

Port agrees to dual county sponsorship of new enterprise zone

Major obstacle appears removed

By David Sykes

In a major concession toward reaching an agreement on the structure of a new enterprise zone, the Port of Morrow has agreed to dual sponsorship with just Morrow County. Previously the port had wanted the new zone identical to the current agreement with the city of Boardman as a permanent partner.

However, the county commission had objected to this structure, with Chairman Melissa Lindsay insisting only the port and county be partners in any new zone, and then other cities in the county be brought into the zone's governing board depending on the location (or influence zone) of any future economic activity. She said this arrangement would place all the cities in the county on equal footing with Boardman and make decision making about economic development and fund disbursement more equitable.

In what appears to be a major move toward reconciliation with the county, the port commissioners at their April 24 meeting backed off the requirement that Boardman be a permanent zone member, thus apparently removing the major disagreement with the county. Also, at the meeting the port put forth a

map with "influence" zones around the five cities in the county. Under the plan if a business proposes a new facility or activity in one of the zones, then a representative from that city would become a voting member of the enterprise zone and included in the contract and money distribution decision making.

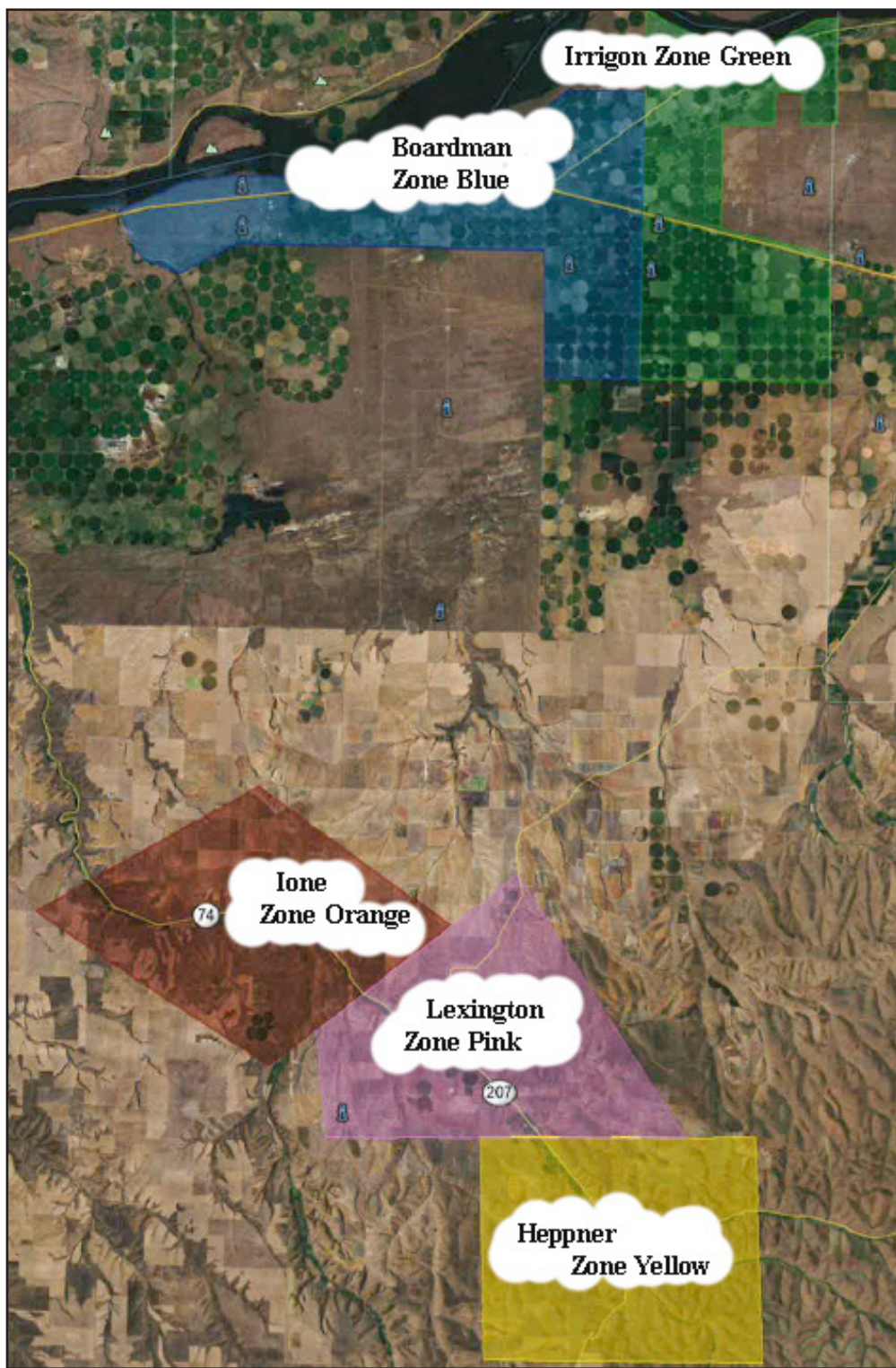
The concept of having all cities throughout the county instead of just Boardman part of the CREZ, was originally proposed by Lindsay. She has remained adamant about a dual sponsorship throughout ongoing negotiations between the county and port. Whether the county accepts this new offer from the port, however, has not been decided, with the commission set to discuss the proposal at its Wednesday, May 6 meeting, after the Gazette-Times deadline.

In a fallback position at the April 24 meeting, the port also passed a motion to co-sponsor an enterprise zone with just the city of Boardman, but only if the county and the port are unable to agree on the structure of a new zone. That motion passed unanimously.

Under state enterprise zone law the city of Boardman can apply for and have its own zone, but must

have the sponsorship of the port, and have the zone only located within its city limits. The port can only have an enterprise zone outside the city limits such as the current zone covering much of the port industrial park, with approval from the county.

The current Columbia River Enterprise Zone (CREZII) expires June 30, and zone administrator Greg Sweek was in the process of drawing up an application to recertify to the state for a new zone. Both Port Chairman Rick Stokoe and Port Director Ryan Neal have repeatedly emphasized the importance of having an enterprise zone when the port negotiates with new businesses looking to locate here. Both say much of the new development happening at the port would not have occurred without the enterprise zone in the port's "tool box." 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. Over the past



A map of the proposed areas of influence each city in the county would have in a proposed new enterprise zone. The map was presented by the Port of Morrow at a recent meeting.

10 years the current zone has generated over \$20 million in revenue in lieu of taxes and in the coming 10 years is expected, with current contracts in place, to take in over \$100 million, much of this coming from the new Amazon data farms being built around Boardman and at the Port of Morrow. Regardless of the current negotiations and zone applications, the current enterprise board will decide how the \$100 million will be spent. In the past the current board 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 in south county. They have been disbursing the money in four broad categories of education, community development, housing and public safety.

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