

## Court discusses putting levy before voters

By Doris Brosnan

The Morrow County Commissioners met in a special session on August 8 for discussion of the county finances with Finance Director Lisanne Currin, Assessor Greg Sweek, and Public Works Director Burke O'Brien. Also present, Larry Mills represented the budget committee.

Currin explained a spreadsheet of road-fund revenue estimates that she projects for 2001-2002, 2002-2003 and 2003-2004. Projections included the beginning fund balances, taxes to balance, gas tax/vehicle license revenues, transfer from general fund, transfer from Finley Buttes, federal forest fees, operating loan, fund exchange, and all other revenues.

Currin also displayed the department's projected costs for personal-services increases based on union contract provisions, cost-of-living-adjustment trends, workers compensation premiums, retirement, medical and dental insurance and tax adjustments.

Another spreadsheet projected the road department materials and services, including asphalt, all other materials, capital outlay, additional road tax funds to the districts and ending fund balances. Inserted back into the figures were those for crushing. With increases in costs and decreases in revenues, the department projections are for a \$935,000 deficit.

Currin presented a similar spreadsheet for the general fund, which included adjustments to personal services, materials and services, the elimination of the transfer to the road fund, capital outlay, and ending fund balances. Sweek added that he expects tax revenues to remain "fairly flat" over the next several years because any construction is primarily in enterprise zones that delay tax revenues. Sweek added that utility taxes continue to decline.

Currin asked the court what length of levy, if they decide to request one, they will want. She pointed out that long-term levies rely on guesses of future needs, which might be over-or underestimated. Sweek pointed out that the timing of a levy expiration could be significant because it could mean voting on a new levy in a double-majority year.

Mills observed that the court must keep in mind the perspective of the voter. Currin suggested that a road-department levy is more pertinent than a general-fund levy. Commissioner Brosnan agreed and noted that the cities would benefit from additional road funds as a result of a road-department levy.

O'Brien expressed concern about having to yet make cuts even after passing a levy because it would not add back previous budget items and Mills pointed out the difficulty in justifying a levy that would include an add-back.

O'Brien further noted the importance of not leading voters to believe that the passing of a levy would result in getting more work done but, rather, that the county would be able to maintain roads in their current condition if the levy passed.

Mills asked the court for discussion of a four-year levy. Currin pointed out that such would place the county closer to the years when enterprise-zone construction will begin paying taxes. Brosnan and Mills stated preference for a four-year levy. Sweek speculated, in answer to a question from Brosnan, that if the rate were less than \$1, the net would be around \$850,000. Brosnan observed that the court could gamble on the hopes of the "Payment In Lieu of Taxes" bill passing and making up the difference.

Mills, however, pointed out that if the county levies for less than needed and the PILT bill does not pass, the county would still have to cut staff. He added, though, that he wondered about voter support for a levy that would mean a \$1.38 tax rate.

Discussion included that the forest-fee revenue will be about \$300,000 short, even with the levy, by year three; that the

county does not transfer as much from the general fund (transfer and Finley Buttes) to support the road fund; that questions can be anticipated from the north end of the county about lack of south-county growth but a need for a levy.

Commissioner Wenzholz observed the need to explain that county growth is primarily industrial that is not being taxed yet and residential growth does not provide an appreciable amount of tax growth. Sweek pointed out that even with the dairies, which are not tax exempt, the decline in utilities means very little tax benefit. Commissioner Wenzholz voiced his desire to keep a levy request under a \$1 tax rate though doubting that possibility. He stressed what a problem passing a levy and then still cutting staff would create. A general consensus was reached of asking in November for a \$1,350,000 four year road-department general-operations levy, which would net \$1,000,000 at a tax rate of \$1.38 per \$1000 (of which the cities would receive \$.26).

Mills pointed out that, if the voters support the levy, the county would not have to actually levy that amount if it turns out that it is not, in fact, needed.

The group agreed on the importance of disseminating correct information. Mills suggested convening the Road Committee for a discussion. Sweek suggested addressing the Heppner Economic Development Corporation and the Lone Community and Business Organization, as well. Brosnan suggested letters to the editor and speaking to the press. Currin said that she will put together the ballot question and file it with the county clerk.

The question of consequences should a road-department levy fail was visited. Noted was expected anger of voters if deputies had to be laid off and other cuts made. Brosnan pointed out that going on the next March ballot would create competition against the children in the school bond election. Tallman observed that going in March would also mean the need for a double majority.

As the meeting ended, the court planned to meet with the road committee and invite the budget committee to attend.

The county court met at its regularly scheduled meeting on August 9. Heppner City Manager Jerry Breazeale appeared at the meeting to request funding in support of the city's request for a RARE student. The program involves qualified graduate students seeking experience by working for rural communities. The cost is \$15,000 for a year, and the student would be requested to market the Willow Creek Valley, including the development of a web-based brochure. The city has one scheduled interview for the position; the city will provide office space and a computer. Lone is supportive and has offered to help with funding. The Port of Morrow will be discussing whether or not it will contribute, and the city of Heppner has the item in its budget. In answer to a question, Breazeale noted that this project is high on the city's list of priorities. Commissioner Brosnan explained that SCERT money is considerably less than originally anticipated, and Commissioner Wenzholz described the decision-making process on the awarding of the tippage-fee money. Breazeale shared his concern that without industry back in the county, the county will not be able to build the tax base and make local communities healthy, but use of this one-year program could have far-reaching results with a minimal amount of investment.

The court explained that they will be reviewing all funding requests next week. Planning Director Tamra Mabbott and Emergency Management Director Casey Beard discussed with the court various issues regarding the Army depot. They shared a draft letter to Governor Kitzhaber requesting his support of safety and statutory concerns regarding the storage of chemical weapons

at the depot. The court agreed to signing the letter to the governor addressing perimeter monitoring of K-block, filtration of igloo vents, remotely monitored smoke detectors, strapping of munitions pallets, inspection of suppression devices, and refrigeration of mustard-storage sheds.

Mabbott offered a handout regarding the secondary waste "Integrated Process Team." She continues to emphasize to the Army the county's strong desire to participate in the team but says she only gets "blank stares." Judge Tallman noted that getting information from the group seems nearly impossible and no one at the national CSEPP conference had an answer to the question of exclusion. Mabbott has been told that no non-stockpile chemicals are to be transported to this facility.

Regarding alternate technology for secondary waste, Commissioner Brosnan reported being told that none have yet been proven, but Mabbott added that two have been used at Tooele and Johnson Atoll. Brosnan voiced concern that the Army raised the issue of not building a dun incinerator, though it has not addressed the storage and treatment issues of that secondary waste. Tallman reported that the commissioners in Utah do not seem troubled by the risk-assessment process, which Beard suggested would offer the permittee the answers they want. Mabbott pointed out that Utah is being paid for storage and that Tooele is not a site that is scheduled for re-use after cleanup, as is the Umatilla site.

Discussing the question of a states impact aid coalition, which some states are choosing to join but others are opting not to join, the court agreed to leave the option open until they meet with the Umatilla County Court. Brosnan stated that the county does not have the \$36,000 for participation this year, or \$24,000 per year thereafter. Wenzholz pointed out that Umatilla seems to favor participation, which would split that amount.

Morrow County Health Director Kelly Sager presented and the court approved a request for his participation in a management course, the cost of which will be covered by the behavioral health budget.

Sager reported a meeting with Judge Reynolds of Grant County about the mental health program services in that county. A discussion focused on what a contract would mean to the Morrow County program and to Sager because of the time contracted, what the legal ramifications could be, what the state tax-related ballot measures could mean to the behavioral health department. Commissioners Brosnan and Wenzholz agreed on the need to speak to the Grant County Court, though Sager will proceed with presenting them the contract.

Public Works Director Burke O'Brien reported that the crew had patched dust blowouts on Strawberry, Juniper, and Emigrant roads, had repaired a five-foot deep sink hole in Patterson Ferry, had asphalt-patched the Lone-Boardman and Baker roads; had painted on Patterson Ferry, Baseline, Willow Creek and Bombing Range roads. O'Brien reported traffic counters on Wilson Road and Patterson Ferry. Wilson Road shoulder work must wait briefly, shoulder rock was pulled on Columbia and Patterson Ferry needs only some cleanup work. The company using Hale Ridge assured O'Brien that the rock work would be done this week, compacted and completed correctly.

O'Brien and the court discussed County Line Road, which has been returned to gravel from asphalt. At issue is the question of maintenance responsibility, as no agreement exists between Umatilla and Morrow counties, and the need to notify residents of such work before it is undertaken.

O'Brien presented and the court approved a policy for dealing with repair and maintenance of

county vehicles: that the mechanics in the road shop perform repairs and maintenance on all departments' vehicles except the newer and well-maintained ones of the sheriff's office.

Other business before the court included the following:

- approval of the fair secretary temporarily exceeding the compensatory time;
- approval of county treasurer Gayle Gutierrez's renewal of the order allowing investment of the county's funds;
- approval of a permit for the city of Lone to cross Gooseberry Road for water lines;
- agreement to open bids next week for county fuel and oil supplies;
- approval of changing a road department job title from "Office Manager" to "Office Support Specialist";
- appointment of commissioner Brosnan as contract performance manager for the courthouse painting and annex roofing;
- reappointment of Joe Yocom, Allen Holmes, and Kelwayne Haguewood to the Fair Board;
- approval of a resolution establishing a policy for the use of Rhea Creek Road;
- appointment of commissioner Wenzholz to the CREPT Board;
- authorization for a claim against a company for damages to McNab Road.

## Lindy Gravelle to perform

The Heppner Elks Club welcomes back singer and Heppner native Lindy Gravelle to Heppner on Saturday, August 19, at 9 p.m.

Lindy grew up in Heppner. "It was cowboys and ranchers, and the big deal of the year was the rodeo," she says. Her parents owned Heppner's popular Wagon Wheel Cafe. For entertainment at the Wagon Wheel, Lindy's father led her brothers and sisters in a country and western band. Lindy made her debut as a performer at the age of three, when her father brought her onstage for a nightly solo. She fell in love with the music.

In 1985, Lindy made the move to Nashville, TN. Marsha Thornton's single and video of Lindy's composition, "A bottle of wine and Patsy Cline," became a regular play on CMT. Lindy herself became a fixture on the Nashville club circuit.

As the millennium turned, Lindy's thoughts turned as well, to her roots in the northwest, and she decided it was time to return back to her Oregon roots.

Lindy will have CDs and tapes on sale featuring her latest releases.

## W.C.C.C. Golf

WCCC Ladies' Play  
Tuesday, August 8  
Low gross of the field: Shari Stahl.

Low net of the field: Betty Christman.

Least putts of the field: Carol Norris.

Flight A: low gross Lois Hunt; low net Pat Anderson; least putts Lynnea Sargent; long drive Shari Stahl.

Flight B: low gross Bernice Lott; low net Della Heideman; long drive Betty Christman.

Flight C: low gross Jackie Allstott; low net Barbara Gilbert; least putts Dorris Graves; long drive Jackie Allstott.

Chip in: Bernice Lott #9.  
Long putt: Carol Norris #5

FAX PAPER  
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## Bibby's home yard of the month



Lyn Bibby (left) and her daughter, Carolyn Wiley, earn the yard of the month award for August.

The yard of Lyn Bibby, 220 W. Baltimore in Heppner, has been selected as the Heppner Garden Club Yard of the Month for August.

Lyn moved into her home when she and her husband, Luke, were married in 1977. At the time, there wasn't much in the yard, but Luke, who has since passed away, liked roses. Lyn told him that if he dug up the yard, she would take care of the roses.

"I've really enjoyed the roses,

although they were really Luke's," said Lyn. "When you have a yard, you really have to baby it."

Lyn's daughter, Carolyn Wiley, who lives with her, now helps her mother take care of the yard.

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on Friday, September 1, from 2-4 p.m.  
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No gifts, please!

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Liz Love, Heppner - painted furniture, decorative items, portraits and animals in oil  
Sheila Piper, Heppner - landscapes in oils

**Morrow County history books are available.**  
Used editions of *Homesteads and Heritages*,  
*History of Morrow County (1983)*, and  
*Bunchgrassers, Shamrocks and Shepherds*

DrySide will search for used and out-of-print books.  
No charge until book is found.