

Gazette Times

VOL. 139 NO. 35 8 Pages Wednesday, August 26, 2020 Morrow County, Heppner, Oregon

County's offer of power line easement won't stop condemnation process

Could ease impact on other landowners, however



County has 5-acre parcel located next to Tallman property offered for power line easement.

By David Sykes

While the county's offer to grant Umatilla Electric Co-op (UEC) a power line easement across county land at Laurel Lane near Boardman is "generous" it will not stop condemnation proceedings against other property owners in the area, co-op CEO Robert Echenrode told the Morrow County commission last week.

The co-op has already filed paperwork with the Oregon Public Utility Commission (PUC), that if approved would allow the condemnation of several

parcels of private land in the area necessary for construction of a new power line. The 230kV line is needed to service current UEC customers and additional growth expected in that area and would run from a Hwy 730 electric switchyard near the I-84 freeway, 4.3 miles east to Olson Rd at Boardman. The PUC is moving forward, having already held a hearing and taken public comment on the proposed condemnation, but as yet, not made a decision.

UEC has been in ongoing negotiations with several area landowners to secure the necessary easements for construction of the line. So far deals have been struck with all landowners except two, former county judge Terry Tallman and his wife Cheryl, who own a 10-acre farm adjacent to the county parcel, and the Hobbs, who own a business on land in the path of the proposed power line.

The Morrow County Commissioners became involved in an effort to stop the undesirable condemnation process. They offered

to allow an easement across a nearby 5-acre parcel of county-owned land, and maybe alter the path of the new line enough so condemnation of private property wasn't necessary.

At last week's meeting the commission met with Echenrode for a second time to talk about the new power line and its proposed route. At a July 22 meeting Echenrode gave a presentation to the commissioners, using Google Earth to show the various

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Governor's treatment of counties 'disheartening' says commissioner

'Stand atop our money and chastise us'

By David Sykes

Oregon Governor Kate Brown's recent press conference chastising counties for not doing more to fight the COVID-19 pandemic came as a surprise and was 'disheartening', Morrow County Commissioner and President of the Oregon Association of Counties (AOC), Jim Doherty said this week.

Brown made the comments during a press conference last Friday, where she said counties need to do more leading by example, education of their citizens and enforcement of her executive orders. She said until counties increase these efforts and reduce COVID-19 rates, Oregon schools will not reopen this fall.

"It was extremely disappointing to hear the Governor take that position," Doherty responded. "The voters in Morrow County have asked the commissioners to approach the work in a nonpartisan fashion. We have done our level best to set aside our ideologies and address these issues as a team, working in partnership with the state. Only to have the Brown administration intercept the \$624 million intended to salvage

the lives and livelihoods of our local families and devastated businesses. Then to see our, 'partner,' stand atop our money and chastise us was disheartening," Doherty said in a statement to the Gazette-Times.

The \$624 million Doherty was referring to was part of a \$1.6 billion federal coronavirus aid package sent to Oregon intended for disbursement down to local governments for use in virus related expenses. Doherty says the money never got to the county level and was instead kept by the Brown administration for use at the state level.

Doherty is also president of the AOC which issued a press release last week saying Brown's chastising of counties came as a surprise for counties as they "have been leading the way," in the fight against COVID. "We are partners with the state, delivering critical services to Oregonians on their behalf. Today, we ask the governor and state officials to support counties. These increased expectations the governor announced require additional resources that the state has yet to distribute," the AOC said.

"Morrow County should be celebrated, for the vital role we play and associated COVID-19 challenges we face in ensuring the agricultural sector continues to feed those, both far and near," Doherty added about the county's role in producing food for the country.

The AOC addressed each of the governor's three press conference remarks:

Lead by Example - Counties are working in their communities to reduce transmission of the virus. Counties are calling on the governor to provide financial and other resources directly to counties to continue to fight the virus.

Education - Counties are communicating with their citizens. The governor's office is many times unclear on how virus statistics are being used to make state level Covid decisions. The virus varies from county to county and more decisions should be made at the county level than in Salem. "A one-size-fits-all approach will not work as well as community-based responses," the AOC said.

Enforcement - Counties have limited means of enforcement for state man-

dated Covid rules. Enforcement is with the sheriffs, independent elected officials. If the state wants the sheriffs to enforce Covid mandates it should provide more funding to the sheriff's offices.

"The decision of the state to withhold, and ultimately spend resources intended for counties and local government response efforts makes it even more difficult for counties to effectively respond to the governor's call for more assistance from counties," AOC said of the money that was not properly distributed to counties by Brown.

The AOC also pointed out that the governor's actions are badly hurting

small businesses, which are proving not to be the source of virus infections. "The primary source of COVID-19 outbreaks in many Oregon communities has not been a failure of businesses to follow mandates and guidance," the AOC pointed out. "The primary source is family and other social gatherings that are not capable of being prevented by enforcement. Retail businesses should not be penalized in an already economically devastating time, when they are not the source of spread," it said.

"As President of the Association of Oregon Counties, I have helped craft this, and other letters



Morrow County Commissioner and Association of Oregon Counties President Jim Doherty

asking, only that the state recognize their partner and pass through the funds to Oregon's 36 counties allowing them to support and enrich the lives of our brethren as the Local Health Authorities," Doherty concluded.

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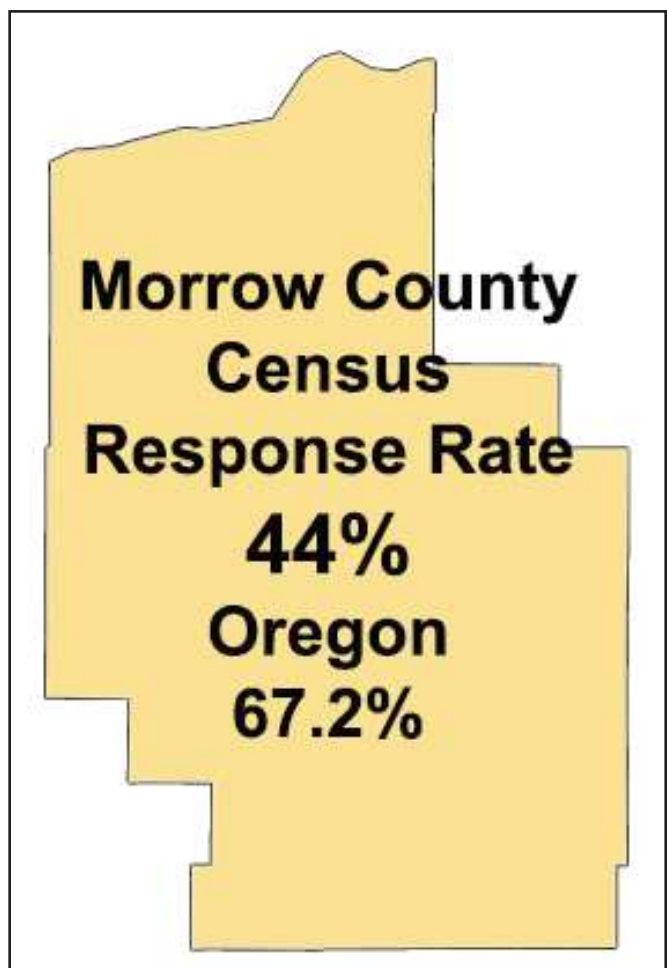
County still lags behind state in census response

Morrow 44 percent participation, Oregon 67 percent

By David Sykes

Morrow County still lags behind the state average for census participation, the county commission was told at last week's meeting. The commissioners heard from Marc Czornij, Partnership Team Leader for the Oregon US Census Bureau, who said although the county rate is low, it is still ahead of 23 other counties.

Commissioners are concerned with the low participation rate for citizens of



Morrow County's census rate at 44%

Morrow County as it will affect the amount of federal grant dollars received in the future. The census is also used to decide how many US representatives are allowed from each state to the congress.

Czornij said the current participation for the county is at 43.6 percent of the population. He said Morrow County lags behind the state which is at 67.2 percent. Twenty-three Oregon counties are lower than Morrow, he added. Within the county Ione has the lowest rate while Boardman and Irrigon are highest. Lexington and Heppner's rates were not given.

Commissioner Lindsay, who has been working hard for a higher county participation rate, asked if the state could not do more to make people aware of the importance of participating in the census, and to boost participation. She has been trying to put together

funding for a mailing urging people to complete the census. An earlier mailer sent out by the state was not very effective in Heppner as many of the addresses were for people's physical addresses and not the boxes so they were not delivered by the post office.

On a positive note, Czornij said the county's participation is only slightly behind last year's rate of 43.9. "You are only .3 percent away from breaking last year's record," he pointed out. Anyone wanting to fill out their census can go to the web site at: oregon2020census.gov/

In other business at last week's meeting, the commission heard a report from county Community Development Director Gregg Zody, who reported he was working on making application to the state for grant money from the Cultural

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