

Surprise vote to decide fate of Army Depot land

By Andrew Sykes

In a surprise vote on October 8, the Columbia Development Authority (CDA) voted to decide the future of the former Army Depot land. The CDA is the governing body that has control over portions of the former U.S. Army Depot that is in the process of transferring to CDA. Five main stakeholders constitute the CDA, county commissioners from Morrow and Umatilla counties, directors of the Ports of Morrow and Umatilla and a member of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR).

The intent of a motion was to deed the industrial land in Morrow County to the Port of Morrow, and the industrial land in Umatilla County to the Port of Umatilla. Kim Puzey (Port of Umatilla) put forward the motion, which was not on the agenda: "As we are trying to finalize all these, water, waste-water, making sure that the tribes have access to the wildlife area. I move that we memorialize our intent to deed all the industrial property to the Ports of Morrow and Umatilla on respective sides of the county line as soon as the transfer of the depot is completed." The motion was seconded by Ryan Neal (Port of Morrow). Bill Tovey (CTUIR) opposed saying, "I am not ready to do that. I think we need to have a lot of discussion, particularly on the Umatilla County side, on how the property is going to be managed, going into the future."

Don Russell (Morrow County) expressed the intentions of previous CDA members, "I know on the Morrow County side I've visited with previous commissioners, Leann Rea and John Wenzholz and they were the CDA's Morrow County representatives for 20 years before I came, and it was always the intent on the Morrow County side, according to my predecessors. But I can't speak for the Umatilla County side." Tovey objected to the vote. "From the Tribe's perspective, I would want to wait as well. It's great getting wildlife properties, but it sure would be nice to be part of the industrial as well." Despite the objections, a roll call was taken and the motion was brought to a vote with three in favor, two opposed. The yes votes were Kim Puzey, Ryan Neal and Don Russell. The no votes were: Bill Tovey and Bill Elfering (Umatilla County)

Rep. Greg Smith, in an attempt to clarify the issue, restated the motion at hand, "In seven years, after the transfer of real estate occurs and our commitment to the BRAC (Base Realignment and Closure) is complete, the industrial lands in Umatilla County as it relates

to the CDA property shall be transferred to the Port of Umatilla. Moreover the industrial lands in Morrow County as it relates to our agreement with the BRAC shall be transferred to the Port of Morrow. Did I capture that correctly?" All members concurred with this summation. Bill Elfring responded to the results of the vote by saying, "Morrow County is now in a position of determining the future of the Umatilla County property. I just don't see that as being appropriate."

In a closing statement by Rep. Smith, he stated, "We really have not provided any benefit directly, directly to Morrow County. Each one of the entities have directly benefited, but we will need to think, in the future, about Morrow County." The other CDA board members continued the discussion. "I have assumed for 26 years that the industrial property would go to the Port of Umatilla. That's why I've been on the CDA for that long," said Puzey. Bill Elfring retorted, "For the last eight years that I have been on this board, that has not been my understanding. Umatilla County wishes to retain a voice with this property and how it is developed. Currently we have no voice, with the board of the Port of Umatilla."

Speaking in favor of the motion Ryan Neal laid out his concerns, "As we get the property transferred, from an entity standpoint, how do I plan for infrastructure if there is not some sort of knowing that that money isn't going to waste in the future. We have all sorts of property that's going need to be demolished and cleaned up. We also have to get bridges, roads, water and how do you plan that without have some sort of guarantee that you have something in return. I have to have some sort of guarantee that I'm going to be able to service customers out there and have marketable land."

Later, Russell's fellow county commissioners were not pleased with his actions at the CDA meeting. At an Oct. 14 board meeting, Chair Melissa Lindsay said all the county commissioners should have been consulted before Russell took such an important step. "I'm not saying I agree or disagree (with the decision)," Lindsay told Russell. "It might have been the right thing to do." Lindsay said she felt "blindsided" by Russell's action and it has affected her relationship with the Umatilla County commissioners. She said Murdock has been her "mentor" since she took office as Morrow County Commissioner and he was upset thinking Russell's vote was the wish of the en-

tire commission. "To have him (Murdock) think that I had made a vote against his county in that way was really frustrating and I made it clear to him that I was not any way consulted," she told Russell.

Lindsay said, as the chair of the CDA, Russell should not have allowed a vote on the issue especially since it was not on the agenda. "As the chair you could have tabled it for further discussion. The way it happened is not appropriate for the transparency of the office we serve," she emphasized. "I don't attend those meetings. I guess I should," she said. "I assume I'm going to be informed when we give away Morrow County properties. I assume we talk about a plan with our partners at the port," she added, saying the whole episode had gotten "pretty negative" and was perceived as being "underhanded."

County Commissioner Jim Doherty was also at the Oct. 14 meeting and said the opinions of past commissioners on the land ownership was not important. "The people you should have run this past is your board (of commissioners). If people wanted to move forward relative to what past commissioners had said, they would be sitting here now," Doherty said of past verbal agreements. "The biggest vote that has ever taken place on that thing (depot land), this is beyond the pale. You got to run this by the board. You got to run this by the county. You're not a representative from Morrow County, you're the representative of Morrow County and as such you have to vet these things. Have to run these things past us," Doherty told Russell.

In a recent interview with the Heppner Gazette-Times, Russell reiterated the point of the vote, "It is time to start the conversation of who will be titled the land." He also commented that he did not know that the vote would be put forth. George Murdock (Umatilla County Commissioner), according to Elkhorn Media Group, said "We aren't going to tolerate that action. It was wrong. I've talked to my colleagues and they've told me that they're prepared to take legal action." Russell, in response to learning of Murdock's statements told the Heppner Gazette, "I don't know why Murdock is having such a strong response," and is "disappointed in George rattling his saber about lawsuits." Russell indicated that he is open to further discussions and when asked if he expects legal action, said, "I hope not."

Murdock, in reference to the CDA vote also claimed, "It doesn't

fit within their rules, their guidelines, their charter or anything else to do that in the first place," Murdock said. "That land belongs to the people of Umatilla County and it's worth quite a lot of money. We simply aren't going to roll over and let it go away." Russell rebuffed this claim by saying, "the Schwabe law firm disagrees."

Another CDA Board meeting has been scheduled for 10 a.m. via Zoom on Thursday, October 22. The board is going to reconsider the vote of the CDA property at this meeting. For a copy of the board meeting agenda please visit umadra.com.

Legion to hold Harvest Bazaar

A Harvest Bazaar will be held at the American Legion Hall in Ione October 31 from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Due to COVID-19, the kitchen will not be open this year. Perk N Brew will be open for those who wish to purchase food or drink.

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# Gorge Networks to acquire local PrineTIME assets

*No change to pricing or service*

By Bobbi Gordon

PrineTIME has entered into an agreement with Gorge Networks, who will acquire the wireless and fiber assets along with the customer base in the Willow Creek Valley. Gorge Networks is a 25-year-old company based out of Hood River, OR and according to Jason Wilkins of PrineTIME, has a strong commitment to the area and customer service.

In the correspondence PrineTIME sent to their customer base, they said nothing will change and internet service will continue to work as usual. They also said a Gorge Networks representative will be contacting each customer to make sure accounts are converted correctly and to answer any questions. Wilkins stated, "We are extremely confident that this change will be seamless to you. PrineTIME did not come to this decision lightly and we are excited about the upcoming solutions Gorge Networks will be offering in your service area."

Dan Bubb, President of Gorge Networks LLC., a Blue Mountain Networks Company, told the Gazette they intend to continue the project of installing fiber in Heppner, that has already been started by PrineTIME, early next year. They also plan to install fiber to the homes in Ione and Lexington next year.

Bubb said, "We are adding new wireless sites during the next couple months so some people that were not able to get service may be able to get it by the end of this year." When asked about pricing he indicated there will be no change to service or pricing for existing customers. By first quarter of next year they intend to migrate everyone to their standard rural wireless pricing plan, which will result in a speed increase and possibly a reduction in cost.

Customers are asked to contact Gorge Networks at 541-386-8300 for additional information. They can also be reached at [support@gorge.net](mailto:support@gorge.net) for support related questions or [sales@gorge.net](mailto:sales@gorge.net) for new service. "Be assured that we are committed to maintaining a high quality of customer service while continuing or improving your rates and service level," Bubb continued. "We sincerely look forward to serving you and your community." A special webpage has been dedicated to Willow Creek Valley PrineTIME customers at <https://www.gorge.net/residential-services/prinetime>.

Gorge Networks is part of the Blue Mountain Networks family of companies. Their mission is simple - to provide "best in class" customer service while giving good value.

## Heppner Outreach plans trunk or treat

The Heppner Outreach Committee will be holding a trunk or treat event on Willow Street from 4 to 6 p.m. October 31. Willow Street will be closed down so anyone can come and pass out candy from the trunk of their car.

Text or call the committee at 541-945-9495 for additional information or to reserve a spot in the trunk or treat.



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365 S Gilmore ST Heppner

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127 N Main St Heppner



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