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Grants Pass Mayor-elect Clint Scherf and four new city councilors will be sworn in on Monday at the council chambers.

By Vickie Aldous
of the Daily Courier

Once sworn in on Monday, the mayor and new City Council members for Grants Pass could call a special meeting for Tuesday to consider closing down authorized homeless campgrounds, canceling funding for a proposed homeless shelter and stopping plans to rebuild Caveman Pool.

Mayor-elect Clint Scherf and four incoming councilors who campaigned as a conservative

bloc backed by the local Republican Party swept the November election, ousting Mayor Sara Bristol and picking up four seats on the eight-member Grants Pass City Council.

The newcomers sought to hold a special meeting Friday, but were blocked from doing so by city rules that stipulate they don't take office until the first Monday of the new year. Once sworn in as scheduled on Monday at 11:45 a.m., the mayor or three councilors can call for a special meeting, which requires

a 24-hour public notice.

That means their first special meeting could come on Tuesday.

City Manager Aaron Cubic sent an email to elected city leaders that the incoming mayor and councilors would like to schedule a special meeting on Tuesday.

Cubic said based on preliminary information he has received, the agenda may include Caveman Pool

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Modern irrigation for a landmark IV farm



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Rhett Nelsen, owner of Nelsen Family Farms on Redwood Highway near Kerby, will be acquiring a pivot irrigation system as part of a way to efficiently water his crops. Known for its "Sweet Cron" signs, the farm's modernized system is expected to be installed within a year and is being made possible by a \$535,868 grant from the Oregon Water Resources Commission.

By Chrissy Ewald
of the Daily Courier

KERBY — The family farm whose landmark "Sweet Cron" signs have delighted visitors to the Illinois Valley for decades is getting a boost from the state to put in a modern irrigation system.

A \$535,868 grant from the Oregon

Water Resources Commission will cover part of the cost to install center-pivot irrigation systems for 33.4 acres of the approximately 100-acre Nelsen Family Farm, located in Sauers Flat along Redwood Highway south of Kerby.

"Modern irrigation systems are very expensive," said Julie Cymore of the nonprofit group Trout Unlimit-

ed, which helped secure the funding. "We're hoping to bring some funding to this area and provide some long-term water security and keep some of these properties in agriculture."

She said pivot systems are more water-efficient and wash off less nutrients from the soil than flood irrigation, where water flowing through canals is piped onto fields.

Rhett Nelsen, who owns Nelsen Family Farms with his wife Linda, said the new system will be much less labor-intensive than the farm's existing drip and flood irrigation.

"I won't have to go spend two or four hours a day just changing water to irrigate the fields," he said.

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Rogue Retreat will operate severe weather shelter in Ashland for next three months

By Susan Hiland
of the Daily Courier

Retreat is a well-known nonprofit service provider.

them into better living situations." Rogue Retreat can run the weather shelter for only 90 days because the

ing goal to reduce homelessness by 2026 can't be solved by these shelters alone. "Two hundred beds is a great first step, but it is not the only step," he said. "We will need to

cold months is a continuation to many other ongoing plans to increase shelter, housing and eviction prevention

and Vega Pederson, these shelters will offer food and other amenities to visitors, and coun-

shortfalls. "We have a limited amount to spend."



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Nelson Family Farms owner Rhett Nelsen stands with Julie Cymore, the Rogue River Basin water project coordinator for Trout Unlimited, as he explains where a pivot irrigation system will be installed on his farmland.

Farm From 1A

"I can just turn on the pumps and control what it's doing by my phone." And replacing drip lines means less cost and less plastic waste.

Nelsen pointed out the future locations of the pivots: one full circle for a hay field west, one half-circle and one quarter-circle. He said he's still working out how he will arrange different types of vegetables underneath the circular watering areas.

Along with sweet "cron," the Nelsens grow many other crops, including tomatoes, potatoes, summer and winter squash, pumpkins, strawberries, "about 26 varieties" of peppers, and U-Pick gladiolus flowers. The farm has a farm stand, a corn maze and pumpkins in the fall, and a trailer that, most years, takes produce to farmer markets in Crescent City and Brookings. This year, the farm has had a stand at the Illinois Valley Farmers Market.

The farm was started by Nelsen's mother Jerry and

father Keith in 1959. Jerry passed away in 2022 at age 91, and Keith a year later.

The farm survived the catastrophic flooding in 1964; Nelsen was only a toddler, but he said the waters rose 17 feet above the farm.

The original "Sweet Cron" sign was an old-fashioned typo.

"My mother was painting two, three signs out here," he said. "She came in to help somebody, and she went back out and she didn't realize she'd put an 'r' where an 'o' is supposed to be. Me and my dad, we didn't even read the signs, we just put them up, and the neighbor came over and said, 'How'd you spell corn?'"

The sign became a landmark, and not just local: Nelsen said a family from Hawaii used to stop by every year on an annual trip.

The irrigation project may take several years to finish, Cymore said. She put in applications for another two grants.

"If we get one of those grants, then once we receive the funds we'll be able to start working on the project," she said. And the farm provided a

match of \$135,022, including the value of work to install the systems. She said they hope to hire local people to install the electrical components.

Along with cutting the workload for a family farm, the project has an environmental component. Nelsen agreed to return 100% of the water that's saved by increasing efficiency back into the Illinois River.

"Water quantity is identified as the primary limiting factor for fish and aquatic ecosystems in the Illinois and Rogue watershed in general," said Geoff Gerdes, stream restoration biologist for the Rogue River watershed with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife. "So projects like these are going to be ever more important."

The farm's water is drawn directly from the Illinois River, not a canal irrigation system; the Kerby Ditch that used to supply water to residents from Cave Junction to Kerby was decommissioned more than 20 years ago.

Once the new irrigation system is installed, it might be the only one of its kind in the Illinois Valley. Nelsen recalled

seeing a home-built pivot irrigation system on a farm on Robinson Road, but he said he doesn't think it's there anymore.

The money for the \$535,000 grant comes from Oregon Lottery revenue bonds. The state money is then used to secure federal grants.

John Bellville, district manager for the Illinois Valley Soil and Water Conservation District, said the Nelsen Family Farm project is part of two larger, ongoing initiatives by the district.

One is a partnership with Trout Unlimited to modernize irrigation systems. The other is a plan to restore targeted areas of the north Illinois Valley, using money from the Oregon Department of Agriculture and including cleaning up abandoned cannabis sites.

"That's going to benefit water quality, but also local folks," said Cymore. "It's important to shore up those water resources for the future."

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