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HEPPNER Gazette Times

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Cities file signatures for tippage money vote

Unable to reach an agreement with the county court over redistribution of close to $1 million in tippage fee money, five cities followed through on a promise Tuesday and filed signatures with the county clerk that would force a county-wide vote on the issue.

A last minute attempt at a December 4 meeting to reach a compromise and avoid a vote was not successful and the cities followed through on their promise to take the issue to the voters.

Mayors and city managers gather at the Morrow County Clerks office Tuesday morning to turn in signature petitions placing an ordinance on the ballot that, if passed, would redistribute tippage money from the Morrow County general fund to individual cities in the county.
Left to right are Irrigon Mayor Charles Neumann, Ione city recorder Gayle Eynetich, Heppner Mayor Les Paustian, Boardman Mayor Ed Glenn, Irrigon City Manager Gerald Breazeale and County Clerk Bobbi Childers.
If the signatures are validated, the ordinance would be on a county-wide ballot in March.

County Clerk Bobbie Childers took the petitions and said 187 verified signatures are required to put the measure on the ballot. The cities said they turned in about 268 signatures. If verified a measure eventually giving cities up to 75 percent of the $1 million tippage money would be on the March ballot.

Heppner, Ione, Lexington, Irrigon and Boardman joined together in January, 2007 to demand that the county turn over the majority of the tippage money generated by the Finley Buttes landfill. The funds, which come from fees levied on each ton of garbage dumped average about $80,000 per month and currently go directly into the county general fund. The cities say it isn't fair, they could do a better job of spending the money and that they should get the majority of the funds.

In February the Morrow County court again turned down a demand by the cities that the money allocation be changed. The cities had threatened at that time to take the issue to the voters if the county declined their demands. They followed through on that threat Tuesday morning by filing signatures to put a measure on the ballot titled "An ordinance requiring distribution of landfill fees to cities/towns".

If approved by voters beginning in fiscal year 2008-2009 the ordinance would require the county to give up 25 percent of the tippage fees to cities. In 2009-2010 that would jump to 50 percent and 2010-2011 it would top out at 75 percent.

The ordinance stipulates that the cities portion will be divided in half, with one half the funds divided equally among the cities, and the other half divided according to population.

At a final December 4 meeting the cities presented the county court with an intergovernmental agreement and letter seeking a compromise to avoid a ballot measure and vote. The county opted at that time to "leave things as they are."

"I'm forwarding this draft at this time so that you may have an opportunity to study it and prepare such counterproposals as you may desire prior to our meeting on December 4," wrote Ed Glenn Mayor of Boardman and spokesman for the cities group. "May I reiterate that the Mayors and Managers would very much prefer an agreeable Intergovernmental Agreement to a divisive initiative election. We intend to re-

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City gears up for Sr. Center work

The Heppner Housing Authority is gearing up to spend the $861,509 in grants and $290,000 in low interest refinancing recently awarded for renovation of the St. Patrick Senior Center, it was announced at Monday's City Council meeting.

Architects were recently in Heppner going through the center, and six members of the community are preparing to go to Salem for special training in administrating the grant.

The grants were good news for the center, which has 19 senior citizens apartments and a dining and meeting area on the ground floor. In the past the center has wrestled with increased expenses and not wanting to raise rents too high.

The funding will allow the center to upgrade the living quarters with weatherization, new cabinets, appliances, windows and other improvements. The refinancing will reduce the city's debt interest on loans on the St. Center to about 2 percent for 20 years.

Tenants in the building will be rotated among rooms to accommodate the upcoming renovations.

In other business at the council meeting an update was given on the current upgrade at the city sewer plant. Public Works Director Brian Harmon said parts are on order to start repairs including a $66,000 auger monster and a 100 KW Cat Diesel generator at $33,650. The city also announced that it had been fined $3,500 for high bacteria counts in effluent wastewater on May 22 and August 22, 2007. The city is working with DEQ to try and get the fine reduced.

The council also heard from Ryan Miller of Miller & Sons which recently purchased the Heppner Garbage service.

Miller announced there would be some changes in the garbage collection service, including slight adjustments in billing amounts and frequency of billing. Home owners are also being asked to move cans to the curb on collection day, or they can leave cans where they are and pay an extra fee each month. City employees have reported fewer complaints since Miller took over the collection service. Miller is considering placing a couple of payment boxes around town where people can pay their garbage collection bills.

The council heard an audit report from Rick Stoddard CPA from Barnett & Moro, P.C. Stoddard said

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New city manager on the job

Interim city manager Steve Bogart attended his first council meeting Monday night, replacing Dave DeMayo who was called to active duty with the U.S. Army.

Bogart, 56, has quite a bit of government experience including 12 years as a Baker County Commissioner, two years as Vale city manager, and three years as Madras city manager. He was Baker city manager for 14 months, Baker county judge and also served on other state-wide boards.

Bogart's wife's name is Connie and she works for a law firm in Baker City. They have three grown children.

Steve Bogart

DeMayo was called up to active duty with the Army and is currently in Fort Benning undergoing a two week training to prepare him for a tour in Iraq. He will reportedly be stationed in Bagdad as an analyst fore the Army Corps of Engineers. He is expected to be off the job for at least one year.

Ione School Dist personnel allegations unsubstantiated, says investigator

Michael Lasher, chief operations officer and human resources director with the Umatilla-Morrow Educations Service District, told the Ione School Board following a school board executive session December 4 that allegations against Ione district personnel are "unsubstantiated."

Lasher said that ESD hired Jim Reger, a "respected administrator" to conduct a third-party investigation.

The Ione School District did not reveal the specifics of the investigation.

With regard to another issue involving an assistant coach, Lasher issued the following statement, "Brandi Heideman is no longer the (Ione) assistant girls' basketball coach. The board would like to thank her for her service. The decision to relieve her of her duties is not based on her performance."

ALL NEWS AND ADVERTISEMENT DEADLINE:
MONDAYS AT 5:00 P.M.

School superintendent upset over Oregonian story

Morrow County School District Superintendent Mark Burrows told the board and assembled audience at the district's regular meeting at Irrigon Elementary School Monday night, that a story in the Oregonian was incorrect and the reporters didn't bother to check their facts.

Burrows said that the article implied that the school district rejected federal monies in order to skirt the federal No Child Left Behind requirements and "escape consequences for low achievement," according to the article. However, said Burrows, Morrow County School District is still receiving federal Title I monies, but directs the funds to elementary level programs. Columbia Middle School in Irrigon, for example, had received federal funding because it included sixth graders, but when it was transformed into Irrigon Junior-Senior High School, the school educated ninth through 12th graders.

Burrows said that the Irrigon school rated "strong" on the state school report card but did not achieve the average yearly progress standards.

In other business, the board:

-heard from Burrows concerning the large financial impact on the district of students' absence of more than 10 days. Burrows said that after 10 days' absence, according to requirements, students must be dropped from the rolls. Burrows said that for each day lost, the district loses $40 per day in state reimbursement. For example, if a student is absent for 20 days, as often occurs when some families spend extended time in Mexico for the holidays, the district loses $800 per student. In some previous years the district has tried to lessen the impact by extending the holiday break. Board member Bill Kuhn suggested that the problem could be resolved at the legislative level.

-approved an expanded options program for juniors and seniors to earn "concurrent high school and college credits and to gain early entry into post-secondary education."

-heard a presentation from Irrigon High School and Riverside High School FFA students concerning their trip to the National FFA convention.

-approved an attendance variance for a student from the Hermiston School District to attend school in the MCSD.

-adopted a 2008-09 budget calendar with budgets due from buildings and departments March 7; publication of notice of budget meeting April 9; second notice of budget meeting April 16; distribution of budget document to committee April 23; first budget meeting and budget message May 5; second budget meeting if needed May 12 with additional meeting dates to be set by committee, if needed; deadline for budget approval May 19; publication of notice of budget hearing May 28; budget hearing, adoption of budget and appropriations made June 9; beginning of 2008-09 fiscal year July 1, deadline to certify levy to assessor July 15.

-accepted the following resignations: Kim Marlow, Irrigon Elementary School special ed one-on-one assistant; Erin Iveson, A.C. Houghton Elementary School special ed one-on-one assistant; Adrienne Lorraine, A.C. Houghton Elementary School half-time music teacher, effective December 20; Mary Gressley-Grow, retirement from Sam Boardman Elementary

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