

Entertainment center would employ 140

Dr. Bret Christensen discusses his proposed North Lewiston park with Lewiston Port Commission

By **ELAINE WILLIAMS**
OF THE TRIBUNE

An entertainment center proposed for North Lewiston would create 140 positions, including 55 full-time, living-wage jobs with medical insurance. That update was provided to the Lewiston Port Commission on Wednesday by Dr. Bret Christensen, the orthodontist who is hoping to open the business in two years.

Christensen has right of first refusal to lease 10 acres from the port for the project for \$50,000 a year at the base of the Lewiston Hill overlooking the Snake and Clearwater rivers.

At previous meetings that Christensen didn't attend, commissioners had wondered about the economic impact of the center.

"This has answered a lot of my questions, and I'm very excited to see the next step."

**COMMISSION PRESIDENT
MARY HASENOEHL**

The center would make \$1 million a year in local purchases on food as well as other goods and services, Christensen said.

"This has answered a lot of my questions, and I'm very excited to see the next step," Commission President Mary Hasenoehrl said after hearing the presentation.

Commissioner Jerry Klemm said he still has some reservations about shifting the use of industrial land to recreation.

"I like what you're doing, but I'm not totally sold," he said.

Christensen is hoping to persuade the commission to back the 51,000-square-foot center, which he expects will draw more than 1,000 people a weekend from as far away as Dayton. It would be a venue for as many as 50 birthday parties a week with a restaurant, games, go-karts and laser tag.

"The majority of the profits would come from the food," he said.

Christensen envisions a company that operates other restaurants, such as Red Robin, sending an executive chef who would stay

for at least two years to create a "polished casual" restaurant that would serve beer and wine and have an outside deck overlooking the river.

Diners could play games like table tennis, bean bag toss and pickleball, some at no charge. An arcade would have video games, including many that could be played by multiple people at once.

"What we hope they do is come buy some food and have some fun with each other," Christensen said.

Two go-kart tracks would have electric cars capable of going anywhere of between 5 mph and 45 mph. The range of speed would be controlled by comput-

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ers, which typically would limit drivers to speeds no higher than 15 mph, but sometimes park goers would be allowed to go faster wearing helmets.

One family-friendly track would be 890 yards long. Another would have a slicker surface.

"They polish up the concrete and make it so you can drift as you go around the corners," Christensen said.

A 6,000-square-foot laser tag arena would be

split into two levels, with a computer and light system that would offer numerous games.

"It can be addicting. That's what we plan on," he said.

In other business Wednesday:

The commission approved its audit for the fiscal year that ended June 30. The port had an operating loss of \$338,390 for that time for its dock, rental properties and warehouse, but a net income of \$235,297 counting revenue from sales tax and property taxes.

The port has experienced operating losses since fiscal year 2013, when the loss was \$92,435.

The highest annual loss — \$501,234 — was in fiscal year 2016. One of the biggest financial challenges the port has faced has been the end of container shipping between Lewiston and Portland. Shipments of cargo such as dried peas and lentils had been a significant source of income.

The port's net position climbed from \$24.8 million in fiscal year 2017 to \$25.1 million in fiscal year 2018. That category includes the port's savings and capital assets.

Commissioners also

approved selling 1,757 square feet of property to the Lewis Clark Terminal for \$7,031. The land is needed to construct a train-loading facility that will replace one at CHS Primeland in Lewiston. CHS Primeland, one of the terminal owners, loads barley onto trains at its Snake River Avenue location, but the rail line that serves it is being removed.

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