

# Airport

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impose requirements to create and maintain a certain number of jobs.

Another barrier to selling lots was the zoning. In addition to its industrial park zoning, the property is covered by an airport safety and compatibility zone overlay, which imposes additional restrictions on what types of operations are allowed.

## Swing and a miss

Still, Lundbom said, there was significant interest from a number of out-of-town companies in those early days, including Tillamook Creamery and a firm that manufactures armrests for airplane seats. But there were no takers.

Then, in 2012, Enviro Board Corp. announced plans to buy land in the park to manufacture environmentally friendly building panels out of agricultural waste fiber.

In January of 2013, the company signed a deal to buy 7 acres at the industrial park. Armed with a \$3.5 million business energy tax credit from the state, company co-chairman William Peiffer said he intended to build a state-of-the-art, 40,000-square-foot factory that would create as many as 100 jobs.

Then-City Manager Peggy Gray called the agreement "an incredible opportunity for our community," according to an article at the time in the Blue Mountain Eagle.

By May, however, the deal was dead in the water over Enviro Board's failure to put up \$10,000 in earnest money.

By that time, Lundbom was mayor of John Day. As he recalls the situation, Peiffer wanted to use his tax credit to cover startup costs including the earnest money payment, but that's not how the BETC program worked – the credit only kicked in after the project was completed.

"I think that kiboshed the deal," he told the Eagle last week. "All of a sudden it just went away."

## Changing the game

After the Enviro Board deal collapsed, the Grant County Airport Industrial Park continued to languish – even as the city continued to make payments on its \$1.5 million loan from the state. Then, following a City Council study session late last year, the city decided to try a different approach.

The council rescinded a 2015 ordinance prohibiting marijuana businesses within the city limits. It broadened some definitions in the land



This is one of eight 1-acre lots still available for purchase at the Grant County Airport Industrial Park. After a long period of dormancy, activity at the park is heating up.



Sherri Dowdy, left, watches as Cindie Hunt preps an order for shipping at the HECS warehouse on Wednesday, Dec. 8.

use code to allow more business types in the airport industrial park zone. It also dropped the requirement that any new business that wanted to set up shop in the industrial park participate in the enterprise zone (although they still have the option to do so).

All of those measures helped, but the last one was a game-changer for some potential lot buyers, according to City Manager Nick Green.

"You had to create and maintain at least three full-time jobs, and almost nobody could do it," Green told the newspaper.

The changes were codified in a new ordinance and resolution adopted by the City Council in February.

At the same time, the city reset the price on 1-acre lots in the park from an artificially low \$3,000 apiece to one approximating real market value: \$15,500.

And then the dam broke. In spite of the hefty price increase, lots in the park

started selling like hotcakes.

"There are only eight numbered lots left out of 27," Green said. "That is pretty significant considering we just started selling them (in February). It hasn't even been a year."

In addition to the numbered 1-acre lots, some additional acreage has been sold and some lots have been consolidated through a replatting process. The sales are in various stages. While some have gone through, others are pending and one is just a verbal offer at this point. But if all of them go through, it will mean a significant infusion of cash for the city.

"If I'm doing my math right, we have \$297,000 in sales completed or pending since February," Green said.

That money, he added, will go into the municipal water and sewer funds, which the city tapped to secure the \$1.5 million state loan for developing the industrial park in the first place.

Meanwhile, the city refinanced the loan a few years ago, consolidating the debt for several city projects in a new state loan with a significantly lower interest rate, according to Green.

"We're down to one payment," he said. "We made a payment in December of this year and we'll make one more in December of next year, and then we'll be done."

Will the city's investment pay off?

"I think it will in the long run," Green said. "There's still a lot of land that could be subdivided or sold off. (But) where the payoff will come is in new job creation and businesses moving into the area."

Lundbom is less restrained in his assessment.

"I think everything up there so far is going to add to the local economy," he said. "It's all good news, man."

## Looking ahead

It's not clear at this stage how soon any of the new busi-

nesses planned for the industrial park will open, but Mike Slinkard says he'll be glad to have a little more company for his business.

"Sure," he joked. "It's been basically a dog-walking park."

He said having more businesses up and running should improve the security situation at the industrial park, which can turn into something of a party spot for local teenagers at night.

Slinkard added that it's been a good location for his business, which is thriving.

HECS (an acronym for Human Energy Concealment System) produces clothing using a patented carbon fiber grid that the company says disguises and dissipates the electrical signal produced by the human body, enabling the wearer to get much closer to animals without spooking them. The firm's product line includes base layers, pants, face coverings and even wet-suits, which it sells to hunters, wildlife biologists and others who want to get up close and personal with wildlife.

While the manufacturing is done overseas (Slinkard says the U.S. lacks the necessary textile production capacity), HECS stores inventory and ships orders from its headquarters in the Grant County Airport Industrial Park.

Southwest Fourth Street, the steep, winding road that climbs up the hill from South Canyon Boulevard to the park, can get a little icy in the winter, Slinkard said, but it has never stopped the delivery vehicles that keep his business humming.

"UPS, FedEx, USPS deliver up here every day," he said, adding that semis can access the park by taking the truck route up West Bench Road from Highway 26.

"I wish more people would take a look at this business model," Slinkard said.

"A lot of people pooh-pooh (the idea of) business in a rural area because of shipping issues, but honestly they're not insurmountable. There's an awful lot of advantages to being in a rural area, especially with the things we like to do."

# Center

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heightened level of hostility and anger.

Nickel said she felt compelled to say something after hearing about the verbal abuse toward public health officials and contact tracers at the Grant County Health Department.

She said people owe Public Health Administrator Kimberly Lindsay and Health Department clinic manager Jessica Winegar an apology for the verbal tirades they and their staff have had to endure when making contact tracing calls.

"We owe her (Lindsay) an apology," Nickel said, "and I hope that people will never abuse a public health worker like her or Jessica (Winegar) at the health clinic again."

## Emergency housing

Rayme Lacey, an advocate at Heart of Grant County, said she is trying to find stable housing for people living in the shelter, but the county's housing shortage has made it difficult.

Currently, she said she is working with roughly 10 people in abusive situations. While those situations are not necessarily violent, they are still unhealthy living conditions.

"I'm extremely worried for their safety," Lacey said. "We don't have the room to house everybody, and they have no place to go, and we're juggling a lot to try and keep them safe."

As someone who experienced domestic violence for a large part of her life, Lacey said she can empathize with what her clients are going through.

Lacey came to Heart of Grant County as a client and lived in the shelter while getting back on her feet.

"When you're living in abuse, you just get torn down," Lacey said, "and you don't think much of yourself, and you don't think that you can do anything."

Lacey said that the staff at Heart of Grant County helped her believe in herself and change her mindset.

She said it is important to her to make sense of her trauma and use that experience to help someone out of theirs.

"It's hard to see a way out when you're in it," Lacey said, "and I'm passionate about letting people know that their life can change."

Lacey said both her faith and a support network within the community helped keep her going.

Before that, Lacey said she had given up all hope of having a happy life. However, she said her life turned around when she got to Heart of Grant County. She said that the organization gave her time to heal and the resources to go to Community Counseling Solutions.

Coming back from addiction, she could get into drug and alcohol programs and work with mental health counselors, she said.

It took a whole community, she said: "All of the people that I have now to use as partners to help other people get out of it."

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