

County votes down proposed gravel fee

Large crowd attends public hearing

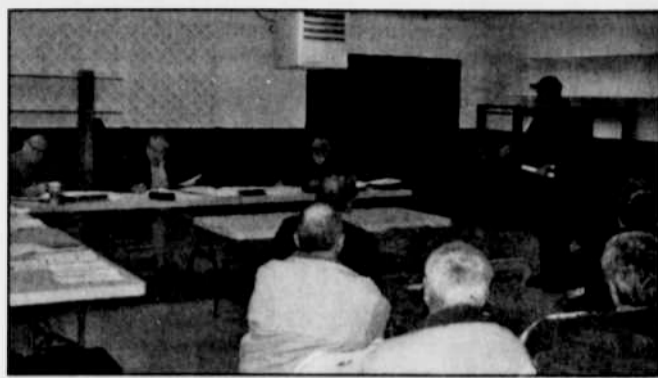
By David Sykes

There will be no 25-cents-per-ton fee—or tax, depending on various

interpretations—imposed on gravel mined inside the county and shipped out of the county, the Morrow County Court ruled last Wednesday.

Because of the expected large crowd for the public hearing on the controversial proposal, the court met at the fairgrounds. About 40 people from all areas of the county showed up for the advertised public hearing.

Sixteen people, including gravel producers, Port of Morrow members and citizens testified about the proposed fee, and all were opposed. County budget committee members had come up with the fee at one of its meetings last April as a way to raise needed revenue for the county. Budget committee member Larry Mills of Heppner wrote a letter of support for the fee, saying the revenue “will help the county maintain needed county services from the road department to the county health department.” Mills also said that county revenues have been flat or on a downturn for the past two years and he expected even less income next year. Mills also said he didn’t expect the fee to harm or impose a burden



Joe Miller (standing right) of Miller and Sons Excavation in Heppner testifies at a public hearing last Wednesday on a proposed gravel tax before the Morrow County Court. (R-L) Leann Rea, Terry Tallman and Ken Grieb. —Photo by David Sykes

on any county business selling gravel outside the county. Estimates on how much money the fee would raise ranged from \$150,000 to more than \$200,000 per year.

Several producers and shippers located in the county disagreed.

“This is a job killer,” said Ryan Miller of Miller and Sons Excavation in Heppner. Miller said the 25 cents is unreasonable and that it was time for the county to look for ways to make cut-backs than to look for new taxes.

Debra and Wade Aylett, owners of Rock Solid Sand and Gravel in Irrigon, said the fee would put their business at a great disadvantage when bidding

against companies in other counties who would not have to pay the fee.

“Our quarry would not be able to compete cost-wise with aggregate companies in Umatilla County who are not subject to such a fee,” Debra Aylett said in a letter of opposition.

Whether or not the 25 cents was a fee or a tax was also debated. If it was, in fact, a tax then it would have to go before a vote of the people before it was enacted. A simple fee only has to be approved by a majority of the three member county court.

“Is this a fee, or is it a tax?” Port of Morrow Manager Gary Neal asked. —See GRAVEL FEE/PAGE FIVE

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Gazette Times

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Scrap-a-saurs a “family project” for creators

By Andrea Di Salvo

Dinosaurs haven’t roamed Eastern Oregon for millions of years...or have they?

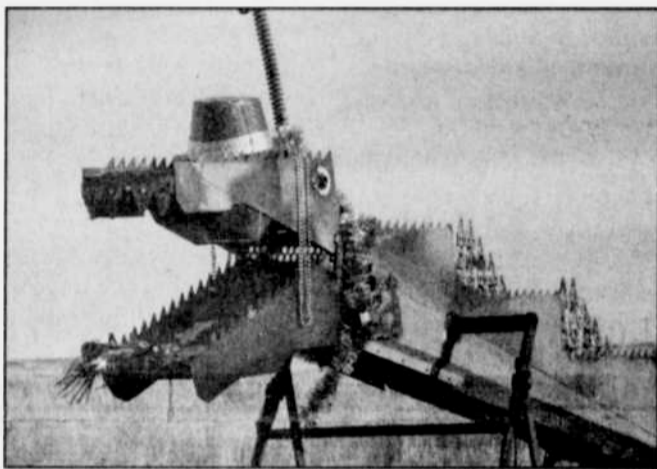
The North Lex scrap-a-saurus and its new pal have become familiar sights for the residents of South Morrow, both through their rising publicity and at their home off Highway 207.

The two scrap-a-saurs—built, as the name implies, of machine scraps—are the handiwork of Chris Rauch and his family. Rauch says each scrap-a-saurus took about a day and a half to create. The prehistoric creations are made mostly of combine and drill parts, combined with other odds and ends the Rauchs found lying around. Most of the fabrication was done by welding, though he says they had to cut some pieces to fit.

As for the inspiration behind the project, Rauch said it was something of a long-time dream.

“It was something Dad and I talked about years ago. He liked building things like that,” says Rauch. “We never got it done before he passed away. Then I talked to my son about the idea, and we got together and did one.”

Rauch and his son, 21-year-old Andre Rauch, built the original scrap-a-saurus and placed it at the newly-redesigned intersection of Highway 207 and Bombing Range Road in November of 2010. A few sharp eyes may have noticed it holding a Heppner Mustang flag, but it received little attention for the next several months. Even



The North Lex scrap-a-saurus and pal (pictured) have become familiar fixtures along Highway 207. Rumor has it another may be popping up next summer, but sources won’t confirm whether this is because the existing pair are more than “just friends” or whether a new species may emerge. —Photo by David Sykes.

the spotlight the Rauch family placed so it could be seen at night was stolen shortly after it was put up.

Then, as the 2011 holiday season approached, the lonely Scrap-a-saurus took on a more festive appearance. Rauch says the decorations are a mystery to him.

“We are not the ones who are decorating them. We are not sure who is,” Rauch says. “I have heard about a couple of people doing it, and we saw another lady decorating but did not get a good look at who it was.”

His best guess? A group effort by others who want to enter into the fun.

Rauch says he had been thinking of creating a second scrap-a-saurus ever since they finished the first. When Andre and 17-year-old daughter, Natalie Rauch, were on Christmas break, the three went to work on a pal for their first creation. Andre helped with the cutting, welding and assembly, as he had with the first scrap-a-saurus. Nata-

lie, Rauch says, provided hands-on help as well as an eye for detail and design.

“Natalie thinks less is more and I think more is more,” says Rauch.

Shortly after the family finished their second creation, the decoration elves celebrated the occasion by decking out the pair in New Year’s hats, noise-makers and beads.

Rauch says another scrap-a-saurus may pop up sometime between now and next fall, but says it will probably wait until the kids are on school break. With Natalie attending Heppner High and Andre in Seville, Spain on a six-month University of Oregon program, Rauch doesn’t feel like continuing on his own.

“It is kind of becoming a family project,” he says.

That said, Rauch admits that he doesn’t have total control over the process.

“You never know with a scrap-a-saurus,” says Rauch. “They do have minds of their own.”

Superintendent recommends new school levy

By April Sykes

Morrow County School Superintendent Dirk Dirksen told the board, at their regular meeting at Heppner Elementary Monday night, that he is recommending putting a new district levy before the voters on the May ballot.

Dirksen said he believes a five-year levy would be more beneficial for the district than the previous three-year levy. He also said that the district’s “new normal” budget would be more in the neighborhood of \$5.7 million, rather than the “old normal” of \$6.2-\$6.3 million, mostly likely due to funding constraints.

The board also learned that an anti-bullying workshop, including a presentation for parents and the general public and led by award-winning children’s author and advocate, Trudy

Ludwig, has been planned for Feb. 2-3 at Windy River and Sam Boardman elementary schools in Boardman.

In other business, the board:

—learned from Dirksen that a school health program training and PowerPoint presentation concerning age-appropriate sex education at the sixth-grade level has been planned on Jan. 23. Dirksen said that the board and community are invited to attend the meeting set from 6-8 p.m. at the district office in Lexington.

—enjoyed listening to the Heppner Elementary School choir sing the National Anthem, under the direction of teacher Michelle Stone, dispensing with the usual Pledge of Allegiance.

—learned from Dirksen that a “Gear-Up” job position has been posted,

with interviews tentatively scheduled for January 27. The federally funded Gear-Up program, aimed at students in Boardman and Irrigon, was designed to give students an extra boost in becoming college-ready.

—heard from Dirksen about the district’s intent to refinance the district’s bond. A refinance could save the district up to \$60,000 over several years, he said.

—learned that the district’s fleet of cars is experiencing difficulty, with head gaskets in three of the vehicles going out in the last six months. Dirksen said that the district bought two Ford Focuses and is looking at the purchase of additional vehicles, along with a Dodge Caravan, which would be used instead of the district’s larger

—See SCHOOL LEVY/PAGE SIX

City considers contract renewal with sheriff’s office

By David Sykes

The city of Heppner is entering negotiations with the Morrow County Sheriff’s Department in anticipation of extending its contract for police services into the new year.

Morrow County Sheriff Ken Matlack was on hand at Monday’s council meeting to go over some of the details of the new contract, saying most everything would stay the same except the cost, which was expected to increase by about \$3,800 but could be more depending on labor negotiations, Matlack said.

“We don’t expect it

to be a lot, but it’s going to be something,” he told the council.

Matlack estimated it would cost the city \$185,083 for one year’s worth of police coverage in the new year, but that this could change depending on how the union negotiations with officers goes. He said he would not know the exact amount for another couple of months. The agreement would run from July 1, 2012 until June 30, 2013.

In preparation of extending the yearly contract, the council plans to hold a public meeting Jan.

24 to which people can come and discuss Heppner police service. Matlack said he would be in attendance to answer questions at the 6-7 p.m. city hall meeting.

Matlack did ask the council that if they were not planning on renewing the contract, and instead set up their own police force once again, that the city give him so notice so he could make adjustments in his department. If the city decided not to renew, according to the contract, the county would be required to give the city two functioning police

—See SHERIFF CONTRACT RENEWAL/PAGE SIX

Town & Country schedule

January 12 Town and Country events are as follows:

10 a.m.: Morrow Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) annual meeting, St. Patrick’s parish hall in Heppner.

12:15 p.m.: Morrow SWCD and Morrow County Livestock Growers (MCLG) lunch, St. Patrick’s parish hall in Heppner.

1 p.m.: Morrow SWCD and MCLG 24th annual joint program, St. Patrick’s parish hall in Heppner.

3:30 p.m.: MCLG annual meeting scheduled to start following joint program, St. Patrick’s parish hall in Heppner.

6 p.m.: Heppner Chamber of Commerce’s annual Town and Country awards begins with a no-host social hour served by Bucknum’s, Morrow County Fairgrounds.

6:30 p.m.: Dinner buffet catered by Pudding on the Ritz, with awards to follow, Morrow County Fairgrounds.

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