

# Morrow County census response rate low

State response 63.6 percent, county 38.6

By Bobbi Gordon

According to email from County Commissioner Melissa Lindsay, the 2020 Census response rate for Morrow County is below the state average in every community. Lindsay told the Gazette, "It is important to note that not only federal dollars, but also state, county and enterprise zone contributions are based on population numbers."

Lindsay continued to say, "Most city leaders offer that PSU population is inaccurate but it has been the go-to for population driven decisions. An accurate census can help to support this common thought process and could possibly more accurately drive the conversations."

The Heppner Chamber, Boardman Chamber and Morrow County held a Facebook Live event last week to educate the public on the importance of completing their census form. It was noted that since the census does not deliver to PO boxes that

might contribute to the low response rate for some Morrow County communities. It is possible the residents never received the form.

## Why is the census important?

"The census is required by the Constitution, which calls for an "actual enumeration" once a decade since 1790. The 2020 population numbers will shape how political power and federal tax dollars are shared in the U.S over the next 10 years. The number of congressional seats and Electoral College votes each state gets are determined by census numbers. They also guide how an estimated \$1.5 trillion a year in federal funding is distributed for healthcare, schools, roads and other public services in local communities. The demographic data are used by businesses to determine, for example, where to build new supermarkets and by emergency responders to locate injured people after natural disasters."

# County considers land offer from Heppner

'Couple of things have to fall into place' to accept Riverside lot

By David Sykes

Morrow County last week acknowledged an offer of free land from the city of Heppner to build its new emergency services building, however, commissioners were not quite ready to accept the gift at their last meeting. Commissioner Don Russell said a "couple of things have to fall into place" before the county would be ready to accept the 100 X 110 square ft lot the city of Heppner was offering near the fire hall on Riverside.

County Commission Chair Melissa Lindsay had earlier asked the city for the Riverside land on which to build its new emergency management facility currently located at the old mill site. She said the county is currently leasing that building from the Port of Morrow, which owns the mill site, but there is an offer to purchase the building so the county must find a new location. It was mentioned that a business is interested in moving there and wants the building.

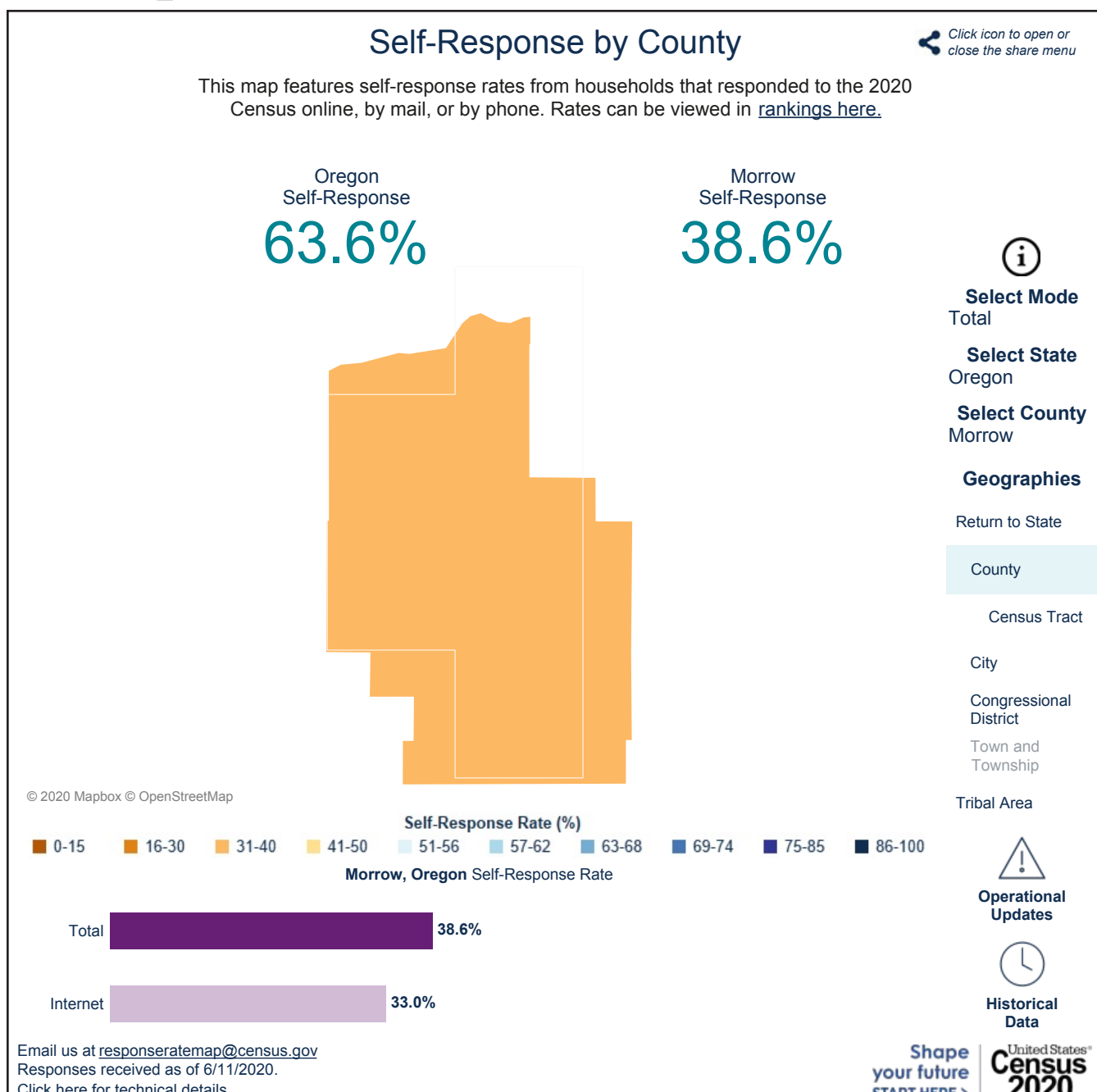
At last week's commission meeting Russell said the port does not yet have a for sure sale of the property and he questioned if the Riverside property "is the right spot in the county" for the new emergency services facility. Heppner City Manager Craig Cutsforth was at the commission meeting and said the city of Heppner appreciates what the county has done for the

city in offering the lot for free. Earlier he estimated the value of the plot at \$10 to \$15 thousand.

The county has a first right of refusal on the current mill site building and could buy it from the port if it wanted to, however, Lindsay says there is a need to vacate the property because there is a "great economic benefit to south county at the mill site." She pointed out the county owns property up in the Lott's addition next to the sheriff's office, but the citizens have indicated they don't want the development there.

In other business at the June 10 meeting, the commission discussed if the county should begin a "petition to intervene" or become a legal party in a current petition before the Public Utility Commission (PUC) to eventually allow Umatilla Electric Co-op (UEC) authority to condemn certain property in the Boardman area making way for a new electrical transmission line. The county owns land next to property that would need to be condemned but has no direct property involvement. The commission discussed if there would be an advantage to the county becoming a party to the action. The petition is before the PUC now and a public hearing was held last week about the condemnation procedure.

The process has become controversial with



Current self-response rate for Oregon and Morrow County shows 63.6 for Oregon and 38.6 for Morrow County.

some landowners hiring attorneys and it appears the process may be headed to court if a deal is not reached between the landowners and UEC. Intervening and becoming a party would allow the county certain rights in the legal process, but also raised some conflict of interest questions.

If the petition is successful and the land is secured by UEC then the application for the transmission line would shift to the Morrow County Planning Commission for approval. Any decision by the planning commission could end up being appealed to the County Commission, so questions have been raised if the county can both intervene and also be an arbitrator in future planning commission decisions. "There is still a land use decision to be made and if the decision is appealed, we are the appeal body," Commissioner Don Russell pointed out. "Does it prejudice our ability to be an appeal body if we are an intervenor?" he asked County Council Justin Nelson. Nelson said outside of "perception" he did not see a problem with the county becoming a party to the action. "A petition to intervene doesn't have to be adversarial," Nelson said.

UEC filed the petition March 19 to allow construction of the overhead transmission line which will require an interest or condemnation of land. The line will run approximately 4.3 miles from the Highway 730 Switchyard and terminate at UEC's planned Olson Road Substation where the location of new Amazon data center is being constructed. UEC states the line is necessary to allow

the company to continue providing adequate line capacity and reliability to existing and new loads in the Boardman and Port of Morrow areas. Critics of the new line route say there was poor planning prior to siting the new data center there without adequate electricity to meet its needs, thus necessitating the new power line and condemnation of land.

"People want to make sure all alternative routes have been considered," Russell said of the condemnation process. "As long as we don't take sides, I don't see a purpose of us being interveners when all the information is public," he said of the proposed county action. "I would hate to see us get disqualified from making a decision on the planning because we became a party." Lindsay said she did not consider it becoming a party, but just being "at the table at the highest level" when decisions are made. "I asked the landowners and their response was to make sure all options are looked at," Russell said of the condemnation process. "I think at this time we need to be neutral. At some time, we need to approve a planning commission decision," he reminded the other commissioners. Nelson said perception and law were two different things and he was confident he could craft the intervention to be a neutral position for the county. The motion to intervene passed 2-1 with Lindsay and Commissioner Jim Doherty voting yes and Russell voting no. "Hopefully, they establish another route that satisfies everyone and have better planning next time," Russell said.

## Sheriff's Report

The Morrow County Sheriff's Office has released the following information:

**January 16 (cont.):**

Morrow County Sheriff's Office received a report at SE Utah Ave/SE Tenth St, Irrigon that two callers reported a driving complaint of a white Chevy pickup. One of the callers said the vehicle almost clipped him then did donuts and continued on. That caller also advised he is going to get in his vehicle and hunt down the driver. Unable to locate.

-MCSO received a report on Hwy 207 Echo, Lexington of a vehicle in the ditch outside of Lexington. It appeared the vehicle slid off, is on its wheels and the driver is ok, has help coming. Deputies checked on the vehicle, no one around, not blocking.

-MCSO received a report at Mill Zone, Hwy 74, Heppner of a vehicle in the ditch on the west side of the road. Vehicle was removed and driver will work with property owner to repair fence damage.

-MCSO received a report on Hwy 730, Irrigon of a vehicle on its side in the ditch. Patient refusal.

-MCSO received a report on NW Gale St/NW Church St, Heppner that there was a white car spinning cookies behind the Catholic Church. Unable to locate.

-MCSO received a report on W Eighth St, Irrigon of suspicious activity. RP advised a person was shining a flashlight by the mail boxes, shining the light onto his property, then took off east on Kangaroo. Unable to locate.

**January 20:** Morrow County Sheriff's Office received a report at A1 Martin Towing on N C St/E Main St, Lexington that the shop has its lights on. RP advised he doesn't believe he would be working this time of night and his vehicle isn't there.

-MCSO received a report on SE Fourth St, Irrigon that a male has his truck door open blaring music. Unable to locate.

-MCSO received a report on I 84 W, Boardman that a Dyna Electric truck is swerving and not using signals. Unable to locate.

-MCSO received a report on Bombing Range Rd, Lexington that a log truck has a motor on fire, driver is asleep in the car, blood coming from his mouth.

-MCSO received a report on Shoemaker Rd, Boardman that subject with a warrant is at location. Corine Ann Deforest was arrested by MCSO on Nez Perce County warrant. Subject was lodged at UCJ with bail of \$5,000.

-MCSO received a report on I 84 W, Boardman that a semi cut off another semi. Referred to other agency.

-MCSO received a report on Hwy 74, Lexington that someone broke into his residence and stole his appliances, can see visible damage. RP advised it is under construction, are not currently living in it.

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