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John Day secures EDA grant for Cyber Mill locations

By Steven Mitchell Blue Mountain Eagle
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John Day City Manager Nick Green, left, and Mayor Ron Lundbom
Eagle file photo

The city of John Day announced they are getting closer to receiving a \$2 million grant to bring additional broadband internet to Grant County.

According to John Day City Manager Nick Green, the \$2 million grant from the Economic Development Administration would help bankroll the opening of the John Day and Seneca Cyber Mill locations.

Green said the city started its final 30-day notice for the project last week.

He said the United States Department of Agriculture also awarded \$6 million to construct the lines to build out a fiber-optic network.



Green said the city closed on its purchase of 241 W. Main Street, the future location of the John Day Cyber Mill. He said the city is working on a tenant agreement with the Cyber Mill to operate the site once the tenant improvements are complete and the building is ready for them to move in.



Green said the Grant County Digital Board moved to purchase the Cyber Mill's Seneca location, and it will serve as the planned point-of-presence for the fiber-optic network and house servers, routers and network switches. He said the board selected the site because it was available and had reasonable proximity to the highway and the existing fiber-optic network at Seneca City Hall and Seneca School. In addition, he noted that it has sufficient space to scale the fiber optic network while also allowing for the Cyber Mill to operate a shared office space as a nonprofit.

Green responded to criticism from a newly-formed Political Action Committee, Grant County Conservatives, who said it was inappropriate that Josh Walker, the digital board's chairman, was the owner of the building sold for the Cyber Mill's Seneca location.

Green said that Walker is one of several building owners of the group Mahogany Ridge Properties and had been "diligent" about recusing himself from those discussions. Moreover, Green said, the other board members made those decisions. He told the Eagle that the real estate market in Seneca is not "exactly robust."

"They chose this location strategically because it was recently remodeled and was move-in ready," he said.



Walker, who was on the email thread, told the Eagle that Green answered the questions and did not add anything else.

Green said the Grant County Digital Board is an intergovernmental group formed under ORS 190. The three standing members, he said, are Grant County and the cities of John Day and Seneca.

Green said Seneca appointed Walker, while the county tapped Prairie City resident Dan Becker, who also serves as the board's co-chair. John Day, he said, chose Elliot Sky, a John Day city councilor. He said the board has two at-large board members, Denise Porter from Long Creek and Harsh Patel of John Day. He told the Eagle the standing members appoint the at-large positions to serve two-year terms.

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