

HEPPNER

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Compensation committee recommends no change to treasurer's salary

By David Sykes

The Morrow County compensation committee voted to recommend no major changes to the county treasurer's salary at a meeting last week. The committee was holding its annual meeting to discuss all the county's elected official's salaries, but particular attention was being given to the treasurer since the county commissioners had requested a review with possible cuts up to 75 percent.

Commissioners earlier said they asked for the salary review because the position may have been part-time and drawing a full-time salary for many years. Commissioners said twenty-five years ago tax collection was taken out of the treasurer's office and done elsewhere, and at that time the position may have become only a part-time job. Commissioners also said they thought now was a good time to make any salary changes prior to the election, and that they had "heard" long-time treasurer Gayle Gutierrez was going to retire and not run for reelection. The commissioners had first asked the budget committee to consider cutting the treasurer

salary, but they voted not to make any changes and sent it on to the compensation committee for review.

After the commissioner's decided to start a review of her salary Gutierrez announced she was withdrawing from the upcoming race. She said after 23 years and six elections her disputes with the commissioners over the past three years have made her no longer want to be treasurer. "I have really enjoyed working in the treasurer's position until the last three years. In those three years, I feel I have been subjected to passive/aggressive behavior and bullying. My mental and physical health is more important than any job," she said in a statement. Gutierrez did not know why the commission thought she was retiring, as she had never officially informed them she would not run for re-election. Also because of the proposed salary cut, a second person who had filed to run for treasurer also pulled out of the race, citing uncertainty about what the salary would be. Since then, Sabrina L Bailey Cave has filed to run.

In other action at the meeting the compensation committee voted to rec-

ommend a three percent cost of living increase to all elected officials except for the assessor, who they recommended receive a total 10 percent pay increase for the coming year. The committee thought the increased workload and complexity of taxing all the new businesses and industry coming into the county warranted a raise.

The current annual salaries without any potential raises applied are commissioners \$51,000, assessor \$83,052, treasurer \$72,648, clerk \$72,648, justice of the peace \$75,000 and sheriff \$104,112. This does not include any benefits, which as an example in the case of the treasurer, brings that total compensation package to \$127,152 for the current year.

The compensation committee, which is made up of five citizens appointed mostly from the private sector, does not set salaries for elected officials but only makes recommendations. Their recommendations then go on to the budget committee for consideration, and then finally on to the county commissioners who have final say over salaries and the entire budget.

Navy says no to predator control, grazing

Bombing range is prime habitat for coyotes

By David Sykes

The United States Navy says it will not allow predator control or livestock grazing on its 47,000-acre bombing range property located in northern Morrow County, the county commission announced at its February 12 meeting. The Commissioners had earlier met with Navy representatives Sept. 17 to discuss several long-simmering issues concerning the Navy's management of its large track of land inside the county. "They listened to us, but said no to our requests," Commissioner Don Russell said. Three main areas of concern were discussed including coyote control and weed and fire control.

About the coyotes, the bombing range is prime habitat and they have been crossing over onto private ranches and killing and harassing livestock. It is a large unoccupied tract of land and predators use the land to escape humans. It is also used as a denning area for coyotes raising pups. The pups will disperse to adjacent properties once they come of age and then travel long distances to hunt and cross over to ad-

acent properties. Wildlife Services said last winter on properties close to the Bombing Range there were 13 calves killed by coyotes on four different ranches. Most of the losses were reported north of the range on the outskirts of Boardman. Wildlife Services says it took out 32 coyotes at that time.

The county has a contract with Wildlife Services for predator control at \$60,000 per year and last year in a letter to the Navy had asked to let hunters onto the Bombing Range to reduce the coyote population. The commissioners asked again at the Sept. 17 meeting with the Navy in Boardman. The response was no. "...we will not provide access at this time to personnel for mitigation measures," the Navy wrote in a letter to the Commissioners. "We do not see a way at this time to provide access for predator control on NWSTF Boardman (the bombing range) given the uncertainty of the effects of predator management activities on the range."

On weed control the Navy says it spends between ten and fifty thousand dollars a year on weed man-

agement, but Russell says they don't have anything in this year's budget. The county wanted to have Morrow County Weed Control man Dave Pranger kept in the loop on any efforts at the range, but that wasn't even possible.

The commissioners also asked if the Navy would allow grazing on the range to reduce vegetation and fire risk. The Navy said no to that also saying it would "adversely affect the Washington Ground Squirrel populations and habitat", and "likely lead to the Endangered Species Act listing of the ground squirrel which would severely affect the Navy's mission." They also said that while grazing "can be an effective tool for short-term fuels management, it would promote increased frequency and intensity of fires over the long-term. Long-term grazing converts rangelands from bunch grass vegetation communities, with low-intensity fires and relatively infrequent return intervals, to annual grasslands that promote increased frequency of higher

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Lexington has a full council



Lexington Mayor Juli Kennedy congratulates Will Lemmon after administering him the oath of office to fill the last remaining empty council seat. -Photo by David Sykes.

By David Sykes

The Town of Lexington now has a full council of four council members and a mayor. Will Lemmon was sworn in last Tuesday to fill the last remaining empty seat. It has been over a year since the council seats were all full. Mayor Juli Kennedy swore Lemmon in and he immediately took his seat for the night's business.

In other business it was announced that town recorder Denis Lien has resigned to take another job. The council has begun searching for his replacement. "He will be missed," said Mayor Kennedy.

The council heard a report from Kennedy who said among other things she has updated the town web site with current information and also created a Facebook page for the town. She also said she talked to Sheriff Ken Matlack about a police coverage contract for the town similar to what other cities in the county have. She said it was very expensive and probably not an option for Lexington. The town will continue to have coverage

from the Sheriff's Office just not on a contractual basis. Kennedy said she had been hearing good feedback on what is going on in the town. "I have had a lot of good positive feedback on Lexington and that we have a positive path to the future. People from Heppner and Ione have commented on what is happening in Lexington," she told the council and the audience.

Maintenance man Scott Lamb reported that the fire department had made a repair to the town fire truck, replacing a hose at a cost of \$1,000. He also said he is still researching the feasibility of getting a new fire alarm for the town. He said the new chlorination system is installed and operating and he is testing it every day.

The council also discussed that they were applying to Oregon Department of Transportation for a small city allotment grant for road maintenance this year. The town applied last year but did not get one.

It was also mentioned that an earlier request from

Blattner Energy to rehab and use the old town well located at the Lexington Airport had been dropped. Blattner needed the water during construction on the new windmill project in Morrow County but the well was not able to be rehabilitated. Blattner is instead reportedly purchasing water from several area farmers. It was discussed that the town should probably look at filling it with concrete to decommission it.

In other business the council set the date for the first budget committee meeting to be March 9 at 6:30 p.m. Jay Papineau, Sheila Miller and Myrna Sieler were appointed as the public representatives on the committee. Three members of the council, Juli Kennedy, Bill Beard and Curtis Thompson, will also serve on the budget committee.

In other business, the council voted to combine two tax lots owned by Sheila and Reid Miller into one. They plan on putting a manufactured home on the property.

Hay truck burns near Lexington

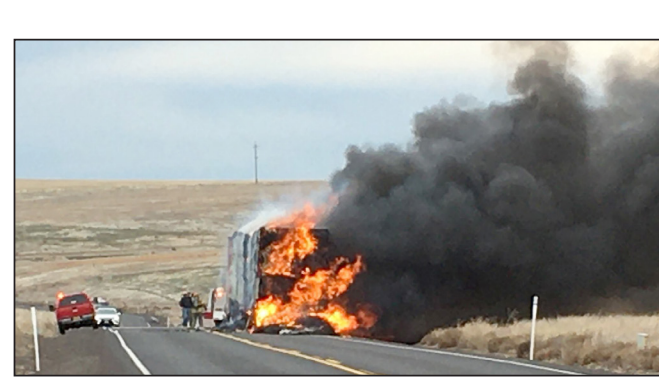


A truck hauling hay caught on fire and burned on Highway 207 last week. -Contributed photos.

A truck and trailer loaded with hay was reported to be on fire near milepost 6B on Highway 207 near Lexington last Thursday, February 13 at approximately 2 p.m. The highway was closed for several hours while the hay burned and crews waited to remove the truck and trailer.

Heppner Fire Department, Ione Fire Department, Fire Station 7, Oregon Department of Transportation, Oregon State Police and Morrow County

Sheriff's Office responded to the fire. The crews were also assisted by several local citizens who responded with equipment.



The fire department remained on the scene until 6:30 p.m. and ODOT continued to stay on the scene throughout the night.

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