

# Gazette Times

VOL. 139 NO. 16 8 Pages Wednesday, April 15, 2020 Morrow County, Heppner, Oregon

## County and Port fail to reach agreement on new enterprise zone

Decisions on economic development, disbursement of funds at stake



Port of Morrow Chairman Rick Stokoe



County Commissioner Chair Melissa Lindsay



Boardman City Manager Karen Pettigrew

By David Sykes

The Port of Morrow and Morrow County failed to reach agreement Monday to form a new enterprise zone. The current enterprise zone expires June 30 and several proposals are on the table to either keep the current zone structure or make changes. How the zone is structured will have a big impact on new businesses' negotiations and how the tax money generated will be spent in the county.

The three members of the current 10-year-old Columbia River Enterprise Zone II (CREZ) are the Port of Morrow, county government and the city of Boardman. The major hang up in negotiations is whether Boardman should be part of the new enterprise zone. The port wants it the same with Boardman as a member, and the county wants just the port and county involved.

The impasse began while CREZ manager Greg Sweek was working on a reapplication of the current enterprise zone, when at a recent meeting the county commissioners announced their proposed changes. Commissioners Melissa Lindsay and Jim Doherty are in favor of changing and Commissioner Don Russell wants to remain the same.

On Monday the port and county held a joint online meeting in an attempt to work out an agreement. Lindsay presented a plan she says would include all of the cities in the county and not just Boardman. Lindsay said only the port and county should be members of the new zone and cities would become involved when a business development is proposed near their city. She says since the enterprise zone board can make decisions on business development and money disbursement throughout the county, it is not equitable for just the city of Boardman to be involved making decisions in all areas of the county. Lindsay wants all cities in the county to be involved in decision making that affects their areas.

The current enterprise zone covers about 12 square miles, mostly encompassing the Port of Morrow where all the new development is. New and expanding businesses receive tax breaks for locating in the zone. Some of the businesses who have located there and taken advantage of the tax breaks include Amazon, Lamb Weston and Tillamook Cheese.

Lindsay's plan includes a provision to include "influence zones" within the county that would allow other cities to become part of the enterprise board and make decisions if business developments were proposed near their city. "Why can't Morrow County and the Port apply as joint sponsors with agreements where all our cities in the county are at the table," Lindsay says.

The current zone is ten years old and expires July 1. Over the past ten years it has generated over \$20 million in revenue in lieu of taxes and in the coming ten years is expected, with current contracts in place, to take in over \$100 million. The current enterprise board will decide how the money will be spent and so far in the past it has made an effort to disburse the money across the county, giving grants to cities and economic development groups such as the Willow Creek Valley Economic Development. Lindsay says her proposal is not about the money, but to involve all the cities and make enterprise zone decision making more equitable across the county. Regardless of the structure of the new zone, disbursement of the \$100 million coming in over the next ten years will be the same with the current CREZII board, Boardman included, making those decisions on where the money goes. In the past the board has distributed the money into four broad categories: education, housing, community development and public safety.

Both the Port of Mor-

row and City of Boardman expressed opposition to excluding Boardman, saying the current enterprise zone has worked fine and should not be tampered with. Port board member Marv Padberg of Ione said there has sometimes been contention and complaining when the Port does a project in a certain city or area, but with the CREZII he thinks it has brought the county together and that "it makes no sense" to change anything. Port board member Joe Taylor said he would "hate for us to walk away from something that is working and go down an unproven path." Port Board Chair Rick Stokoe, who is also Boardman police chief, said the enterprise zone is important for the port and the people in the region. He pointed out how the CREZII board distributed large amounts of money around the county for housing, schools, community development and public safety, and that there is nothing wrong with the way the current board operates. "We need to continue CREZII as it stands and move forward," he said. Heppner City Manager Kraig Cutsforth weighed in and said the money coming into the Heppner community from CREZ and distributed by WCVEDG "has been a tremendous boon and I hope it continues." Irrigon City Manager Aaron Palmquist said he wanted the current enterprise structure to continue unchanged also. Both Lindsay and Commissioner Jim Doherty argued that if the Port partners with only the county, nothing would change and the port would still have the enterprise zone to use in negotiations with new companies locating here.

As far as the enterprise zone as a business recruitment tool Stokoe and Port Manager Ryan Neil both pointed out the Port would be at a great disadvantage without it to entice

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## Health District requests two additional ventilators from State of Oregon

The Morrow County Health District has requested two additional ventilators from the State of Oregon for use at the Pioneer Memorial Hospital if needed to treat any COVID-19 virus patients it may receive.

Hospital Administrator Bob Houser says the district currently has two ventilators both in working order. One had been down for about one week awaiting a part but is now operation-

al. Houser said they have requested from the State of Oregon two more ventilators, which are a key piece of equipment in treating the Coronavirus, through the Morrow County Emergency Management and the County Public Health Department.

Houser was asked if he thought Oregon Democrat Governor Kate Brown's recent gift of 140 of Oregon's ventilators to the State of New York, would cause any

delays or problems having the local health district's request being filled. "The state has made no promises in this regard, but in checking with Shelley Wight (County Health Dept.) and John Bowles (Undersheriff) whom the order went through, both indicated it looked good for us getting our two, but no date of delivery at this time," Houser told the Gazette-Times last week.

## Ione and Heppner join stadium lighting trend



Stadium lights at Les Payne Field in Heppner are turned on at 20:20 each Thursday and remain lit for 20 minutes to honor the class of 2020.

Heppner and Ione high schools have joined many other schools around the country in the "Be the Light" movement. Many high school stadium lights across the state are coming on at 8:20 p.m., which is 20:20 military time, to honor and support the 2020 graduating classes. Many spring sports athletes and high school seniors have had their last semesters upended thanks to the coronavirus pandemic.

The stadium lights at Les Payne Field will come on at 20:20 every Thursday and will remain on for 20 minutes in support of the Heppner High School se-

nior class. Stadium lights at the Ione field will come on at 20:20 on Friday nights and will remain on for 18 minutes in honor of the 18 seniors.

The bright stadium lights were turned off too soon for every senior across the state. The coronavirus pandemic has forced campuses around the state to shut down for the remainder of the school year, taking away what some might have understandably taken for granted: final spring sports seasons, senior proms and walking the stage for graduation.

A spokesperson for Heppner said, "We want

to honor all our students with this symbol of hope and support and let them know we are thinking of them." J.J. Rosenberg of Ione posted on the booster club Facebook page, "Rest assured, just because the season may be over, our Cardinal pride can never be extinguished."

The lights will continue to be turned on each week to honor and say thank you to all of the students. Lighting the stadium will let everyone know the community is missing seeing the students perform and they look forward to seeing them again.

## Morrow County reports more COVID-19 cases

In a press release on April 8, Morrow County Public Health reported a third individual in Morrow County had tested positive for COVID-19. An updated press release the following day confirmed two more had tested positive, bringing the total for the county to five.

It was reported that cases four and five were identified during the public health investigation from a previously reported case. Both individuals are self-isolating at home.

The third individual who tested positive had recently relocated to Oregon from out of state and

was in Morrow County for a limited amount of time before being hospitalized out of the county. The case is unrelated to previous positive cases in the county.

Morrow County has reported positive cases in both north and south county and would like to remind everyone to continue practicing safe distancing guidelines, wash hands often and stay home.

The CDC recommends a non-medical face mask for those who venture out for work or essential needs. The mask is for the protection of yourself as well as others. People can have

the virus and spread it to others before showing any symptoms.

The most common symptoms of COVID-19 are fever, cough and shortness of breath. If you are experiencing any illness, you should stay home, and stay in contact with your healthcare provider. If medical care is needed, call first. Be extra cautious to limit your contact with people who are at higher risk for severe illness.

Morrow County Public Health wants to assure citizens that all precautions are being taken and screening and testing are continuing.

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