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County breaks ground on new Irrigon office complex

Community leaders, officials and staff celebrate new facility



A large group of county and city leaders and staff gathered last week for the groundbreaking of the new county administrative building in Irrigon. -Photo by David Sykes

By David Sykes

With big smiles and glowing words, a group of county and city officials, community leaders and county staff gathered last Friday morning for the groundbreaking ceremony of the new 12,500 square foot county office complex in Irrigon.

"This has been a long time in the planning to get this done," said Commissioner Don Russell following the traditional golden shovel ceremony and photo shoot. He said the \$6.8 million-dollar mixed-use office space will house a multitude of county offices and departments including the Justice Court, Planning Department, Sheriff's Office, County Clerk, Surveyor, and Parole and Probation. The county seat is still in Heppner and no offices will be closed there; the new Irrigon facility is just an expansion to service the ever-growing north end of the county.



Community supporter Barbara Huwe

Community leaders were also on hand including longtime Irrigon resident and former Main Street businessperson Barbara Huwe. "I am just absolutely ecstatic that the county decided to build this facility in Irrigon," Huwe said with a large grin on her face. "We have had our annex since the mid-70s and here I felt that we need to continue that so that Irrigon has some ownership in Morrow County." She said at first there was talk of locating the new facility in Boardman, but "We got together and proved to them that Irrigon does need ownership," she said in support of the county decision to build in Irrigon. "Those

few businesses we have on Main Street know there is a lot of business generated out of this building. I used to be there, and I know," said Huwe who owned the gas station and mini mart on Main Street for many years. "We are just over the top that this is going to happen for Morrow County, and we are very proud of Irrigon," she said.

Former Commissioner John Wenzholz

Former Commissioner John Wenzholz was also pleased with the decision to locate the new facility in Irrigon. "This has been my vision ever since I was a county commissioner. I always felt that Heppner had a county seat, and our industry is in the Boardman area. I feel that having this building here will give Irrigon some identity. I have been a champion of this since I was a county commissioner and I am glad to see it come to fruition today. I think this is a great thing for the city of Irrigon and the citizens of Morrow County," Wenzholz said.



Irrigon City Manager Aaron Palmquist

Irrigon City Manager Aaron Palmquist praised the addition of the office complex to the city. "From our perspective as the city of Irrigon this is a great boost. This is exciting," Palmquist said it was a "good use of county resources across the whole county taking a dilapidated old facility (current county buildings) and bringing it up to the 21st century."

Palmquist said city planning is currently in the process of doing the building's plan review, saying, "It is going to be a state-of-the-art facility for everyone across the whole county."

He said the city council and members of the community "are very excited about it and it will continue to add livability and enhancements to Irrigon as we make it shine brighter."

Commissioner Jim Doherty

County Commissioner Jim Doherty said he was "really thrilled to be here today" saying, "It has been a long time coming for Irrigon." Doherty, who lives in Boardman, related his connection to Irrigon telling how his son was in the last combined Irrigon and Boardman high school class before Irrigon built its own school. Doherty recalled how his son was on a combined basketball team that went to the state playoffs together with the Irrigon students and won third place. "Or as we like to say they were public school state champion," he laughs. "They played Regis and lost," he remembers.

"But Irrigon wanted their own wings and their own future so when I was campaigning four years ago, I knocked on every door and said for too long Irrigon has been treated as the red-headed step child and nobody argued that fact," Doherty recalled. "So as soon as I got elected commissioner Melissa Lindsay and commissioner Russell joined me in an effort that was 30 years in the offing to update the county buildings. It's got a wonderful start for Irrigon. They have really gathered themselves around their own school program and their own future and I think the sky is the limit for them. I am really super excited to be a part of this venture," he said.

Commissioner Don Russell

Commissioner Don Russell joined others saying the new facility is overdue. "This has been a long time in the planning to get this done. We are finally to a spot where we are three weeks from when crews will come and start moving and do a real groundbreaking," he said with a smile. Russell said once crews start it should take about 12 months before the county is ready to move into the

building.

He said the building, which was designed by CIDA Architecture with the main contractor being Fortis Construction, is going to be 12,500 square feet of mixed-use office space. He detailed the offices and departments that will be in the building. "The Justice Court will be in the new building along with the planning department. There will be room for the county commissioners to meet here on the north end," Russell says. He says the sheriff's office north end offices will all be consolidated in the new building. "Right now the sheriff works out of an office in the Irrigon building and we have a leased space in Boardman. Those will all be consolidated and they will all be in Irrigon," he says. "The county clerk who leases an office across the street will be in this building and offer services to the public," Russell says. "Right now she comes up here (from Heppner) once per week so people can get passports, marriage licenses and register to vote." Russell says in addition the county surveyor will be here "and his documents will be stored here instead of a conex box out in the weather." Also the Sheriff will have storage for their marine boat for emergencies on this part of the river. He says the only other county office in the north end will be the health department with an office in Boardman and they will stay there. "But the rest of the county services will be consolidated in this building. These will just be modern offices with better places to work for our employees," Russell says of the new facility.

County awards new sheriff building contract to local builder

Allstott Construction gets \$564,702 building contract

By David Sykes

Local builder Allstott Construction was low bidder on a new sheriff's office storage building in Heppner, the county commission announced last week. Allstott's bid was \$564,702 for the 60 X 80 ft wooden structure. The county is planning on building the new storage facility near the Heppner fire station on the highway near Riverside Ave. The building will be used to mainly store sheriff's office vehicles and equipment such as the mobile emergency command center vehicle.

The county currently leases a building at the former mill site for its emergency building, however the current owner, the Port of Morrow, has sold the building for \$100,000 to local businessman Jay Coil who plans on moving his fabrication business there from its current location on Riverside Ave. The county had the right to match the offer and buy the building but opted instead to find a location and build its own new emergency building. Subsequently the city of Heppner offered to donate a lot next to the current firehall located between Riverside and Hwy 74 behind the Devin Oil facility for free. The Soil and Water Conservation District has also been approached about donating an easement across its property so there is access onto the highway from the new building.

There were two bids submitted on the project with Allstott \$102,397 lower than second place Silver Creek Contracting LLC at \$667,099. However the low bid was still \$15,702 higher than an estimated cost from an engineering firm.

County commissioners have been wrestling with where they were going to come up with that much money, since they only had \$250,000 budgeted for the project. With the more than \$300,000 shortfall commissioners decided last week to take \$250,000 out of the sheriff's office new vehicle fund to make up the shortfall. Taking the money out

of new vehicles will mean the sheriff's office will not replace aging vehicles as often as it has in the past.

In other business at the Oct. 14 meeting the commission announced the winners of the annual special youth elk spike hunt at the Morrow-Grant County OHV park in the mountains south of Heppner. Each year the county gives away six hunts to youth. This year the winners were five Morrow County applicants, one Grant County and one Morrow County alternate. There were two applicants from Clackamas, however it was decided to keep the hunt eligible just for Morrow and Grant County youth. The hunt will be held during the regularly scheduled second season elk hunt Nov. 7 - 15. The youth were: David Rietmann and Katie Spivey of Ione, Lane Rowe, Zackariah Jones and Kassadie Griffin of Irrigon, Riley Percy of Boardman and Fallan Griffin from John Day.

In other action the county authorized the road department to purchase two 2021 Workman three axle dumping pup trailers at a cost of \$154,000. The trailers are necessary to continue making the road department more efficient by doubling the payload while moving road rock, excavating materials, chip rock, paving asphalt and other material, public works said. The purchase was planned and allotted for in this year's budget.

The commissioners also voted for public works to purchase two 2021 Kenworth hook trucks and components at a cost of \$570,857. The added components adaptable to the trucks are a 2000-gallon water tank, two snow plows, one sander for sand application on snow and ice, one flatbed for moving material, two dump bodies and one liquid asphalt distributor. This purchase was also budgeted for this year.

In other business the commissioners heard a report from Finance Director

-See IRRIGON OFFICE PAGE THREE

~ G-T Trophy Corner ~

The Heppner Gazette Times would like to see pictures of your trophy animals from this hunting season. Please send a photo along with your name, age, town you live in, location of the hunt and a description of the animal to editor@rapidserve.net, upload to Heppner.net or text to 541-980-6674.



Lennie Hanna, 71, of Heppner killed this bull elk in the Red Desert of Wyoming on October 10.

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