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ENTERTAINMENT, 1B

Grants Pass

# Daily Courier

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THURSDAY  
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## Grants Pass sees improvement in chronic absences

Percentage of freshmen on track to graduate improves at GP and Three Rivers districts

By Casey Crowley  
of the Daily Courier

Local schools saw mixed results last year in school performance as some schools saw noticeable decreases in chronic absenteeism and others saw increases.

Grants Pass High School had the biggest year-to-year change with nearly a 5 percentage point dip in its chronic absenteeism rate. At the middle and elementary school level the Grants Pass School District saw more modest changes.

Statewide chronic absenteeism rates at the high school level decreased by about half a percentage point.

Chronic absenteeism differed for each district depending on the grade level. Three Rivers saw both increases and decreases. Rogue River saw increases at two levels, but data at the middle school level wasn't available.

Students are considered chronically absent when they miss 10 or more days of school in a year. Research has shown that attendance rates are correlated with graduation rates.

Grants Pass and Three Rivers both saw gains in the amount of freshmen on track to graduate on time.

Glendale had data available only for the elementary school level and saw its chronic absenteeism rate fall to 22.8%. Glendale data is highly volatile because the district has a total enrollment of under 300 students.

As of this morning, 2018-19 performance data for every public school is available to view on the Oregon Department of Education website.

Unlike last year, when an election for governor loomed, there was no drama about when ODE would release the data.

Turn to SCHOOL, Page 5A

## City Council moves closer to selling River Road Reserve



Photos by SCOTT STODDARD/Daily Courier

The Grants Pass City Council, city administrators and the public listen to proposals for the River Road Reserve property Wednesday night at the council chambers at City Hall.

By Sean Bassinger  
of the Daily Courier

The Grants Pass City Council inched closer to selling the city's expansive River Road Reserve after a hearing at City Hall on Wednesday that witnessed two very different futures for the legacy of the land.

The council gave City Manager Aaron Cubic and his staff the go-ahead to continue negotiations with two groups that are vying to buy or control 227 acres of prime farmland west of the city now up for grabs.

The council then intends to return Monday to executive session, which the public is not allowed to attend, to discuss the fate of the reserve.

Travis Boersma's TMB Racing wants to buy the land outright from the city for a horse farm that would help support his expansion of horse racing across the Rogue River at Grants Pass Downs. Boersma, co-founder and



Caleb LaPlante explains a River Road Reserve proposal backed by Fort Vannoy Farms to the City Council.

CEO of Dutch Bros Coffee, has aspirations to make it an equestrian training facility for up to 400 horses.

Also competing for the land is a group led by Bob Crouse, co-

owner of Fort Vannoy Farms. He's seeking a long-term extension of his current lease with the city, which ends next year.

If the lease with Crouse and his partners is long-term, the

reserve could serve as an ideal event space for Grants Pass and what's being called the Grants Pass Skypark, a new flight training school by the Southern Oregon Air Academy for unmanned aircraft, also known as drones. Other partners are the Rogue Valley Flyers and Oregon State University Extension Services.

Prior to the hearing, tensions flared up when Caleb LaPlante, the driving force behind the air academy and the Grants Pass Balloon & Kite Festival, accused City Council President Tyler Flaming of having had a once-secret agenda to dump the reserve.

The city bought the land, formerly a pear orchard and hop farm, from the Naumes family for \$2.75 million in 2006. A public planning process led to the goal of someday repurposing it for public use.

After a period of dormancy, Turn to RESERVE, Page 6A

## School bond forum tackles crowding at North Middle School

By Casey Crowley  
of the Daily Courier

Overcrowding at North Middle School is a serious problem that is getting worse and will continue to get worse as Grants Pass and the city's school district continues to grow.

Nobody knows this better than Rowan Balloch, a student who goes there.

"I've actually been smacked in the face walking down the hallway," she said, referring to the school's now-legendary clogged hallways, during a forum Wednesday night at the school.

The subject of the forum was Measure 17-94, a \$95.63 million bond that would both replace the school and pay for improvements to security and air quality at the rest of the district's schools, including all six elementaries.

The forum was held the same day that ballots were mailed out to voters in the district, mostly residents of Grants Pass. The bond on the ballot is for 10 years and estimated to cost \$2.59 per \$1,000 of assessed value to property owners.

The bond is one of two proposed tax measures on the ballot. The city of Grants Pass is proposing a fire district that unlike the bond would be permanent. That would come at a cost of \$2.03 per \$1,000 of assessed value and would replace the current public safety levy of \$1.79 per \$1,000 of assessed value.

Measure 17-94 is the school district's second attempt to pass a bond to address overcrowding at both North and South, the city's other middle school. In May 2018, voters rejected a \$138.7 million, 30-year bond by a margin of 54% to 46%. That bond would have replaced both schools, which were built in 1966 and 1958, respectively. District voters

Turn to BOND, Page 5A

## Driver in fatal head-on crash makes first court appearance

By Jeff Duewel  
of the Daily Courier

Freddie Louis Tillet's blood-alcohol content was three times the legal limit to drive and he was driving close to twice the speed limit when his car slammed head-on into another driver, killing her, a prosecutor

said Wednesday.

Those details emerged during the initial court appearance for Tillet, 46, who is charged with first-degree manslaughter and DUII in the death of Brenda Reinert, a 39-year-old mother of three, in a collision on Sept. 27 on Rogue River Highway just east of Grants Pass.

New District Attorney Josh Eastman told Circuit Court Judge Michael Newman that Tillet had four prior DUII convictions, not three as previously reported, and 13 other criminal convictions.

He recommended Tillet's bail be set at \$500,000. Newman readily agreed.

"For the protection of the community, I'll follow the district attorney's recommendation," said Newman, who retired in 2017 but is filling in as a senior judge.

Tillet was arrested on Monday after two weeks recovering

Turn to CHARGES, Page 5A

## Sondland distances himself from Trump at impeachment hearing

Ambassador tells lawmakers he was disappointed president told him to work with Giuliani

By Eric Tucker  
and Mary Clare Jalonick  
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The U.S. ambassador to the European Union said today that President Donald Trump directed him and other envoys to work with his personal lawyer, Rudy Giuliani, on Ukraine policy and that he disagreed with the directive.

Gordon Sondland's closed-door testimony to House impeachment investigators was aimed at distancing himself from Trump and Giuliani's efforts to pressure Ukraine into investigating Democratic rival Joe Biden and his son Hunter.

Sondland said he was disappointed Trump instructed him to work with Giuliani, a directive that sidestepped the role of the State Department

and the National Security Council. He also said he believed it was wrong to invite a foreign government to conduct investigations to influence American elections.

The ambassador was the latest in a series of witnesses to be privately interviewed by three House committees conducting the impeachment

Turn to DISTANCE, Page 7A



US Ambassador to the European Union Gordon Sondland (center) arrives for an interview with House impeachment investigators today in Washington.

PABLO MARTINEZ MONSIVAIS  
Associated Press



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