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City to sponsor public meeting on dam prior to March 28 vote

Heppner City Council voted Monday to set March 15 as the date for a community-wide discussion on the proposed Willow Creek Dam.

The meeting will start at 7:30 p.m. in Heppner Elementary's multipurpose room. Council members and representatives from the Army Corps of Engineers and Federal Insurance Administration are expected to be on hand to answer any questions.

The meeting will probably be the last public forum on the Willow Creek Dam prior to March 28, when Heppner voters are scheduled to make their feelings on the subject known at the polls. In February, the council voted to authorize the public election, after Mayor Jerry Sweeney tried fruitlessly to bring the council to a vote to reaffirm support for the long-contemplated dam.

On Monday, Sweeney asked the council members to reconsider their February vote calling for the citywide poll on the dam question. The council opted to let the resolution stand. Near the end of the meeting, Councilman Cliff Green introduced a motion calling for the public meeting, stating that "we have a responsibility to give the people the information they need before the election."

Council members indicated during Monday's meeting that if Heppner voters cast against the dam, the council would withdraw support for the project.

Should the public vote against the proposal and the council, in turn, withdraw its support, "you're virtually killing the Willow Creek project," Planning Commission Chairman and Gazette-Times General Manager Terry Hager told the council. "If you decide you want it back a couple of years later, good luck."

Earlier in the meeting, Hager questioned the wisdom of leaving the question of support for the dam up to the public vote, "due to the complexity of the issue at hand." He noted that most Heppner residents had not attended public meetings on the dam in the past, and had not studied what the implications would be, should the dam be voted down.

Heppner realtor Bob Harris pointed out to the council that there were only two citizens attending Monday's meeting that did not have business before the council, demonstrating public apathy on the subject. "It's important for the people to have protection," he told the council, "and you are the people responsible to see that it's done."

Council members noted that a 1978 resolution gave city support for the dam only because it was understood that the flood plain would be eliminated. Since a sizeable portion of the city would remain in flood plain zones even with the dam, Councilman Joe Miller questioned "why build a dam if it only solves half a problem?" Councilmen Green and Ron Forrar added they were suspicious of how a Corps of Engineers map excises most of Heppner's central business district from the flood plain, in the event the dam is built.

While allowing that the dam would not remove all of Heppner from the flood plain,

Chuck Steele of the Seattle regional office of the Flood Insurance Administration said that construction of the dam would make "a world of difference" to the city.

"I don't know of a more seriously impacted community than Heppner...in Oregon or Washington," in terms of projected flood depths without the dam, Steele told the council. Steele termed the Corps of Engineers hydrology study that led to the current flood plain designations an "extremely careful analysis." Due to the sensitivity regarding Heppner's flood problems, the FIA assigned a specialist to re-check Corps data, Steele said. Thus far, the FIA study has led Steele to feel "very certain about the (Corps) data." If anything, he told the council, the Corps findings for Heppner may be "a bit conservative."

Steele outlined some of the effects that would occur, should Heppner opt to pull out from the federal Flood Insurance program. Among the effects are the fact that no federal grants or loans could be made for buildings in identified flood hazard areas through such agencies as the department of Housing and Urban Development, the Economic Development Administration, and the Small Business Administration. No federal disaster assistance would be allowed for loans for repair or reconstruction in flood hazard areas, and no federal mortgage insurance would be provided in flood hazard areas by such agencies as the Federal Housing Administration and Veterans Administration. Banks participating in the FDIC or FSLIC programs may not issue loans to finance construction in flood hazard areas. Other lending institutions may make loans for construction in such areas, but they would be unable to sell mortgages in the FNMA and GNMA secondary market.

Without the dam, which would substantially lower projected flood depths in the city, the cost of flood insurance could be prohibitive for new housing built in flood fringe areas. Flood depths of four to six feet are projected for parts of Heppner located below the confluence of Hinton and Willow creeks without the dam.

While much of the city would remain in flood plain zones even with the dam, the projected flood depths would be much lower. New construction in areas with one or two feet of projected flood depth would not likely be cost prohibitive, since several loads of fill in many cases would be all that is needed to elevate structures above the flood plain.

But, Steele noted, "when you're talking about a six-foot

flood depth, it's pretty difficult to build."

Steele told the council that Heppner is not alone in coming to grips with flood insurance regulations. More than 200 cities in Oregon are participating in the program at some level. Currently, Steele said, 88 Heppner residents have purchased flood insurance for coverage totaling some \$2.1 million. The

average premium rate in town is \$68 per year, he said.

In other developments Monday, the council gave city approval towards issuing a beer license to Richard and Jaqueline Barrett of Grand Ronde and Golda Hastings and Marcena Hastings of Brogan. The four intended to purchase the West of Willow Tavern, pending state approval of a beer license.

Concerned Parents postpone meeting

The Concerned Parents meeting scheduled for tonight, Thursday, March 8, has been postponed.

Rod Aho, publicity chairman for Concerned Parents, said Dr. Jim Monasmith, principal of Colville (Washington) High School and noted authority on school disciplinary problems will be unable to speak at the meeting as originally scheduled. A fire at Colville High School requires Dr. Monasmith's attendance there.

Aho said Concerned Parents plans to reschedule the Monasmith lecture at a later date.

Advisory committee to discuss junior high shop program

The Heppner-Lexington Advisory Committee will meet at the Junior High School Shop on Tuesday, March 13, at 7:30 p.m. The major item to be

discussed will be the occupational versatility shop program at Heppner Junior High School.

Columbia Basin announces electric rate increase

Power rate increases averaging more than 20 per cent for residential customers were unveiled this week by the Columbia Basin Electric Co-op, Inc.

Customers are not expected to see increases in their power statements until the June billing period.

Columbia Basin officials have stated that the increase in power rates is being implemented in order to keep abreast of an anticipated boost in costs charged by the co-op's supplier, the Bonneville Power Administration. Another increase is planned for next year. But, according to a letter notifying Columbia Basin customers of the 1979 increase, co-op officials stated that "there is still considerable question about the 1980 increase from BPA."

According to Columbia Basin, rates under the upcoming increase will rise about 20.1 per cent for residential customers; 4 per cent for customers in the small general service category; 35.8 per cent for large

general service; 21.3 per cent for irrigation, and 20 per cent for lighting.

Billing for residential customers will be done on a flat rate basis of a \$6 service charge plus 1.4 cents per kilowatt hour, rather than the

current block type rates.

A homeowner using 1,000 kwh of power per month can expect to pay \$20 under the new rate, as opposed to the current rate of \$16.25.

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Spring Lumberjack Show is set for April 21

Plans are well underway for the second annual Heppner Spring Lumberjack Show, according to Gary Grieb of the Morrow County Fair Committee.

This year's show will be held on April 21, starting at 1 p.m. at the Morrow County Fairgrounds.

"It was hard for us to even realize the amount of interest in this sport one year ago," Grieb said. "However, due to the size of the crowd and the large number of contestants, we will bring in additional

seating and the prize money has been increased."

New this year will be a single bucking event. Another rule change will be that the stock power saw event will be limited to Morrow County residents. Points for naming the top Morrow County contestants will be based on three events—stock power saw, the axe throw and the choker race.

Entry deadline is April 13. Entry forms may be picked up from Monte Stookey.

Rodeo dance coming March 17

The first Rodeo dance of 1979 will be held Saturday, March 17 in the Pavilion at the Fairgrounds in Heppner with the rock and roll group "Quad" providing the live music. Helping to kick off the 1979 Morrow County Rodeo activities will be the Fair & Rodeo Court, led by Queen Debra Palmer. Flanking Queen Debra are Princesses Lori Edwards of Ione and Jennifer Wenholtz of Irrigon. Debra, a sophomore at Blue Mt. Community College is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Lee Palmer—her mother Mary Ann, serves as court chaperone. Jennifer is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. John Wenholtz and the princess is a junior at Riverside High School in Boardman; and Lori is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. John Edwards and is a junior at Ione High School. The dance will last from 9 p.m. to 1 a.m. and the price of admission is \$2.50 per person.

Grand jury returns indictments in Heppner drug investigation

Thirteen indictments—12 of them secret—were filed last week with the Morrow County Circuit Court Clerk, stemming from last month's grand jury probe on drug traffic in Heppner.

The non-secret indictment charges Noel Gay Harshman Jr., 22, of Lexington with the manufacture (growing) of marijuana, between May 1, 1978 and Jan. 9, 1979, in his home in Heppner. Harshman was arrested in Oregon City on Jan. 11, after Heppner City Police, armed with a search warrant from Justice Court, allegedly discovered illegal drugs in his home. On Jan. 22, Harshman's bail was set at \$7,505, and he was released from jail after a 10 per cent security bond was posted in his behalf.

According to a statement from District Attorney Dennis Doherty's office, "the contents of the secret indictments will become public when the persons charged are arrested on the charges or are arraigned in Circuit Court. A circuit court judge is scheduled to be in Morrow County next on March 12."

The grand jury reportedly heard testimony from nearly 20 witnesses—many of them Heppner High School students—during two full days of proceedings in February. The grand jury met again on March 1 before handing down the indictments.

According to Doherty's statement, "a substantial portion" of the grand jury's proceedings was "devoted to inquiries into violations of laws relating to controlled substances. Although the grand jury has not completed its inquiries into related

matters, it had reached a point where it felt it could file the indictments found to date. I cannot be more specific than this without running the risk that any further comment could be construed as a violation of the statutory prohibition against disclosing facts concerning any indictment while it is not subject to public inspection..."

Doherty continued that "everything we have done and will do is intended to be constructive and to accomplish two things: Assure that known violations of the law are scrutinized to determine whether formal charges should be pursued; advance the cause of ensuring com-

pliance with the law to the maximum extent possible."

Information gleaned in the grand jury probe could possibly result in "some actions less formal than criminal prosecutions," Doherty stated. "These could include a broad range of alternatives, such as juvenile court proceedings, administrative proceedings within the school system, formal contacts with

parents, etcetera. The District Attorney noted that there "may not be any public body other than the grand jury with the means to conduct a reliable inquiry into a subject of broad public interest, such as the 'drug problem.' The grand jury has

the power of subpoena. It receives testimony under oath. It can compel testimony from hostile as well as non-hostile witnesses. As with any power, there can be a potential for abuse; however, so long as the grand jury's powers are exercised within reasonable constraints it has a great potential as a source of public information based upon its investigations into different matters."

But, Doherty pointed out, the grand jury's potential for public information "cannot be realized" since grand juries "are now prohibited by statute from issuing reports which provide their general findings, determinations and recommendations on such subjects."

Steep increases seen in county property tax valuations

Property owners in Morrow County can expect something extra in their property tax statements this year—a larger bill, in most cases.

County Assessor Everett Harshman told the Heppner-Morrow County Chamber of Commerce Monday that homeowners in Heppner can expect their homes to be valued at an average rate of 24 per cent higher than last year. Homes in the lower end of the value scale will experience an average increase in valuation of 28 per cent, with homes in the higher value end averaging increases of 19 per cent.

On the other side of the coin, land in farm use classifica-

tion will experience an aver-

age decrease of 10 per cent. Harshman said Morrow County's total value has not yet been computed, but it is expected to be "around \$400 million. I feel it will be a little over that, but to be on the conservative side, we'd better figure on \$400 million."

Adding to the difficulty in tabulating the county's total value is the fact that tax assessments for commercial property are being challenged by Portland General Electric, operator of the Carty coal fired power plant, the Union Pacific railroad, Pacific Power and Light and Pacific Gas Transmission.

The assessments being challenged by the corporations,

totaling some \$16 million, cannot be included among funds expected to be collected for budgetary purposes. The assessments are currently being disputed in the Oregon Supreme Court. Should the county prevail in its assessment of the firms, funds collected would go into the general fund.

County Assessor Tom McElligott blamed a "tight housing market" in Heppner for the increase in valuations for tax purposes, since the tax rate "is based on what you could sell your house for at the first of the year." The main yardstick for measuring home

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