

Giving Cascade Locks School and the community a new lease on life

On March 8, the Cascade Locks Community Charter School Committee submitted a comprehensive plan to the Hood River County School Board for operating a K-12 charter school in Cascade Locks. If the board approves the proposal, the committee plans to open the school for classes in September.

The community began this extraordinary effort more than a year ago, after the school board voted to close Cascade Locks High School and bus students to Hood River Valley High. The closure of what had long been the heart of this close-knit small town shocked the community, but it also galvanized parents, business leaders, city and port officials and citizens. We immediately began weighing our options, seeking a solution that would benefit all students and this proud town.

It has taken an extraordinary amount of organization and hard work by a group of committed parents and community members who took the lead in researching the alternatives. The group worked to forge consensus through a series of town meetings, designed a comprehensive charter school curriculum, and then applied for and won a substantial grant that will help get the school up and running. With that grant, the committee and an educational consultant are completing the proposal that will go before the school board on March 8.

As we envision it, Cascade Locks Community Charter School will provide a supportive small-school environment that fosters academic excellence, promotes community engage-

ment and interaction, values public service, teaches life skills, and connects students to their region, state and nation. Our students will learn to be responsible citizens of the world, prepared to take the next step on their educational journey, whether that means college, professional or occupational training or entering the work force.

In time, Cascade Locks Community Charter School could become a magnet for other students in Hood River County School District and other districts who recognize the advantages of a small-school education. These include the greater individual attention teachers can give students, higher academic achievement, a safer school environment, and stronger parental and community involvement.

Hood River County School District already operates a successful charter school—the K-5 Dos Mundos at Westside Elementary School. Cascade Locks Community Charter School would be the district's first community-based charter school. Under state law, a charter school operates under a contract or "charter" between the members of the charter school community and the local board of education, in this case the Hood River County School Board. The board's primary role is to assure that the charter school meets all required educational standards and rules.

As part of our contract with the school district, we are asking the school board to negotiate in good faith an agreement that would allow Cascade Locks Community Charter School to use the current Cascade Locks School. We think this would be the highest and best use of the

school.

The school board's own guiding principles set out the following policy on the use of school facilities and grounds:

"We believe it is our responsibility to provide the opportunity for all students to realize their potential in intellectual, social, psychological and physical development to enable the students to adapt to a changing world and at the same time develop individual and group responsibility in our global society. The educational system of Hood River County School District is dedicated to the total personal development of each student in a safe and secure environment."

We agree completely with this policy. Cascade Locks School, which was built in 1948, has 20 classrooms, including the library and a media room, along with a gym, a large music room and a cafeteria. According to the school district's 2006 Long Range Planning Report, the capacity of Cascade Locks School is 225 students. With 80 students attending K-8 this school year, Cascade Locks Community Charter School will have plenty of room to grow.

We believe the school board's support for our charter and its approval of the committee's proposal for the Cascade Locks School would be the best ways for the school district to assure that all students in our community have an opportunity to excel academically in a safe and nurturing environment.

**Cascade Locks Community
Charter School Committee
George Fischer
Myra Walker
Dawn Benson
Molly Aguilar**