Service Unit (ESU) that equals 3,700 square feet. The average impervious surface for a single-family dwelling is 3,700 square feet, or one ESU.

This rate for 2021 is $7.50 for a single-family dwelling and billed monthly on your Utility Bill.

For other developed parcels the total impervious surface is divided by 3,700 SF or one ESU. This is for non-single family residences.

For example if you have 6,882 SF of Impervious Surface: 6,882 SF divided by 3700 SF per ESU = 1.86

1.86 ESU times $7.50 per ESU, equals $13.95 monthly stormwater charge.

The Path of the Stormwater

As the City of Grants Pass has grown, so has our “impervious” footprint.

With the addition of parking lots, subdivisions, driveways, and roofs, the rainwater is no longer allowed to soak into the ground. Instead, the water runs off or is directed to other locations, eliminating the natural, intended flow.

More pavement equals more problems.

Water needs a place to go.

When we have wet weather, all that stormwater needs a place to go.

After landscaped surfaces have soaked up the rainwater there is still a lot of runoff. Stormwater has a hard time getting absorbed on impervious surfaces, like roofs, patios, driveways, and parking lots.

The unabsorbed water goes into the stormwater system and finds its way to the Rogue River.

Some water gets into the city’s sewer system. This is known as inflow and infiltration, or I&I.

Water finds its way into the sewer system and has to be treated at the Water Restoration Plant before it goes to the Rogue River.

That puts excess load on the Water Restoration Plant. During the rainy season, flows at the plant can become so heavy, the plant can require 24-hour operator surveillance to make sure the plant isn’t over worked (see subsequent story on Page 7).

Public Works And You

The Grants Pass Public Works Department offers a variety of programs and opportunities to benefit and educate residents about public works.

Adopt-A-Street

This Public Works program gives citizens a chance to take charge of a chosen street and organize regular litter pickups to keep our community walkways clean and beautiful.

Bulk Water

The City of Grants Pass offers a bulk water station.

Emergency Drinking Water

Check out the facts about our water trailer, which is capable of supplying safe drinking water to Grants Pass residents in times of emergency.

FOG

Fats, Oils, and Grease poured down the kitchen sink or drain system congeal inside the sewer pipes and cause problems, requiring expensive repairs and sewer line cleaning.

Hazardous Sidewalk Repair Program

Find out how you can lower the cost of replacing hazardous sidewalks on your property through the City’s Hazardous Sidewalk Repair Program.

Low-Use Water Gardening

You can conserve water by choosing plants that reduce the need for extra watering.

Street Closures

Find out where local streets are closed due to construction or other issues.

Water Conservation Tips

Learn how to conserve water both indoors and out, and find out how to detect leaks and read your water meter.

To learn more about these and other programs, visit the city’s Public Works And You page: https://www.grants-passoregon.gov/1013/Public-Works-and-You

Wastewater Collection

The Wastewater Collection Division is responsible for meeting state and federal standards for ensuring the safe, uninterrupted operation of sanitary sewer lines within the community.

Wastewater Collection Division services are administered through distinct programs, including customer service, inspection services, system maintenance, and general operations.

The duties encompassed in these programs include sewer main repair and cleaning, manhole repair, clean-out repair, closed-caption TV camera inspection of new and existing sewer lines, easement maintenance, and emergency service calls.

The Wastewater Collection Division also provides support to local contractors involved in new construction, as well as the city’s Water Distribution Division during their normal course of business.

City of Grants Pass Public Works Divisions

Engineering
Fleet
GIS
Streets and Drainage
Wastewater Collection
Wastewater Restoration
Water Distribution
Water Treatment

For any questions regarding Public Works, please contact Public Works at (541)450-6110.
Patrol...(from page 6)

situation, place both sides of the call into the comments for future reference and provide assurance that nobody was going to be arrested. He recommended further consultation with medical personnel and social services to help further navigate the difficult situation.

“These situations can be very hard on families,” said Nieminen, who handled the call with grace and compassion.

A subsequent welfare check was our next call. A concerned coworker reported that the subject had been distraught over the death of a beloved pet, was potentially intoxicated, and had missed work without calling in with no response to attempts to contact him.

We were first to arrive to the scene and followed proper protocol to wait for a second unit to arrive as back-up.

The standard operating procedure is there to provide for officer safety and potential support, especially in an unclear situation and any report of alcohol use.

Once both units are on the scene, officers approach the location with caution and awareness.

“We knock on the door and if we don’t get an answer, we take a look around, see if we can see anything through the windows,” said Nieminen.

“If we see something that looks like anyone is in danger, we can pick the lock, or even break the door down if we have to,” he said.

In this incidence, several knocking attempts went unanswered. Dogs barking from inside the house and smoke coming in from the chimney suggested that someone was home inside.

Eventually the subject answered the door. Officers asked him some basic questions to assess his well-being and make sure he was not a danger to himself or others. Then Nieminen updated the status of the report and waited for the next call.

When there are not any pressing calls, units try to remain spread out to provide faster response to any needs.

The roving supervisor keeps their eye on where other units are and their activity, while doing area checks of locations where activity is known to occur, such as shopping center checks, business location passes, etc.

“It’s all about resource management,” said Nieminen.

It was raining pretty hard and even snowed a little bit during our afternoon on patrol. Inclement weather can have an exponential effect on call volume, Nieminen said.

“People think that call load decreases with inclement weather, but it actually increases. People seem to start acting up when the weather changes from good to bad,” said Nieminen.

With little opportunity to slow people down during bad weather, of course traffic collisions increase as well. To try to reduce accidents, patrol units drive through areas where collisions can be known to happen.

Their visual presence can help slow people down, and officers can look out for dangerous conditions on the road that may need to be addressed.

During our shift, we came across a storm drain grate on Seventh Street that was clogged with debris and causing a large puddle to form in a nearby intersection.

Nieminen stopped his unit, turned on his warning lights, and cleared the debris from the grate to improve the drainage and eliminate the hazard.

“It’s all a part of providing public safety,” he said.

Nieminen said COVID-19 restrictions have changed the landscape of providing public safety over the past year. Call volume is starting to return after a decline during the early shutdowns. The types of calls have changed as well, he said.

“The bars being closed has changed the dynamic with more people doing their drinking at home,” said Nieminen.

Even without COVID conditions, law enforcement is about constant adjusting and adapting to the community it serves, he said.

Continuous training is essential and important as well (see side bar about the department’s specialty enforcement teams), as is keeping up with changes to national standards.

“There’s a lot of factors involved that have to be considered to provide public safety to our community,” he said.

After spending an afternoon on patrol with Sergeant Nieminen, from domestic conflicts in a public store, to welfare checks and conflict resolution, and business safety checks to clearing roadway hazards, I have seen firsthand exactly what Nieminen means.

As he said, “It’s all a part of providing public safety.”

Special Weapons & Tactics

Sgt. Josh Nieminen has been a member of the SWAT Team since 2002. He has served as the team leader for eight years. He estimates the SWAT Team is put into action on average five times per year for things such as high-risk warrant service, armed barricaded subjects, and hostage rescue.

High-risk warrant service is their most prevalent duty, said Nieminen. The team has a system in place to determine the criteria for whether or not a warrant requires the SWAT Team.

“Then we take over the planning,” he said.

That planning includes scheduling the warrant service for the safest time of day and scenario. Factors to consider include whether there are known to be any children in the residence or area, if there are any schools nearby, and the relative safety of other residential and business buildings.

“We make sure to plan it with everyone’s safety in mind,” said Nieminen.

The team trains twice per month every month for eight hours per day. The days are divided between range days and tactical days. Range days involve a combination of rifle and

Crisis Negotiations Team

The Grants Pass Department of Public Safety maintains a team of specially trained personnel to deal with incidents involving hostages or barricaded subjects. The Crisis Negotiations Team (CNT) has been in existence since 1997.

The DPS uses the CNT to develop communication with barricaded subjects and to attempt a safe surrender without harm to any person. Deployment of the CNT can be in response to an existing situation, or they can be deployed proactively if a situation of expected or potential high risk is anticipated.

The CNT includes both sworn and non-sworn members of DPS. Members of the team are trained to function in all relevant positions within the negotiations setting and train with members of the SWAT Team.

The team is composed of a lieutenant, who acts as the team commander, a senior negotiator, who is the team leader, two police negotiators, and one scribe.

The intent of the CNT is to provide initial response to hostage situations or barricaded subjects.

They also accompany members of the SWAT Team during high-risk warrant services, that

Domestic Violence

Domestic violence assaults in Grants Pass increased nearly 30% in 2020 over the previous year, at an average of five DV assaults per week. The months of July and October set three-year records for total assault calls to the Department of Public Safety.
Strategic... (from page 2)

4. Create an equity task-force/committee.
5. Facilitate development of homeless shelter and/or urban campground.
6. Pedestrian & Bicycle Commuting Connectivity.
7. Parklet Infrastructure Plan.
8. Support continuity of community events.
9. Work with county to move bus hub.

The remaining objectives deemed beneficial to the community are known as one-star items and include:

1. Explore economic impacts of cannabis industry.
2. Identify new methods to increase communication and participation with citizens.
   • When possible, hold ‘State of the City’ public forum.
   • Partner with schools/or- ganizations to do more public outreach throughout the city.
3. Publish a total of four “Art Spotlights.”
5. Create a Public Art Walking Tour Map.
6. Upgrade and/or relocate the Skate Park.
7. Dedicated tree canopy funding.
8. Permanent funding for Public Safety services.
9. Increase public awareness of decisions regarding the Water Treatment Plant.
10. Fire/Rescue Division internal restructure.
11. Add one parking lot art installation to a designated parking lot.
12. Feasibility study for demand generators.
13. Reassess the purpose and usage of Gilbert Creek Park and redesign it to better meet the neighborhood needs.
14. Review water rate structure.

As we approach the city’s budget process, the Budget Committee will provide recommendations for council approval with these objectives in mind. Think of the Strategic Plan as a road map to city priorities and actions, how resources will be used, and what can be done to move Grants Pass forward.

“There are many ways of going forward, but only one way of standing still.”
— F.D. Roosevelt

Committees/Commissions

Bikeways / Walkways Committee
Budget Committee
Collaborative Economic Development Committee
Committee on Public Art
Housing Advisory Committee
Historical Buildings & Sites Commission
Tourism Advisory Committee
Urban Area Planning Commission
Urban Tree Advisory Committee

Trees... (from page 5)

Tree Removal

Sometimes it may be necessary to remove a street tree. For example, if a tree is of high risk (i.e. hazardous) to person, property, or even other trees, it must be removed. A dead, diseased, or significantly declining tree may also be a candidate for removal.

Title 10, Section 10.01.400 (3), of the Grants Pass Municipal Code lists the cases for which a right-of-way tree can be removed. You can find the Municipal Code on the city’s website or by visiting City Hall.

If the tree does not meet one of these conditions, it cannot be removed. Removing a tree from the right-of-way without a permit from the city is a violation and may result in fines.

All trees removed, whether due to its hazardous condition, decline, or unauthorized removal, must be replaced by another tree, unless the location is not suitable for a replacement, as determined by the city.

If a tree is hazardous, the city may have funds available to assist the adjacent landowner with the removal cost. The city does not remove trees, nor pay for the cost.

The Municipal Code explains that the maintenance responsibility of trees in the right-of-way belongs to the adjacent landowner. If the city has funds available, it will pay 50 percent of the lowest bid for tree removal and replacement. This includes the removal of the stump.

If you suspect a right-of-way tree to be hazardous, dead, diseased, or significantly declining, please contact me. I will conduct a Basic Risk Assessment, which is a standardized process from the International Society of Arboriculture, and requires the assessor to complete a qualification course and exam in order to perform the assessment.

For more information visit www.grantspassoregon.gov/tree or call me at (541)450-6162.

Connect... (from page 6)

time of dispatch. Data provided by residents within Community Connect is 100 percent secure and is used only for the purpose of better serving the resident during emergency situations.

To learn more about the program and to create a profile, please visit: https://www.communityconnect.io/info/or-grants-pass

Recycling in the Grants Pass Area

Republic Services: (541)479-3371
Josephine County Recycle and Transfer Station, 1749 Merlin Road, Grants Pass

Southern Oregon Sanitation: (541)479-5335
Recycling Depot, 1381 Redwood Ave., Grants Pass
Transfer Station, 905 Kerby Mainline Road, Kerby

Non-Recyclable Materials:
Take non-recyclable materials to the transfer stations.

Toxic and Hazardous Waste:
Collection events for commercial and residential toxic and hazardous waste are held twice per year.

Yard Waste:
Recycle yard waste in your curbside yard waste cart, or take it to a transfer station for a fee.

LIVE!
ON THE AIR

Listen live to city council members and city staff discussing local issues on KAJO 1270 AM radio 9:30 a.m. the 1st and 2nd Tuesdays of every month.
A tour of the plant continues through the lab. Built in 1974, it looks like something out of Mary Shelley’s “Frankenstein” filled with beakers, incubators, gas nozzles, and resting samples.

Operators pull samples of the effluent discharge all day to make sure it is clear before it returns to the river. Modern computer technology helps them keep a close eye on their microbiological farm of hungry critters.

In order to help people understand the process of converting influent (wastewater arriving to the plant) into effluent (clear water returning to the river), Brelinski’s tour follows the flow of the water, which begins three stories down at the very bottom of the plant.

Four giant pumps serve as the heart of the plant, pulling influent from the wet well and pumping it straight up. One of the pumps is a classic from the 1950s, while the three more modern pumps were installed in 2001. Each pump is composed of several tons of steel.

Two giant blowers are the lungs of the plant, supplying important oxygen to the microorganisms. Internal airflow at the plant is also crucial to prevent build up of methane and other gases.

A gas-fired boiler heats the building and the digester to the tune of $4,000 to $6,000 in natural gas per month. A new digester project recently approved by the city council will help recycle gas burnoff and save approximately $20,000 per year.

All of this heavy equipment requires regular maintenance and repairs. For that reason, the WRP has its own fully equipped repair shop for taking care of hydraulics, plumbing, electrical, machinery, and more.

“My team has to know their stuff,” said Brelinski.

Part of the regular schedule of maintenance includes testing and maintaining the massive diesel generator at the plant for use in case of a major emergency or power outage. When operating, the generator can consume as much as 1,000 gallons of diesel fuel per day. Diesel fuel must be kept on hand, but also cycled through, as it has a shelf life that expires from time to time.

The first stage in treating the influent involves removing all of the solid trash and debris that arrives in the water to the plant.

Extracting inorganic material is the crucial first step, as it cannot be properly treated.

Brelinski reports an astounding array of items that are regularly pulled from the filters, including adult and infant diapers, articles of clothing, plastics, and other debris.

A series of long conveyors help separate the sludge from the scum and moves the sludge to the filters, where non-treatable material is removed into bins to be taken to the landfill.

“Sludge sinks. Scum floats,” Brelinski said.

The most important phase of the treatment occurs when the influent is introduced to the microorganisms in the aeration process. That’s where plant operators monitor the tanks to make sure there is “healthy foam” resulting from the proper combination of food and oxygen.

On either side of the aeration process are the primary and secondary settling tanks. After secondary settling occurs, there is final filtration process before the effluent is channeled past racks of UV lights set to a very specific wavelength.

“The wavelength of the UV is designed to disrupt the DNA of viruses and bacteria,” said Brelinski.

The tubes the bulbs rest in have an automated cleaning system that scrapes past on a regular basis to avoid any build-up and maintain light exposure to the effluent for proper disinfection. After that, the treated water is released back into the river.

Brelinski is looking forward to sharing the plant’s complex operations and massive machinery with students through the video tour project. He is passionate about his work and the astounding amount of engineering that has been required to create the processes and construct the facilities.

“We’re standing on the shoulders of giants,” Brelinski said.

More News
Public Works Reminds You: Call 811 BEFORE You Dig!

The City of Grants Pass Public Works Department is gearing up for the National Safe Digging Month of April by reminding the public to call 811 before beginning any outdoor digging project.

April traditionally brings a ground swell of outdoor work which often includes digging, which is why the month of April is dedicated to safe digging awareness by public utilities, states, and local governments.

According to information from natural gas supplier Avista, a great majority of damage to natural gas lines occurs when residents install landscaping, irrigation, and fences.

Before beginning any outdoor digging project, residents are encouraged to call 811 at least two business days before they dig. Calling 811 will get a professional locator to a site to mark the approximate location of underground utility lines.

There is a two-foot tolerance zone on each side of the line, and it is required to hand dig to determine the precise location of the utility in this tolerance zone. This service is free.

Knowing where underground utility lines are buried before digging will help protect from injury, prevent damages to utilities and service disruptions, and avoid potential fines and repair costs.

Every digging job requires a call — even small projects like planting trees and shrubs. The depth of utility lines varies and there may be multiple utility lines in a common area.

Examples of when to call 811 include: installing a rural mailbox, putting in a fence, planting a tree or shrubbery, building a patio or deck, or excavating a new garden area.

For more information, call 811 or go to www.digsafe-tyoregon.com.

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City Hall
Administration: 541-450-6000
Utility Billing: 541-450-6035
Community Development: 541-450-6060
Parks: 541-450-6060
Public Works: 541-450-6110

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City Council Meetings
1st & 3rd Wednesdays at 6 pm
in the City Council Chambers, 101 NW A Street

City Council Workshops
typically held Mondays at 11:45 am
(Holidays will alter this schedule)

Any televised meetings are on Charter Cable
Channel 183 and stream live on our website

Listen live to City Councilors & staff on KAJO (1270 AM)
the 1st and 2nd Tuesdays each month at 9:30 am

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SWAT...(from page 9)

Pistol practice.

Nieminen is also the range master for the entire department.

“Working through both (SWAT and patrol) has really helped me to set up our training for patrol as well,” he said.

“It’s like sending everyone through supervisor school.”

SWAT training days follow a lesson plan with different members of the team conducting the training each month. Members of the team go to specialized training sessions to bring what they learn to the entire team.

Areas of specialized training include chemical munitions, scouting, warrant service, and others.

“Most of our training comes through the National Tactical Officers Association. It’s like sending everyone through supervisor school. Even if they aren’t a supervisor, it helps each officer to understand the day-to-day operations,” said Nieminen.

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What is SWAT?

Established in 1996, this team of highly skilled GPDPS personnel utilizes Special Weapons And Tactics (SWAT) to resolve “extreme high risk incidents” that are beyond the scope of operations.

The SWAT Team has an authorized strength of one team commander (a deputy chief), one team leader (a sergeant), 12 operators (police officers), two tactical medics (firefighters and/or medics) and two scribe-recorders (tactical dispatchers).

The SWAT Team works in close conjunction with the department’s Crisis Negotiations Team (CNT) to peacefully resolve incidents.

The team responds to emergency situations when needed. The decision to activate the team rests with the DPS Chief, but shift supervisors can activate the team based on specific criteria if necessary.

The primary goal of the SWAT Team is to save lives, by diminishing the likelihood of someone being injured or killed, and to diminish additional shots being fired.

Together, they work to substantially reduce or altogether eliminate the risk of injury to all involved. While attempting to achieve a peaceful resolution to the situations they respond to.

SWAT team members receive training in specialized weapons, tactics, and munitions. Team members attend monthly trainings aside from normal patrol or fire-rescue training. Team members also attend outside training such as the annual National Tactical Officers Association (NTOA) conference and hosting special tactics training sessions.