

Court signs on for broadband

By Richard Hanners
Blue Mountain Eagle

The Grant County Court on March 28 conditionally approved the formation of a governing body and a cost-sharing formula for a new broadband internet network intended to improve the lives of residents in the county.

An amended ordinance and an intergovernmental agreement between the county, John Day and Seneca each passed by 2-1 votes, with Grant County Commissioner Hamscher opposed each time.

The ordinance was similar to one approved in November that creates an intergovernmental entity called the Grant County Digital Network Coalition, which will plan, own, manage, control and operate a broadband network that will start out with a fiber optic line running from Burns to John Day, with a provision for connections in Seneca. The effective date was

changed to April 10 in the amended version, and it was passed as an emergency to take effect immediately. The amended ordinance also adopted the intergovernmental agreement.

County Judge Scott Myers received a draft of the intergovernmental agreement by email on March 26, two days before the court meeting, that was marked up by Grant County Attorney Ron Yockim.

Hamscher said he hadn't seen the latest version until he was provided a printed copy just before the court meeting began. He said he had more questions on the IGA, including about cost-sharing and severability, and wanted to speak with Yockim before approving it.

Further details on how the coalition will be managed and how costs would be shared are provided in the intergovernmental agreement. The city of John Day will be the lead agency, and a five-member board will create bylaws, establish a mission and

goals, oversee development and operations of the network and approve the coalition's budget and capital purchases.

The county, John Day and Seneca each will choose one board member to represent them. Until two more possible entities join the coalition, the remaining two board members will be chosen at large by the three parties to the agreement.

The board will not have the power to commit taxing authority or general funds of the county, John Day or Seneca, or to expend funds in excess of the amount received from the members in a fiscal year. Grant County, John Day and Seneca can terminate participation in the agreement with 90 days notice.

According to a cost-sharing formula attached to the agreement, operating expenses will be shared among the three entities based on a 2017 certified population estimate. Grant County will be responsible for 60 per-

cent of the operating costs, John Day 37 percent and Seneca 3 percent.

Hamscher told the court he needed more time to review the agreement. He also said he was concerned about the cost-sharing formula and how the county's share of the network's costs would be included in the county budget.

Hamscher also suggested that the county could save money by putting the network's northern terminal facility in a county-owned building. He also was concerned about insufficient financial planning for the agreement and about hanging a main fiber optic cable on power poles across national forest land.

Commissioner Boyd Britton said he was comfortable with the agreement because Yockim had reviewed it. He said he had looked over the severability clause and felt the county could easily get out of the agreement if necessary.

A timely vote on the ordinance

was needed to get the project started, Britton said. He suggested the court approve the intergovernmental agreement on the condition that Hamscher could talk more with Yockim about his concerns before final approval.

Hamscher said the attorneys for the county and John Day had months to look at the agreement, while the court had just received it, and the county had the lion's share of the financial responsibility.

Hamscher said he wasn't opposed to bringing broadband to Grant County, but he wasn't ready to approve the ordinance and the intergovernmental agreement.

Myers said the ordinance changed little except the coalition's starting date. Project planning couldn't start until the documents were signed, he said.

"This project will affect Grant County citizens in a positive way," Myers said.

OBITUARIES

Dennis Dee Olsen

March 15, 1935 - March 24, 2018

Dennis Dee "Denny" Olsen, 83, died March 24, 2018. He grew up in John Day, where he was very involved in athletics. He played college baseball at the University of Oregon for his hero Don Kirsch. His first teaching job was in Drain High School, where in 1962 he coached a talented team to a state baseball championship. In 1963, he continued teaching and was a counselor in the Springfield School District until he retired.

He married Brenda Gustafson in 1961, and they moved to a ranch close to Creswell. The couple loved to dance in their younger years, and he was an exceptionally good dancer. They enjoyed riding their horses and taking horseback trips to the high lakes and fishing there. They enjoyed water skiing and trips to the lake with family and friends. Olsen coached their son, Scott, in little league baseball, and they enjoyed watching him play ball, ride motorcycles and play slow pitch as an adult. They enjoyed seeing Shauna, their daughter, excelling in school activities and music. They were also proud of their grandkids. They enjoyed traveling to Cody's swim meets for many years and watched Jake play basketball and soccer. Family time was always special to Olsen. A favorite outing was taking the family to Sun River over Labor Day weekend for many years where they biked, ran the river, played cards and just hung out together.

Olsen was also a great community man. He was an active member in the Creswell Presbyterian Church for 40 plus years and served on the session several times and sang in the choir. He was active in Kiwanis and volunteered for South Lane Wheels to drive people in need. He always spoke fondly of his riders and called them his friends.

Olsen had a life well lived. He is remembered as always being kind. He loved his family, and they loved him in return. A family celebration of life will be held.



County sets minimum bids on foreclosed sites

By Richard Hanners
Blue Mountain Eagle

Thirty-one tax-foreclosed properties will be deeded to the county April 10 and sold as quickly as possible to get them back on the tax rolls, Grant County Assessor David Thunnell told the county court March 28.

The court approved Thunnell's recommendation that the minimum bid for the properties should be 50 percent of their real market value. If all 31 properties sell at the minimum bid, the county would receive about \$395,000, Thunnell said. The total in back taxes with interest owed on the properties is about \$365,000, he said. Grant County Attorney Ron Yockim suggested holding an oral auction, Thunnell noted.

Some of the tax liabilities were very old, Grant County Judge Scott Myers pointed out, and some owners didn't know about these properties. The county exhausted all remedies trying to track down owners, he said, adding that the real market value of one property was only \$10.

A dozen trailer homes still sit on a foreclosed mobile home park property in Mt. Vernon with tenants who may need to be evicted, Myers later



Eagle photos/Richard Hanners

The 31 tax-foreclosed properties that will be deeded to Grant County on April 10 include (from left) a burned-out motel building and a hillside covered with trailers.

told the Eagle. He said some of those trailer homes didn't have running water.

"It's a sad state of affairs," he said.

Bob Crisler told the court a foreclosed house next to his in Prairie City posed a safety hazard, with wind blowing pieces of metal around. Thunnell, however, said that property had only recently received foreclosure judgment in circuit court and hadn't gone through the two-year redemption period.

Thunnell said the foreclosure process could be hastened in some cases, and Myers noted that Prairie City could use its nuisance ordinances to deal with the home, which is considered an eyesore.

Grant County Commissioner Boyd Britton suggested the court address how it will deal with liabilities incurred by taking ownership of foreclosed properties in the future.

In other county court news:

- The court agreed to table a motion to establish a natural resource adviser position after Commissioner Jim Hamscher said he wanted time to find a way to pay for the position using federal Secure Rural Schools or payment-in-lieu of taxes funding.

Budget constraints and political concerns were raised by court members at their March 14 meeting as reasons for delaying a decision on filling

the proposed position. Nearly \$50,000 exists in the current county budget for the position, Myers noted at the time, but he also expressed concern about how to continue funding the position.

Hamscher had agreed sustainability was an issue, but he made a motion that the court at least try filling the position for a year. Britton had raised concerns about the nature of the position and how it would be structured.

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Katee Hoffman

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Saturday

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Time: 4:00—Doors open
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Where: Downtown John Day
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