

CITY OF **JOHN DAY**

mayor
Ron Lundbom

city manager
Nicholas Green

secretary
Lindy Berry

council
Shannon Adair
Gregg Haberly
Dave Holland
Heather Rookstool
Elliot Sky
Paul Smith

May 7, 2021

Re: Testimony in Support of Gleason Pool / Kam Wah Chung Interpretive Center funding in SB 5534

Dear Committee Members:

I am writing in support of funding for the Gleason Pool / Kam Wah Chung Interpretive Center infrastructure package (pictured below).



Though at 1,750 residents our size is small, John Day is the largest of Grant County's nine incorporated cities and its economic center. Many generations of county residents have called John Day home. They have lived through the boom and bust cycles that have characterized many of our rural communities. While our traditions have endured, our way of life is also at risk.

It is time for us to act.

Our community is surrounded by over two million acres of national forest and public lands ideal for hunting, fishing, outdoor recreation and business retreats. More than a dozen state and federal parks, heritage sites and recreation areas surround John Day – including the historic Kam Wah Chung store and visitor's center, located near John Day's Main Street, and the John Day Fossil Beds National Monument, located an hour to our west. The city's namesake and main natural feature is the John Day River, the third longest freeflowing river in the contiguous United States, which runs through the center of town.

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Three decades of steady population decline has left us struggling to find enough revenue to fund basic city services. The disruption to the natural resource economy in the 1990s led to the closing of three of our four timber mills. The loss of family-wage jobs, particularly for our younger families, has created a vacuum filled largely by the unemployed, marginally employed, and retired residents living on fixed incomes. For years, Grant County has been considered Oregon's most socioeconomically distressed area by the Oregon Secretary of State.

Now we are fighting back.

In 2017, we adopted a new Strategy for Growth for the city. Since adopting the strategy, we have raised over \$14 million in external funding for new housing developments, transportation planning, broadband improvements, recreational trails and Main Street infrastructure investments – and we're just getting started.

Over the next five years, our goal is to position John Day as a recreation and destination tourism hub in eastern Oregon. We are promoting high growth industries like controlled environment agriculture, agritourism and outdoor recreation that will benefit John Day as well as the surrounding farms, ranches and communities in Grant County. We are staying true to our heritage as a natural resource economy, but we are also adopting better business practices, new economic development approaches and entrepreneurial policies that will help our city become a leader in rural innovation and rural economic development.

This funding proposal will help us create a replacement of our 62-year old Gleason Pool, Grant County's only public swimming pool, which closed in 2020 due to COVID-19 restrictions. Due to its age and condition, the pool will never reopen.

Replacing our pool at a new location outside the 100-year floodplain was a collaborative effort between appointed and elected officials from five cities across central Grant County. They were assisted by a multi-disciplinary team of consultants that specialize in designing and engineering aquatic facilities that meet the needs and the capacity of the organizations they work with. This project is funded by the City of John Day and through planning and technical assistance from the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department (OPRD).

Community discussions about replacing the 62-year old pool have been occurring since the 1990's. Most, if not all of those discussions focused on locating the pool at a new site in John Day, which would allow for the expansion of the Kam Wah Chung Heritage Site by OPRD. This proposal recommends the same strategy.

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In 2018, the City of John Day and OPRD reopened negotiations for the state to acquire the pool property. At this point, negotiations are scheduled to be completed this Fall with the property turned over to OPRD to build the new Kam Wah Chung Interpretive Center.

A complete report on this project is available on our website:

<https://www.cityofjohnday.com/planning/page/final-report-central-grant-county-aquatics-center-published>.

The anticipated cost of construction for the proposed aquatics center is \$6 million. Expected annual operations, maintenance and replacement (OM&R) is \$90,000 per year. Assistance on the capital construction of this project will allow for the creation of a world-class destination at Kam Wah Chung while also creating a new community pool that will last for the next three generations.

Our greatest assets are our people, our lands and our will to survive. We are resilient in spirit and are striving to overcome the decades-long decline that has strained our community to the breaking point – but we will not break.

Please join us in our fight. Let's work together to accomplish something truly remarkable. We encourage you to take part in our community reinvestment strategy by helping invest in John Day's economy. Together, we can overcome one of the longest recessions in our history and make John Day once more a thriving rural community.

Sincerely,



Nicholas Green,
City Manager