

The East County Journal

Circulation Group II

NEWS DIVISION

328 Comprehensive Coverage, Single Writer

Three-part series

Jan. 19, 2022, page 1, head: Morton SD seeks \$24.5M bond from voters Feb. 8

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Feb. 2, 2022, page 1, head: School bus garage was worn when the district acquired it

Jumps to page 3, head: Bond: New bus garage will add needed security

COMMENTS:

Instead of producing a single story on the upcoming school bond issue before Morton voters, we decided to do an in-depth look at the growing needs forced on the school district by a closed down bus garage and an ailing elementary school that is facing potential shut down from any number of growing safety concerns inside the building and out.

But voters in the area are leery of the school administrators, having last passed a bond in 1997, so we felt it our duty to best educate the voters on the needs the district is facing in providing the basic tenets of services required of them by the state and the crucial nature of the bond given the infrastructure's condition.

We broke it into three stories: the first focused on the bond in general and what it is addressing; the second a look at the aging elementary school; and the third at the now closed bus garage and what the district is doing short-term for bus storage and maintenance.

We timed the series to run in the weeks leading up to the vote on Feb. 8.



Mossyrock students keep busy leading in to winter break with gingerbread houses
Page 6

Reconciled Christian Fellowship welcomes Pastor Jody and Shannon Caskey
Page 7

Morton/White Pass boys basketball takes two of three contests in a week to improve to 8-4
Page 12



The East County

JOURNAL

Dedicated to serving East Lewis County since 1945

January 19, 2022

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Raise the butter cups, Packwood crab feed returns

BY CATHY KANE
East County Journal

After the cancellation of last year's event due to COVID-19 restrictions, the sounds of fun and laughter echoed once again through the Packwood Community Hall during Saturday's night Crab Feed benefit, sponsored by the Packwood Improvement Club (PIC).

With 136 tickets sold and generous bidding in the silent, live and dessert auctions, the event was deemed a success by President Ron Blankenship.

"I am tickled to death that so many people came out with all that is going on," Blankenship said, referencing recent adverse winter weather conditions, the off-and-on closing of White Pass and omicron concerns. "We put this all together in just a little over a week."

Besides the good ticket sales, Blankenship said the community volunteers who showed up to help was nothing short of

amazing.

"We had lots of help. We went from four volunteers to nine to 10 people decorating the hall. We ended up with 11 dinner servers," he added, noting all dinners were plated and served in 14 minutes. "It's amazing what can be done when people cooperate and work together."

PIC trustee Sheryl Hall, who invested days of preparing for the event alongside Blankenship, added her own accolades.

"I am so impressed with the Blankenship family and all they do. Also, Deb Townsend from Randle, who stepped in to help. She was amazing – a jewel. Also, the kitchen help, including head cook Jim Rehn, Lee Grose for driving down to pick up fresh crab and Toni Just who gave all she could while suffering from pain," she said, adding all of the volunteers from Packwood and Randle really stepped up to make the event

See **Crab feed** Page 10



County Commissioner and long-time Packwood Improvement Club member Lee Grose presided over the live auction at the club's annual Crab Feed benefit on Saturday night.

Cathy Kane | East County Journal



Chris Johnson | East County Journal

Future hoopster

Kaeston Westover, 3, is hoisted up to the hoop by his dad Nick in hopes of making a basket to win a bottle of soda at halftime of a recent basketball game in Morton.

Morton SD seeks \$24.5M bond from voters Feb. 8

This is part 1 of a three-part series on the 2022 school bond measure to be put before voters on the Feb. 8 special election ballot. Parts 2 and 3 will be in the Jan. 26 and Feb. 2 issues, respectively.

BY CATHY KANE
East County Journal

On Tuesday, Feb. 8, Morton voters will be asked to approve a 30-year bond of \$24.5M for the expansion and renovation of Morton Junior/Senior High School.

"A bond is a school's way of taking out a mortgage," Morton School District (MSD) Superintendent John Hannah said,



referencing the adage – levies are for education and bonds are for building.

"It's either buying a building or paying for a renovation just like you do with your own home. That's why we have anywhere from one to 30-year bonds. You are basically taking out a mortgage as a community to pay off that building," Hannah said.

Before choosing the bond, the district also looked at bringing the current elementary school building up to current code and that expense was estimated at just under \$21M, while the new wing is estimated to

See **Bond** Page 3

Mossyrock City Council sets aside funds for summer fests

BY BUDDY ROSE
East County Journal

Mossyrock city council members passed a resolution during the regular meeting Thursday, Jan. 13, that will make up to \$30,000 in city funds available to the Mossyrock Area Action League (MAAL) to plan and organize two festivals next summer.

The Freedom Festival – hosted last year for the first time and well-attended – will take place over the Fourth of July weekend and a second event will take place during the first weekend in August. The latter was previously called

the Blueberry Festival, but according to Mayor Randall Sasser, MAAL members are planning to change the theme of that event and call it something different.

In other business during the council meeting, Sasser reported the recent heavy rains resulted in the city sewer system struggling to handle all of the extra water. The lift station on Meadow Lane was unable to keep up with the high flows, he said, and they had to hire a pump truck to empty the tank there several times and transport the wastewater to State Street, where it could be discharged into the gravity

system.

Sasser reported that an inspection of the system afterwards discovered several leaking manhole covers that added to the problem, as well as identifying several locations where private roof drains were emptying into the sewer system, which is not allowed.

City Treasurer Angeleetta Hartmann provided a summary of the city's 2021 budget. She reported city revenues were \$1,710,031.19, which was slightly over the projection. Expenditures, however, were only 88

See **Funds** Page 2



East Lewis County saw the end of 2021 come in with a bit of wild weather, with high winds striking the area in October causing power outages all along the Highway 12 communities; an atmospheric river hitting the region with heavy rains in November, seeing the heaviest flooding along the Cowlitz River between Packwood and Randle; and a winter storm that produced a white Christmas bringing more than a foot of snow to the east end of the county.

Part 3 of a three-part series recapping life in East Lewis County in 2021. Parts 1 and 2 appeared in the previous two issues of The East County Journal.

October

- Lewis County firefighters were saluted for their dedication to the community during Fire Prevention week.
- Arbor Health Commissioners approved an operating lease and

- purchase of a portable imaging machine to augment recently added orthopedic surgery and podiatry services at the hospital for Drs. Robert Williams and Garret Paresko.
- Morton School District pre-kindergarten through sixth grade



Chris Johnson | East County Journal file photo

Fall fishing along the Tilton River in Morton proved to be beneficial for anglers ready to limit out.

- students took part in a Jog-a-thon to benefit the Associated Student Body.
- An afterschool program between the county and Cispus Learning Center was approved for Morton and White Pass School districts.

- A weekend storm on Oct. 22 and Oct. 23, featuring 60-mile mph winds and fallen trees and branches, left 4,000 customers in Mossyrock, Morton, Mineral, Salkum, Glenoma and Randle without power, according to PUD operations manager Cory

- Moses.
- Halloween fun was enjoyed with a trunk or treat and bake sale in Mineral; haunted house sponsored by LCFD 4 and trunk or treat at Gust Backstrom Park

See **Review** Page 9

Bond: District is targeting eight areas of concern

Continued from page 1

be just under \$15.5M.

The proposed bond would fund eight projects deemed necessary by the school board to improve educational opportunities, safety and security and aging and educationally outdated infrastructure.

- The construction of a new elementary school wing at the junior/senior high school campus for the relocation of elementary students.
- The addition of a weight room to the gymnasium to expand physical education space for both elementary and junior/senior high school students.
- The replacement of windows and doors to improve energy efficiency.
- The upgrading and/or improvement of the vocational building and mechanical systems including, but not limited to, heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems and equipment, plumbing and electrical

systems.

- The replacement or improvement of the roofing at selected buildings.
- The renovation of the life skills, library and administrative areas.
- Improved parking and traffic circulation.
- Construction of a new bus barn on the junior/senior high school campus to replace the existing bus barn.

“As a government agency,” Hannah explained, “we cannot take out a loan that is more than 1.5 percent of the assessed value. And there is a limit to the amount of debt a district can take on.”

“So if you take the assessed value of everything within the borders of the MSD, which is \$600M plus 5 percent is our max debt, which gives us around \$28 or \$29 million. We cannot exceed that debt – that’s what puts a cap on what you can borrow. That’s what the bond pays for.”

Hannah added the tax rate for the bonds of \$1.80

per \$1,000 of assessed value is the target rate.

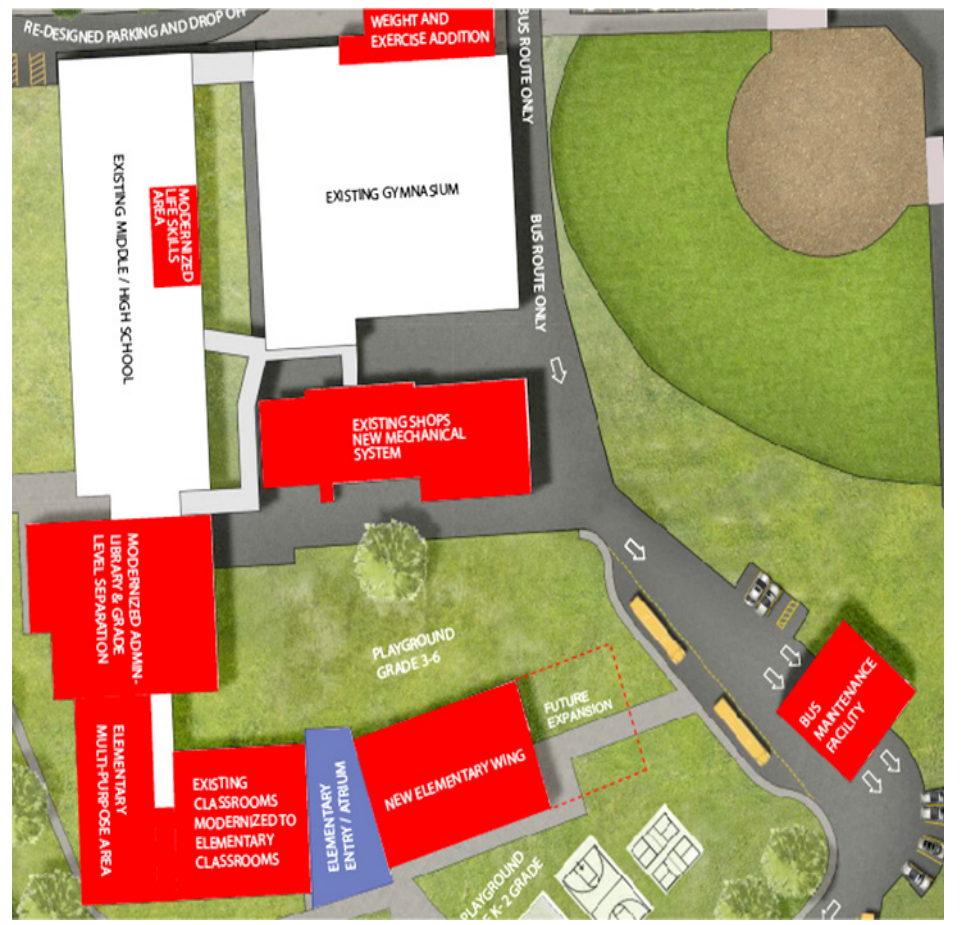
“We believe we can hit that.”

“If the bond passes, the county would begin collecting in 2023, then the money comes to us and goes out. We can start construction and address the priorities to us,” he said, adding the project could probably be completed within two years after construction begins. During that time students will stay where they are, which means the elementary school will stay open for two or three years.

For the bond to pass, a supermajority or 60 percent approval is needed.

“We are excited to see where it goes. If it passes, awesome. If it doesn’t pass, we are going to have to go back and ask again because our needs are not going away,” Hannah said.

Next week: An in-depth look at the current elementary school building.



Morton School District courtesy illustration | East County Journal

A diagram from the Morton School District website shows the current junior/senior high school building in white, with the renovations and additions the bond would cover indicated in red.

Nachos Restaurant opens in Packwood

BY CATHY KANE
East County Journal

The long-awaited opening of Nachos Mexican Restaurant was announced at the Packwood Business Owners Committee (PBOC) meeting chaired by Tracey Croshaw on Jan. 14 at the Blue Spruce Saloon.

Located at 13016 Hwy. 12, the restaurant is open Thursday through Monday from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. and is affiliated with Nachos Mexican Restaurant in Mossyrock.

“Nachos is doing well and staying busy,” local realtor Briston Meidinger said, adding like many businesses these days, finding employees is a challenge.

With his own business update, Meidinger noted he is one of a five-member team who will be working through Pacific Trails Realty, LLC located in Packwood Station, 13068 Hwy. 12.

East Lewis County Chamber of Commerce board members Mitchell Merrill and Jenn Kaatz were also in attendance. Merrill currently serves as treasurer and has been nominated to assume the role of president for the next two years by the board of directors.

Merrill noted Chamber manager Cynthia Swift retired and the new manager, Lenee Langdon, will be introduced at the annual

dinner meeting scheduled on Saturday, Jan. 29 at the Morton Moose Lodge, 101 First St. Social hour begins at 5 p.m., a steak dinner will be served at 6 p.m. and a guest speaker will be featured at 7 p.m. Tickets are \$25 and reservations can be made at 360-520-6878.

“It is wonderful to see you here in Packwood and your community spirit. We are super passionate about connecting with the Packwood community,” he added.

Merrill noted membership information is currently available at www.elchamber.org. Membership meetings are hosted on the fourth Wednesday of each month at noon.

Gretchen Fritsch extended an invitation to the Packwood Trail Project meeting at 5:30 p.m., Saturday, Jan. 22 at the Packwood Community Hall, 12935 Hwy. 12. Officers will be elected and information provided on the mission and projects of the group, she said.

Croshaw noted the first of five housing forums will be hosted by Commissioner Sean Swope from 6

to 8 p.m. on Thursday, Jan. 20 at the Packwood Community Hall. The public is invited to attend in person or view as a webinar online, she said.

Lewis County Senior Long Range Planner Mindy Brooks reported 38 Packwood residents have volunteered to be part of the community advisory group to work on the Packwood Subarea plan, which will help guide how the town will grow and develop over the next 20 years. Topics covered by the committee include land use,

transportation, public facilities and services, natural resources, urban design and other topics identified during the process. Information is available by contacting Brooks at mindy.brooks@lewiscountywa.gov or 360-740-2610. Meetings will be in person and on Zoom.

Mary Kay Nelson with MK Marketing was on hand with tourism updates for attendants. Nelson gave information on THREAD Map, a comprehensive, interactive, real-time trail information app that is currently under consideration by Lewis County Board of Commissioners.

“Nachos is doing well and staying busy.”
— Briston Meidinger
local realtor

Ballots being mailed for Feb. 8 election

The Lewis County Auditor’s office will send out 21,560 ballots today to all active registered voters within the Morton and Mossyrock school districts, as well as voters in seven other districts. A total of 199 military and overseas ballots were mailed out Jan. 7.

Ballots should begin arriving in mailboxes the week of Jan. 24-28. The USPS says it can take up to 7-10 days for delivery. If ballot packets have not been received by Jan. 28, voters may receive a replacement ballot by any of the following methods:

- Online: Go to www.votewa.gov, log in and select “My Ballot” then “Online Ballot” to print your replacement ballot packet.

- Call: (360) 740-1164, (360) 740-1278 or toll free within Lewis County at 1-800-562-6130 ext. 1164 or ext. 1278.
- In-person: 351 NW North St., Chehalis, WA 98532. Office hours are 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday-Friday, 8 am to 8 p.m., Election Day, Feb. 8.

If an individual has moved, they may contact this office to update their voter registration or go online at www.votewa.gov. If there is a forwarding order in place with the USPS, the ballot packet will be forwarded but may take more time going through the forwarding process.

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Vikings defeat Timberwolves 53-29 in girls' rivalry match Page 12



Be prepared for emergency situations by taking steps before an emergency strikes Pages 7-10

White Pass Elementary School students earn an opportunity to create Valentine's mailboxes Page 6



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Morton Elementary School needs TLC

This is part 2 of a three-part series on the 2022 school bond measure to be put before voters on the Feb. 8 special election ballot. Part 1 ran in last week's East County Journal and part 3 will conclude next week.

BY CATHY KANE
East County Journal

With the deterioration of the Morton Elementary School entering a potential crisis phase, Morton voters will be asked

to approve a bond of \$24.5M on Feb. 8, which would allow for the expansion and renovation of the Morton Junior/Senior High school, including the construction of a new elementary school wing.

"It's something that we are needing for what's best for our kids," Hannah said. "We all love the (current) building, but it is failing. Trying to fix it



would cost over \$20M. The cost for a new elementary wing at the junior/senior high school is estimated at under \$15.5M."

The current elementary school was built in 1948, Hannah said. The gym and covered play area were added in 1985. The last renovations took place in 1981 and 1987, respectively.

In the facility condition as-

essment conducted by KMB architects on July 7, 2021, the elementary school "appears lacking in ventilation and temperature control systems. Mechanical systems appear to be well past their expected lifecycles for expected performance. It is recommended that most of the mechanical units and boilers be replaced including their main trunk and secondary distribution lines."

The report also recommended

See **Bond** Page 3

Mossyrock replacement school levy election on Feb. 8 ballot

BY BUDDY ROSE
East County Journal

Mossyrock School District is on the special election Feb. 8 ballot for voters within the district to consider a Replacement Educational Programs and Operations Levy. The special levy will cover three years beginning in 2023 and will replace a similar levy that expires this year. Mail-in ballots for the special election were mailed by the county to all eligible voters within the school district last week and should arrive this week.

If passed by a minimum of 50 percent of those voting plus one vote, the levy will cost property owners within the school district \$1.14 per \$1,000 of assessed valuation in 2023, \$1.12 per thousand in 2024 and \$1.12 per thousand in 2025. That translates to an annual cost of \$114 for a property assessed at \$100,000 in 2023, \$112 in 2024 and \$112 in 2025.

By comparison, the current levy rate is \$1.07 per \$1,000 of assessed value in 2022. However, it was \$1.13 in 2021 and \$1.19 in 2020. It should also be noted that there are exemptions from paying school-related taxes for qualifying seniors and individuals with disabilities.

Although state and federal fund-

See **Levy** Page 3



Teresa Fenn courtesy photo | East County Journal

Colorful respite

Packwood resident Teresa Fenn found herself in the Centralia/Chehalis area of Lewis County with her grandson on Thursday, Jan. 20 when they came across a rainbow with its double barely visible above. Noting that rainbows are seen as signs of hope and a promise of better times, Fenn wrote, "After enduring two years of stormy times, we could all use a bit of hope." Agreed.

Spotlight shines on special education at WPS school board

BY CATHY KANE
East County Journal

The Junior/Senior High School special education (SPED) program was in the school spotlight at the White Pass School (WPS) board meeting on Jan. 18 on Zoom. The meeting was chaired by President Ricky Emerson. In the absence of board members Heather Muir and Darla Mullins, Vice President Joel McMahan and Sandra Freitas joined with Emerson to make a quorum.

In her presentation, Director Polly Fuchs noted 26 SPED students are enrolled in the program she facilitates - 10 in junior high and 16 in high school.

With WPS recognized as an inclusive facility, SPED students are placed in general education classes with lessons modi-

fied as needed and extra support provided by five para professionals. Learning in an inclusive environment is beneficial for all students, she added, listing several advantages, including all students learning to work together.

Fuchs gave special recognition to teacher Danya Hanks as a "super star when it comes to inclusion.

"I love my students," Fuchs said, noting her SPED "home room" is set-up with a homey environment to make kids feel safe and comfortable.

In his report, Superintendent Paul Farris reviewed the process for making the decision to open, close or delay school during adverse travel conditions, including snow, ice and flooding.

Farris noted that the process actually begins the night before when the possibil-

ity of school delay notices are sent to parents around 6 p.m. The following morning at 4:15 a.m., Farris receives his first report on travel conditions from transportation Supervisor Shane Dotson. By 5:15 a.m., Farris and Dotson have made a decision and Farris initiates notification through Robocall, texts, faxes, school website alerts and other media outlets.

"It's always a difficult decision to close school, but we want to make sure kids and staff are safe," he said.

Farris also noted this is the time of year when he and Business Manager Angie Bowen begin the planning and scheduling of summer projects to maximize funding opportunities.

In light of School Board Appreciation month, Farris also thanked the school board for their diligence and service.

In his report, Junior/Senior High School Principal Chris Schumaker said his building is continuing to work towards a 90 percent attendance rate. He noted Amanda Allen has been appointed as True North Drug and Alcohol counselor. A Martin Luther King workshop was also hosted this month.

Schumaker also reported the Associated Student Body (ASB) would be reopening the student store in February. "It's been two years since it has been open and has been missed."

Elementary School principal Gregg Teel reported iReady diagnostic testing with a dyslexia evaluation was performed to determine student growth. He also noted math specialist Cindy Neace is working in person and on Zoom to help assist

See **WPS** Page 2

Morton begins 2022 with three new city councilors

BY CATHY KANE
East County Journal

Mayor Dan Mortensen administered the oath of office to Councilors-elect Richard Vanderlip and Caro Johnson at the Morton City Council meeting on Monday night. Vanderlip was reelected to Position No. 3 for his third term during the Nov. 2, 2021 election. Johnson was elected to serve for the first time in Position No. 5. Councilor Jaime Fleming was sworn in for Position No. 2 at the Dec. 28, 2021 council meeting.

The three join Travis Cooper and Kevin Dunlap who have served on the council since 2020.

In their first vote of the new year, councilors unanimously approved Morton resident Gwendolyn Reed as the new city treasurer.

"She is a quick learner. She just graduated from college with an accounting degree," Mortensen said, adding Reed will work full time at city hall - 40 hours per week.

With the majority of funds already in place to hire a school resource officer (SRO) for Morton, Mossyrock and White Pass schools, councilors voted to approve the final \$9,000 needed

from the \$170,000 American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds awarded to the city.

"The SRO will dedicate 74 percent of his time to school districts on the east side of the county," Morton Police Chief Roger Morningstar said. "The SRO will have regular contact with the kids and be the first line in dealing with students."

Once the first three years of the program are in place, Morningstar said the next three years will pay for itself. "But we have to get through the gate first," he said.

Mortensen noted the funds have to be used and this seems a good way to use them. City attorney Jim Buzzard was asked to research and confirm.

Councilors also approved the payment for Gray & Osborne's Progress Estimate No. 9 for Wastewater Treatment Facility improvements.

Mortensen said the project is "pretty much on schedule" with the completion date projected as mid-2024.

The next Morton City Council meeting is scheduled for 7 p.m. on Monday, Feb. 28 at the Bob Lyle Community Center, 700 Main Ave.

Dollar General opens doors in Morton

BY CATHY KANE
East County Journal

Without any fanfare due to company COVID-19 policies, Dollar General discount store opened its doors for customers on Sunday, Jan. 16 at 303 Second St. in Morton.

"We have been very busy," Morton manager Sara Roth said. "Every one seems super excited to have us here and we are excited to be here."

Roth noted she, assistant manager Crystal Cooper and the six other employees who staff the store are all Morton residents. "Most of us live within five minutes of the store," she said.

Roth, who moved to Morton a year ago, said her 16 years as a Walmart associate was instrumental in securing her position as manager. Cooper brings more than 15 years of retail experience to her new job.

According to information supplied by corporate headquarters in Goodlettsville, Tennessee, the Morton Dollar General store will feature "the top 20 items typically sold in traditional grocery stores and covers approximately 80 percent of produce categories most grocery stores carry."

Fresh fruit and vegetables will



Cathy Kane | East County Journal

Manager Sara Roth, assistant manager Crystal Cooper and employee Katy Hubbard enthusiastically embrace their new jobs at the Morton Dollar General discount store.

be delivered twice a week, Roth said, and food has just arrived to fill the freezer and refrigerator sections of the store.

One older customer, who said she had spent \$200 in the store on opening day, described the store as being a combination of Walmart, Grocery Outlet and the Dollar Tree.

"I can get what I need here at prices I can afford without having to drive into town in this winter weather with such high gas prices," she said.

"We have a little bit of everything here," employee Katy Hub-

bard said. Hubbard and both managers said they have received similar comments from many other customers, especially senior citizens and those living on a "fixed income."

A unique opportunity offered to customers is the option to round up their purchases to a dollar amount, with change added to Dollar General Literacy Foundation, which addresses local community literacy needs.

"The change mounts up and

See **Dollar** Page 2

Bond: Building has issues that could force closure

Continued from page 1

that “the electrical system be completely replaced at all levels from switch gear to low voltage systems.”

Other recommendations included the replacement of existing doors and windows, the addition and replacement of insulation

systems throughout the building including roof and walls, the addition of furring in the walls to add insulation, asbestos abatement and the removal and replacement of the roofing with an architectural asphalt roofing.

This Friday, the school will be going through an-

other inspection to determine if it’s safe for students to enter through the front door, where water has been found leaking under the steps into the utility room below.

The school also currently operates with an emergency contingency plan in place for busing elementary school students to the high school campus in case of building leakages, flooding, bathroom plumbing and other infrastructure problems that crop up in the 74-year-old building.

“Everyone wants the kids to be safe,” Hannah said, adding he believes the proposal to build an elementary school wing on the current junior/high school campus to be the best, most practical and affordable option.

Elementary School Principal Josh Brooks, who grew up attending a K-12 school, concurs.

“I have no doubt that, with the plan and building layout that Mr. Hannah and the school board set up, the transition would be very smooth,” he said, adding the improved parking and traffic circulation plan would make picking-up



Ric Hallock | East County Journal

A restraining fence is being added to the back side of the building to keep loose roof tiles from slipping off and striking people below.

and dropping-off students much easier and safer.

The new elementary school plan also proposes separate entrances prohibiting intermingling between younger and older students; the same number of classrooms as the current elementary school with the ability to add space if needed for growth, and a large multipurpose room for the cafeteria. The same gym would be used for physical education instruction with the addition of a weight room for junior/senior high school students. Teachers would be present at all times when students are in the gym.

At the same time, the proximity of the elementa-

ry and high school to each other would allow positive mentoring and student teaching opportunities that are now restricted due to cross town travel needed during the school day.

Hannah said the comments from concerned community members who want to preserve the historic elementary school have been duly noted by the school board, and a pathway to do just that through partnership with local businesses, non-profits and potential grants are being explored.

“We would love to find partners and people who want to help,” he said.

With that in mind, he trusts “the great people on

both sides of the issue,” to make the decision they feel is in the best interest of the students.

“Eight years ago, we had 270 students. Today, we have over 400 students. We are growing. Kids are coming,” he said.

For the bond to pass, a supermajority or 60 percent approval is needed.

“We are excited to see where it goes. If it passes, awesome. If it doesn’t pass, we are going to have to go back and ask again because our needs are not going away,” Hannah said.

Next week the series concludes with a look back at the old bus garage.



A utility room underneath the main entry stairs is leaking and has been resealed. At any given point, the district could be forced to close the entrance which would then have school officials having to provide an alternate entry to the school.

Six days of clam digging approved at coast beginning on Saturday

BY BUDDY ROSE
East County Journal

Razor clam fans are getting another six days of digging at the coast starting with a late afternoon dig on Saturday. Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) has confirmed the next round of digging can proceed as planned from Jan. 29 through Feb. 3.

“We have had some really good digging opportunity to start the new year and are excited to be able to finish out January on some really good minus tides,” said Zach Forster, a WDFW coastal shellfish biologist.

Diggers are reminded the daily limit has reverted to the standard 15 razor clams. Under state law, a daily limit consists of the first 15 clams dug regardless of size or condition, and each digger’s clams must be kept in a separate container, although sharing of digging tools is allowed.

Shellfish managers confirmed the following digs during evening low tides will proceed as scheduled, after marine toxin results from the Washington Department of Health showed razor clams were safe to eat:

- Saturday, Jan. 29 (4:30 p.m., -0.7 ft.) Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Mocrocks
- Sunday, Jan. 30 (5:21 p.m., -1.2 ft.) Long Beach, Copalis
- Monday, Jan. 31 (6:08 p.m., -1.5 ft.) Long Beach
- Tuesday, Feb. 1 (6:52 p.m., -1.5 ft.) Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis
- Wednesday, Feb. 2 (7:34 p.m., -1.2 ft.) Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Mocrocks
- Thursday, Feb. 3 (8:13 p.m., -0.7 ft.) Copalis

It should be noted that not all beaches are open for every dig, so diggers are encouraged to make sure their intended destination is open before heading out. Diggers should also continue to respect coastal communities and residents by following local and

state health guidelines.

The most successful digging occurs between one and two hours before the listed time of low tide. Low tide times on Jan. 29-30 will occur just before or at sunset, a rare but welcome occurrence during the winter season when most digging occurs after dark and lights are needed. No digging is allowed before noon during digs when low tide occurs in the afternoon or evening.

All diggers age 15 and older must have an applicable fishing license to harvest razor clams on any beach.

Licenses, ranging from a three-day razor clam license to an annual combination fishing license, are available from WDFW’s licensing website at fishhunt.dfw.wa.gov/login, and from hundreds of license vendors around the state.

WDFW recommends buying a license before visiting coastal beach communities for this razor clam season.

Levy: Town Q&A is planned Feb. 2

Continued from page 1

ing for education covers the basic costs of programs, it does not fully cover all the instructional costs for students or all the operational costs for the district. Levy funds are needed to provide students with a well-rounded education that will enable them to achieve success as adults.

Specifically, levy funds support: Grounds and facilities maintenance, safety and security, instructional materials and curriculum, student and instructional technology, field trips and associated transportation, Special Education, after school and summer school programs, and co-curric-

ular and extra-curricular programs such as athletics.

Regarding the upcoming levy and schools, Superintendent Larry Markuson said, “Strong schools build strong communities.”

The last day for mail-in, online or driver’s licensing voter registration is Jan. 31. The last day for in-person voter registration at the Auditor’s office in Chehalis is Feb. 8.

Ballots mailed in have to be postmarked by Feb. 8. No stamp is needed; a prepaid postage envelope is included with the mail-in ballots. There is also a drop-box for ballots at the Community Center. It will be closed at 8 p.m. on Feb. 8.

There will be a town hall

question and answer meeting about the levy, 5:30-7:30 p.m., Feb. 2, at the School District Office.

For information, visit the school website online at www.mossyrockschools.org, call the district office at 360-983-3181 or email the superintendent at lmarkuson@mossyrockschools.org.

CORRECTION

In a story in last week’s East County Journal on the Packwood Business Owners Committee, the wrong hours of operation were listed for the new Nachos Mexican Restaurant in Packwood. The hours of operation are 11 a.m. to 9 p.m., Tuesday through Thursday and Sunday and 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. Friday and Saturday.

In the same story, a program on a new statewide trail information app was misidentified. The name of the app is TREAD.

CLARIFICATION

In the same story, Mary Kay Nelson spoke to the PBOC members as a representative of the White Pass Scenic Byway Committee. She was not representing her company at the meeting, as the story inferred.

The East County Journal strives to provide factual and correct information. If you see an error, contact the Journal at 360-496-5993 or email to ecjeditor@devaulpublishing.com. We run corrections and clarifications in the next available issue.

Deadline Monday to register to vote

The registration deadlines for all precincts within the districts voting in the Feb. 8, 2022, Special Election will be as follows:

- Jan. 31 – Last day to register by mail, online or at a drivers’ licensing location and to transfer or update existing voter registration remotely. Your application must be received no later than eight days before Election Day.
- Feb. 8 – Last day to register or update your address in-person is Election Day. Visit your local Auditor’s Office to register or update your address in person no later than 8 p.m. Updates can only be processed if you have not already returned your ballot.

The 8-day registration deadline is for all new registrations, address changes, county transfers and name changes done remotely by mail, online or at a drivers’ licensing locations and must be received by the voting center (Auditor’s Office) no later than Monday, Jan. 31.

Individuals may register, update their address or obtain registration forms at the Auditor’s Office in the Historic Courthouse, 351 NW North St., Chehalis, between 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. Registration can also be completed at all drivers’ licensing locations when updating or obtaining your driver license, mail-in registration forms are available at all Post Office locations, libraries, school

district offices as well as registering online at www.votewa.gov.

In-person changes can be done between Jan. 31 and Feb. 8 for all new registrations, address updates, county transfers and name changes in the county’s election department of the county in which the voter resides.

In addition, the Auditor’s Office is available for assistance to individuals with disabilities, and the elderly, for registration and voting.

If you have any questions, call the Auditor’s Office at 360-740-1278, 360-740-1164 or toll free within Lewis County, 1-800-562-6130 ext. 1278 or 1164.

Voters’ guide, ballot concerns online

An online voters’ guide for the Feb. 8, 2022 Special Election is available at: www.votewa.gov. A voter can access the VoteWA website by logging in with name and date of birth. When logging into VoteWA you will only be able to view measures that you are eligible to vote on.

A generic voters’ guide listing all measures in the election is available at https://elections.lewiscountywa.gov. A printed pamphlet specific to the district will be included in each ballot packet.

Online voters’ guide

- Select “Current Election > Voters’ Guide > Search.”
- If a candidate statement has been submitted, click

on the candidate’s name to view their statement. Click the back button to go back to the list of candidates.

- If there is a measure on the ballot, select measure heading.

Voter registration status

- If an individual is not a registered voter, a message will appear giving them the opportunity to register. Select “Register to Vote” and follow the step-by-step instructions.

- If an individual is already registered and an address update needs to be made, select “Voter Registration > Update my name or address” and follow the step-by-step instructions.

Ballot status

- Select “My Ballot > Ballot Status” to see if your

ballot has been received in the office and accepted for tabulation.

Replacement ballot

- For a replacement ballot, select “My Ballot > Online Ballot.” The ballot can be marked online and then printed or printed first and marked by hand.

A declaration will print as well, the voter must sign and return the declaration with their ballot. The ballot envelope must be postmarked by Election Day or in a ballot drop box by 8 p.m. on Election Day, Tuesday, Feb. 8.

For questions, call the Auditor’s Office at 360-740-1278, 360-740-1164 or toll free within Lewis County, 1-800-562-6130 ext. 1278 or 1164.

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It’s Never Too Late

It is never too late to return to God. In the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32), we are told of a young man returning home after leading a dissolute life in a foreign land. He is welcomed home with open arms by his father, as we are by God. In another parable, Jesus speaks of laborers who are hired at different times of the day, and all are given a full day’s pay (Matthew 20:1-16). This parable illustrates that God wants to reward us, regardless of when we have decided to follow Him. Finally, in the parable of the lost sheep (Matthew 18:12-14), we are told that the good shepherd will leave all of his sheep in search of the one that is lost, which indicates how much God loves and cares for each of us. In each case, we see that God’s justice is not the same as man’s. The brother of the prodigal son feels betrayed by his father’s loving acceptance of his brother, and the laborers who worked all day feel they should be given more than those who only worked for a few hours. Is it not foolish to leave the flock to search for the one that is lost? The point of all these parables is simple: God loves us unconditionally and wants us to return to Him, no matter what we may have done or when we make the decision to live a godly life. It was fitting to make merry and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.

R.S.V. Luke 15:32

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MWP girls go 2-2 in busy week in league play
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Chinook salmon study has recommendations to improve returns following 10-year lows
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Morton students keep busy indoors and out
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The East County JOURNAL

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February 2, 2022

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New faces on Hospital District board

BY BUDDY ROSE
East County Journal

Lewis County Hospital District No. 1 welcomed two new commissioners during the regular hospital board meeting last Wednesday. Kim Olive, representing the Glenoma/Randle/Packwood area, and Laura Richardson, an at-large representative of the entire district, were elected in November.

Olive said, "I'm glad to see a diverse group on this board and I'm looking forward to working with all of you in the years to come."

"I feel privileged to be on this board and I am looking forward to doing the best I can," added Richardson.

Commissioner Tom Herrin, currently serving as board chair, said he was excited about the current board makeup and recently re-elected Commissioner Craig Coppock, along with Commissioner Wes McMahan, thanked

the two new members for taking the time and expending the energy to serve.

Hospital District CEO Leianne Everett announced the new Rapid Care Clinic at Morton began with a "soft" opening on Jan. 28-29 followed by an official grand opening on Feb. 4. The new facility is located in the Morton Clinic with office hours from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. on Fridays and Saturdays.

When fully staffed, the clinic will expand to include Sundays and Mondays with the same extended hours. Emergency Department Dr. Kevin McCurry will be the primary physician to begin with, noted Everett, and recruitment of additional staff is ongoing.

Related to staffing, commissioners ap-



Kim Olive



Laura Richardson

proved a proposal presented by Everett to increase the salaries of the Emergency Room (ER) physicians to \$200 per hour for those not board certified and \$220 per hour for those certified as ER physicians, effective Feb. 1. Current ER physician salaries range from \$136.59 to \$177.50 per hour depending on their status, she said, but there is a danger of losing current ER physicians to other health care facilities if their pay is not increased sufficiently.

She added the loss of ER physicians could threaten the ability to keep the ER open 24/7, 365 days per year, which is necessary for

See **Hospital** Page 2

School bus garage was worn when the district acquired it

This is part three of a three-part series on the 2022 school bond measure to be put before voters on the Feb. 8 special election ballot. Parts one and two ran in the previous two issues of The East County Journal.

BY CATHY KANE
East County Journal

On Feb. 8, Morton voters will be asked to approve a bond of \$24.5M, which would give the Morton School District (MSD) the funding for eight projects deemed necessary by the school board to improve educational opportunities, safety and security and aging and educationally outdated infrastructure.

"If the bond passes, the county would begin collecting in 2023, then the money comes to us and goes out. We can start construction and address the priorities to us," MSD Superintendent John Hannah said, identifying the bus maintenance facility – commonly known as the bus barn – as a top priority.

After being assessed by structural engineers "as in severe repair and unsafe for continued use" and no longer insurable, the bus barn was condemned and closed before Christmas.

"The building has so many issues. I knew it was just a matter of time," Transportation Supervisor George Harbaugh said, point-

See **Bond** Page 3



Ric Hallock | East County Journal

What's in a possum pie?

The East Lewis County Chamber of Commerce hosted its annual dinner meeting at the Moose Lodge in Morton on Saturday. From left, newly elected Chamber President Mitchell Merrill, and chamber members Caro Johnson and Tesha Hanson listen in on what makes up a possum pie, one of two pies Louise Fisher made for the auction. Her two pies netted \$85 for the Chamber coffers.

Realtor jumps at chance to blaze own trail with Pacific Trail Realty

BY CATHY KANE
East County Journal

With five times as many visitors logged in 2021 than the previous year, real estate and vacation rentals continue to be a major draw for Packwood, according to the Packwood Visitor Center.

For Briston Meidinger, who worked for six years as a realtor for Mountain Valley Real Estate and also manages his family owned TMC Properties, it seems like a

good time to open his own business, Pacific Trail Realty.

"For the past year-and-a-half, I have wanted to branch out on my own. I felt that I was at the point in real estate that I could do it," Meidinger, a self-described entrepreneur, said. "My intent was not to start a big brokerage and have a bunch of agents come on and be in this office. That's not how it originally started. It just organically went that way."

The first addition to the Pacific Trail

team was Cesar Garcia, a close friend who was moving to Packwood to work at TMC. "I convinced him to get his real estate license," Meidinger said.

The third, fourth and fifth additions – broker/realtor Sally Van Boeemen, broker/realtor Tracy Croshaw and licensed assistant Lisa Davis, who works directly for Croshaw – joined Meidinger when Mountain Valley was sold and the new owner announced plans to vacate the current location at the historic Packwood

Station and move to Morton. Her decision opened the door for Pacific Trail to maintain the highly visible building at 13068 Hwy. 12.

Opened from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., Monday through Saturday, and by appointment, the office is manned by Davis and/or Croshaw with the rest of the staff coming and going.

"They can meet here. Use the conference room. Listings will also be posted

See **Pacific** Page 4

Journal welcomes newest correspondent

BY CATHY KANE
East County Journal

Before new East County Journal (ECJ) correspondent Amber Brown covered her first Morton School Board meeting last week, her reputation for tuning in and taking meticulous notes at Packwood business and community meetings preceded her.

"I love writing. I have always loved creative writing," Brown said, adding she has self-published one novel and is currently working on a couple of other novels. In college, she learned MLA (Modern Language Association of America) formatting. Now, she is looking forward to learning AP (Associated Press) style used by American newspapers.

"I am looking forward to keeping an eye on the pulse of Packwood and not just what's going on in Packwood, but the whole community," she said.

A 2006 WPS graduate, Brown was born in Morton and grew up in Packwood and Randle.

She holds an associate of arts



Cathy Kane | East County Journal

Amber Brown joins the East County Journal staff as a correspondent and will be covering a number of topics.

degree from Centralia College East, two bachelor of arts degrees – one in history and another in philosophy with a specialization in religious studies – from Central Washington University in Ellensburg, and a master of business administration from the Florida Institute of Technology.

In 2011, Brown and her hus-

band and fellow WPS alumni, Derek Brown, returned to Packwood, where she met the challenge of being labeled "over-educated and under-experienced."

Always willing to work hard and learn new skills, she has worked at the Silver State Armory, Peter's Inn, Blanton's Market, Mountain Valley Real Estate and Nisqually Lodge in Ashford. She is currently in the process of renewing her real estate license, which she plans to use through Packwood Four U Realty. She and her husband are enjoying living with and helping Derek's grandfather, Herschel Brown, navigate life at age 95.

Brown serves as president of the Packwood Timberland Friends of the Library, Packwood Community Advisory Committee member, Packwood Business Owners Committee participant and Packwood Improvement Club trustee.

"My life right now seems to be all about going to meetings," she

See **Journal** Page 2

Share the love by sending a Valentine's Day message

One question: Do you have a significant other in your life or parents, siblings, children, friends, pets or anyone else in your life that you care enough about to send them a free Valentine's Day message?

If the answer is yes to any one of the possible recipients listed above, then the next question is why aren't you taking advantage of The East County Journal's offer to run your Valentine's Day message in an upcoming issue?

Yes, for a limited time (note that submissions must be in the ECJ office by 10 a.m. Monday, Feb. 7) you can submit your special message to that special love, crush and/or apple of your eye for free and for all the world – or at least East Lewis County residents – to know.

There aren't enough moments in the day to tell someone you know just how special they are, but now you can let them know in print – and within 25 words or less – just how much that unique someone means to you.

Flowers and candy may suffice for the special day, but why wait until the last minute when you can immortalize your feelings with a one-of-a-kind message that comes straight from the heart?

Stop by The Journal office at 278 W. Main, in Morton to drop off your personal message or email your Valentine's message to ecjeditor@devaulpublishing.com, by 10 a.m., Monday, Feb. 7. The Valentine's messages will be printed in the Feb. 9 edition of The East County Journal, in plenty of time to keep you out of the doghouse in case you forget the flowers and candy.

Packwood housing forum draws community interest

BY CATHY KANE
East County Journal

Fifty Packwood residents, and over 40 online viewers, attended the first Packwood Housing Forum at the Packwood Improvement Center on Thursday, Jan. 20.

Facilitated by Lewis County Special Projects Deputy Prosecuting Attorney Eric Eisenberg and Senior Long Range Planner Mindy Brooks, the audience consisted of full-time and part-time Packwood residents, home owners and renters, business owners, employers and employees.

"This is only going to be the first forum," Eisenberg said. "What we are doing here tonight will help direct how many forums there will be after this and

what they might address. Tonight, you all are going to set the agenda.

"This is not a night of deciding who is right and who is wrong. For the questions we are talking about, there are really no wrong answers," he added.

Over the course of the next two hours, Eisenberg and Brooks allowed the audience to weigh in on their concerns about housing in Packwood, before being divided into groups of three to prioritize their concerns.

Housing concerns included:

- Lack of long-term rentals for residents and local employees.
- Rapid increase in property taxes.
- Zoning issues.
- Ratio of vacation home owners to permanent resi-



Cathy Kane | East County Journal

Attendees of the first Lewis County sponsored Packwood Housing Forum worked to set the agenda of upcoming meetings by prioritizing the needs.

- Too many vacation rentals.
- The lack of multi-family housing options.
- Unattainable and unaffordable housing.

- That discourage ownership.
- For Patrice Mars and Darcie Hoppens, who work at Mountain Goat Coffee Company and Sonja Rosas, who is employed at Mountain View Timberland Library, the lack of rentals

that discourage ownership.

For Patrice Mars and Darcie Hoppens, who work at Mountain Goat Coffee Company and Sonja Rosas, who is employed at Mountain View Timberland Library, the lack of rentals

were definitely a concern.

"The majority of workers here in Packwood come from out of town – Randle and Morton," Mars, a 10-year Packwood resident said.

Hoppens noted, "I was very lucky to get the rental I am in."

Regarding the housing forum, long-time Packwood resident Van Anderson said, "This is something we need people involved in. We want to have a community that thrives for everyone. We used to have affordable housing."

"This many people in the room shows the urgency," Brooks said.

Housing forums scheduled for the future are: Short-term rentals on Thursday, Feb. 17; Affordable housing on Thursday, March 24, and Zoning on Thursday, April 21. Locations will be announced.

Storm calls it a day after 32 years at Market

BY CATHY KANE
East County Journal

Back in 1989, Morton resident Jenny Storm never imagined that the trajectory of the next three decades of her life would be changed when her neighbor, Bobbie Reed, offered her a job at the brand new Morton Country Market.

"I have worked in the office since the store opened 32 years ago," Storm said, on her last day of work.

She was glad to accept the offer since it meant no longer having to drive to Packwood for seasonal work at the forest service and the business courses at

the Portland business school she had attended had thoroughly prepared her for the job, she said.

Eventually, the Reeds' business partners, Dave Chambers and Christie Greiter, bought the store.

During her long career at Morton Country Market, Jenny and her husband, Bill, raised their three children and welcomed six grandchildren.

Originally from Enterprise, Oregon, the couple lived in Alaska before moving their family to Morton to be closer to her parents,



Jenny Storm

who worked for the forest service in Randle.

"Morton has been a good place to live and raise the kids," she said.

When asked what she plans to do in retirement, she replied with a laugh, "Anything I want." For Storm, that could mean some extra time for traveling to see her mother, who now lives in Yuma, Arizona. Also, more time to spend with two granddaughters, age 2 and almost 7, who live in Morton.

She and her husband already attend all of her grandson's sports games in

Napavine.

"We also have grandchildren who have graduated. One down in Mississippi, who plays ball. We could go see her. We boat. We camp," she said, adding the couple would also like to visit their own siblings, who do not live in the area. "My husband retired last year. He has just been waiting for me."

"We really thank Jenny for her 32 years of service here at Morton Country Market. We have enjoyed working with her all these years. She has done a really good job and we wish her the best of luck in the future," Eric Greiter said.

Bond: New bus garage will add needed security

Continued from page 1

ing out that flooding – "the way the ground water came through the cement walls any time it rained" – was just one of many issues.

Harbaugh said the closure of the bus barn resulted in the necessity of parking the school buses and support vehicles in the junior/senior high school parking lot.

Just last week, "our new school bus was vandalized in an attempted fuel theft in the school parking lot," he said, one of the many reasons he believes passing the bond is important.

There will be room in the new bus barn to accommodate the nine school buses and five support vehicles used by the school, he said. "Everybody will be able to park there."

"Security will be much better with the plans for the new bus barn. You will actually have to go through multiple sets of gates to get to the buses. The plan is to

have transponder-operated gates so the bus drivers do not have to get out and open those gates. They just drive up and the transponder will recognize the bus and open the gate."

Harbaugh said the proposed plan for the bus barn also places the building solidly on school property in the back of the junior/senior high school campus, separated from student and parent traffic.

"It would work out well, integrated into the new routing system of entering and exiting the property," he said, adding the current bus barn is only fully accessible through adjoining property owned by Alta Forest Products.

In addition, Harbaugh said the plan calls for the new facility to have a working bay with a lift and another bay that can be used either as a working bay or a washing bay. Washing the buses could not be legally done in the current bus barn, even before it was

condemned, he added.

And the lift is significant to Harbaugh. "Anything that allows me to stand up while working underneath the buses is a huge plus," he said, making his job as mechanic for all of the vehicles a lot safer. "White Pass has had a lift in their bus garage since the '80s."

A shared office space for him and the five full-time drivers and one substitute, which he has enjoyed since becoming transportation supervisor in 2005, will also be included in the new bus barn.

"It's worked out well. By having this closeness and the drivers right here with me all the time, we have a good working relationship. It's a little more like family and a little less like work," he said.

Overall, a little more than \$3M of the bond will be designated for the new bus barn, Harbaugh said. "It's a big barn, but it's a big investment in the kids and

in the future of Morton."

Rejected twice through bond failures in the past, Harbaugh is hoping this time around voters will give their approval for the bond and thus, a new bus barn. For the bond to pass, a supermajority or 60 percent approval is needed.

Like just about all property owners, Harbaugh said he, too, has experienced the recent rise in property taxes, but he is still willing to vote for the bond.

"Someone stepped up and invested in my education. I need to do that now," he said.

"We are excited to see where it goes. If it passes, awesome. If it doesn't pass, we are going to have to go back and ask again because our needs are not going away," Hannah said.

Program to get students outside focus of Morton School Board meeting

BY AMBER BROWN
East County Journal

The Morton School District board members received a surprise of flowers, cards and candy to celebrate National Board Appreciation month at their regular board monthly board meeting Monday, Jan. 24, in the school library.

After admiring the new décor of table with wheels attached, making it easier for the students to socially distance, and the MWP Timberwolves logo painted on the wall behind the Board's seats by Marta Metcalf, the meeting was called to order.

The meeting was kept short – under 20 minutes – with board member Chase Buffington delivering a presentation of School for

All Movement. The program utilizes resources like the Cispus Learning Center to get students outside and learning about different environments.

"We are lucky in our location because we have five different ecosystems available in Washington state," Buffington said.

During his research he discovered that students are getting roughly 44 hours of screen time per week compared to spending approximately 10 minutes outside.

The next board meeting will be at 5:45 p.m., Monday, Feb. 28 in the high school library. The meeting will start 15 minutes earlier than usual so the board will be in compliance with WASDA training on the Open Public Meetings Act.

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