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Gazette Times

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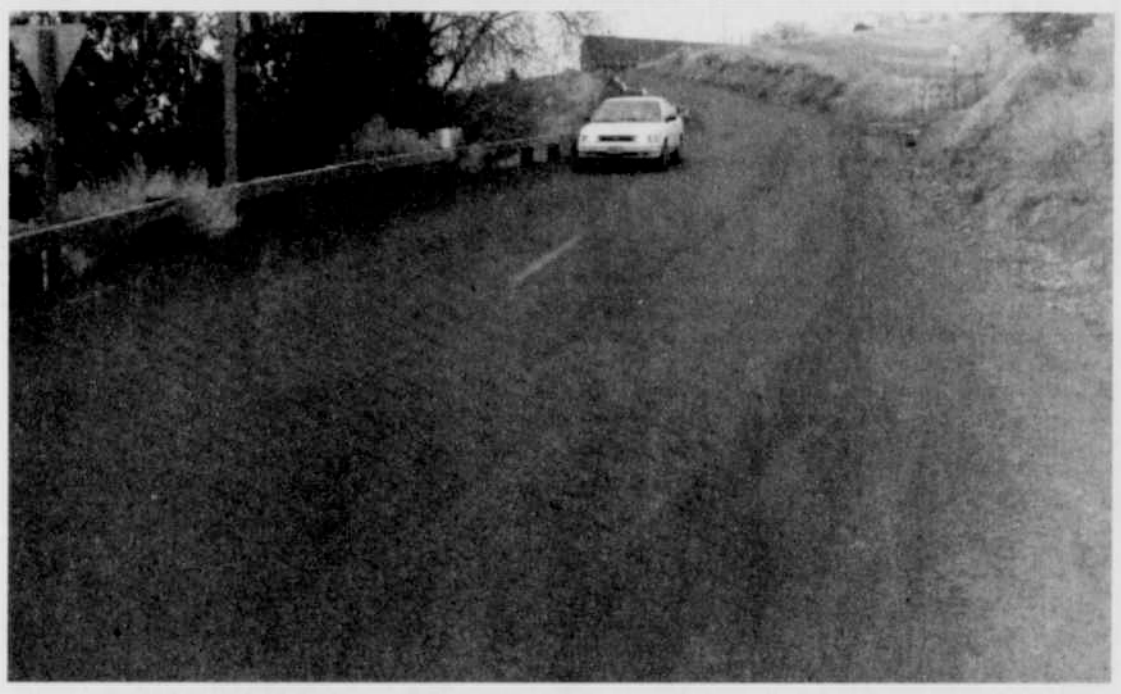
City says 'no' to ownership of three county roads

Heppner city council heard concerns about safety of Spruce Lane



Safety and water runoff issues voiced about road leading up to the High School in Heppner

The city of Heppner decided Monday not to take over ownership of three county roads outside the Heppner city limits.

Morrow County officials had told the city council last month that a verbal agreement between the former city manger and then mayor Bob Jepsen had committed the city to taking ownership of portions of Riverside, Fuller Canyon and all of Spruce Lane. Subsequently the city voted to hold a public hearing on assuming ownership of the streets.

County Judge Terry Tallman and Road Department boss Burke O'Brien came to last month's council meeting and said there was a verbal agreement for the city to take over these roads in exchange for work the county did on Riverside during the city's recent water renovation project.

Monday night both Jerry Breazeale, former city administrator, and Bob Jepsen, former Mayor, attended the council meeting and said they did not recall any such agreement. Jepsen said he did not attend any of the meetings were the agreement was suppose to have taken place, and Breazeale said that he had not agreed the city should take ownership of all three streets in exchange for the county's work on Riverside.

City council member Glenn Baker asked the two: "Did either of you indicate the city's intention to take on these roads." Breazeale said he had agreed only to some maintenance duties and that the city take over ownership of Riverside if it were brought up to city standards. Jepsen said he was upset over what was being said because he "wasn't at any of the meetings."

Spruce Lane, leading up to the high school, was the road most discussed by the council Monday. Dick Sargent, who lives at the bottom of Spruce Lane, attended the public hearing and told the council he is worried an accident is going to happen there.

He related a story of watching a school bus slide down the hill on an icy day. "The road is not wide enough," he told the council. "There is no safety with the guard rail. A bus came back down there backwards one time. It scared me to death when that happened."

Sargent said the asphalt on Spruce Lane is wasting away and there is a water problem coming down the hill. A culvert at the top of the hill that had diverted water across the road and down the opposite hill has been intentionally plugged up and the water is running down the side of Spruce Lane causing erosion problems, he said.

City Attorney Anne Spicer told the council that Spruce Lane is "scary"; saying she herself has slid down the road.

After much discussion councilmember George Koffler offered a compromise and made a motion for the city to accept ownership of the three roads with a deed restriction for the county to do all maintenance over $2,500. That motion went down with a 2-4 no vote. The council then voted 4-2 in favor of declining to accept ownership of the roads from the county.

"There has always been that question. Did we agree or not," said Mayor Tim VanCleave.

In other action at the meeting, the council heard from two log truck drivers in town, Gary Ball and James Rollis, who asked to be excused from a city ordinance that prohibits large trucks from driving on residential streets. The council agreed to consider changing the ordinance to allow trucks on residential streets.

"I have been parking my truck in front of my house for 31 years," Rollis said. "The school (grade school near his home) furnace makes more noise than my truck."

"We are just trying to make a living," Ball told the council.

The issue came to the council because of a complaint from a neighbor.

The council also discussed the tougher enforcement of traffic laws now going on in the city. More moving vehicle citations such as running stop signs have been issued recently and some residents have complained.

"I am glad there is a step up in activity," said council member Glenn Baker, who has been pushing for stricter enforcement. Baker wrote a letter to the Gazette-Times several weeks ago pointing out dangerous driving in residential streets around Heppner.

In other business, the council accepted a bid for $8,000 to repair the roof at the St. Patrick's Senior Center. The bid was lower than the city had expected and much lower that two other bids which were received.

The council also heard that there are now five vacancies at the Senior Center and that Kathy Turner had been hired as the new manager.

Groundbreaking for new Boardman six classroom addition imminent

Morrow County School District Superintendent Mark Burrows told the board, at their regular meeting at Sam Boardman Elementary School Monday night, that groundbreaking for the proposed six-classroom addition to Windy River Elementary School in Boardman will occur just as soon as the district is able to obtain building permits for the project. District Assistant Superintendent Wade Smith said that the estimated cost for the project is down to $695,895 from $725,000.

Burrows also told the board that the issues between the district and the city of Irrigon concerning the sewer system hookup for the district's new Professional Technical Education building in Irrigon and Irrigon Elementary School has been resolved. Burrows said that the city of Irrigon and the district agreed on a $27,938 fee for the hookup, a much lower figure than the initial $60,000 estimate. Burrows said that the new building is now ready for a "walk through."

The PTE building will include a shop, classroom for shop and ag classes, a weight room and a multipurpose room.

Borrows also told the board that the district plans to offer advanced placement classes through Blue Mountain Community College at the school district office in Lexington on Friday mornings. He said the district will run buses to transport students to the program. The classes are open to any student with a teacher's recommendation.

Ron Anthony

Burrows said that the district also plans to offer the program to students in the Ione School District also. The district will send information to students and parents.

Also at the meeting, Irrigon Jr./Sr. High School Principal Ron Anthony was recognized for being named principal of the year by the Oregon Middle Levels Association. Anthony, who was nominated by a staff member, will receive his award at a presentation in Newport on March 10.

In other business, the board:

-postponed action on numerous policy changes until a work session planned for 6 p.m., prior to the next board meeting Monday, March 13, at the district office.

-discussed the upcoming Bridges Project community meetings designed to garner input from the public as to how the district is doing in educating children, what the district is doing well and suggestions for improvement. The first meeting is scheduled for Thursday, Feb. 23, beginning at 7 p.m. in the Heppner Elementary School library. The district is seeking information from a broad spectrum including parents, educators, business people, community members and students. A Boardman area meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, Feb. 28, at 7 p.m.

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Grace announces he won't run for re-election

Morrow County Commissioner Ray Grace has announced that he will not run for re-election. (See letters to the editor.) Grace has served as Commissioner since 2002.

Burns to run for Commissioner

Loyal Burns, Jr., of Ione, has filed for the position of Morrow County Commissioner Position #2, said Morrow County Clerk Bobbi Childers. The primary will be held May 16.

Heppner teams head to district

The Heppner Mustang varsity boys and girls will be playing in the district tournament held in Pendleton, Friday, Feb. 17. Both teams placed fifth in the Columbia Basin Conference. The girls will play at 6 p.m. and the boys will play at 7:30 p.m. If they win, they will play the following day, with the girls at 1 p.m. and the boys at 2:30 p.m.

Ione teams head to district

The Ione Cardinals varsity boys and girls will be playing in the Big Sky Conference district tournament held in Umatilla, Thursday, Feb. 16. The girls will play at 3 p.m. and the boys will play at 4:30 p.m.

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