

Enterprise Zone disburses \$9.2 million DA's Report

New infrastructure allotment gives each south county city \$200,000

By David Sykes

The Columbia River Enterprise Zone, CREZ, disbursed over \$9.2 million last week, including a new infrastructure allotment that saw two hundred thousand dollars sent to each of four cities in the county, ostensibly to tackle their special waste treatment needs. Recognizing Heppner, Lexington and Ione may need extra help with their waste treatment systems, the six-member CREZ board last Monday took some of the record \$9.2 million in-lieu-of-taxes money it has collected this year and gave each city \$200,000. The other two cities in the county were not left out, however, and under separate allotments Boardman received \$1,310,035 and Irrigon \$1,018,151 which included the additional \$200,000.

In the past, the CREZ has disbursed money around the county in four categories: education, public safety, community enhancement and housing. This year it decided to add a fifth category of infrastructure. "In the past we have talked about some of the bigger infrastructure problems we have in the county," CREZ chairman Don Russell said. As an example, he cited the city of Ione which has septic systems for all its homes. He said the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality, DEQ, has "not been receptive to septic on smaller lots. I would like to see some of this money go directly to the city to help with their infrastructure problems," he told the CREZ board. He also brought up Lexington which also is completely on septic systems. Heppner, who although has a central treatment plant, has been told by DEQ to stop dumping its treated effluent into Willow Creek and is facing a large expenditure to accomplish this.

While the CREZ board said it would not mandate the new allocated money be used by the cities strictly for waste treatment, it made clear that is the reason the money was given. "I am not saying we tell them to build a sewer system because that should be up to each city to decide what they want to do with it," Russell said. He added that maybe the people in Ione for instance are satisfied with septic and don't even want a new central sewer system. "Here is \$200,000, but what is the new system going to cost?" Russell said. "And do the people of Ione want it? I think that is still undetermined." He has talked to people in Ione and says, "I know some in Ione are in favor and some are not. I don't know what the overall voice of the people is. I know some think its badly needed and some think 'I just spent money upgrading my sewer system and having my septic pumped and my system works fine. I don't want to pay for something I don't need.'" Russell related. "I know being on a septic system (at his home outside Boardman) and

someone took me off and had me paying \$50 a month I might be a little resentful on that."

All board members acknowledged that \$200,000 alone would not solve the wastewater problems of any of the cities, but they did hope it would get them on the way to determining what is needed and how much it is going to cost. Heppner City Manager Kraig Cutsforth was on the Zoom meeting and was asked what Heppner is facing in sewer rehabilitation costs. "Right now, somewhere between \$3-5 million," Cutsforth told the CREZ board. "It's pretty large. I'm hoping to have a (sewer) retention pond in the next couple of years and hope to be out (of the creek)," he said. He added that the city also is having to replace old, deteriorated clay sewer pipes in town and that is another expense." Cutsforth said, however, that he was happy to get the CREZ money.

In further clarifying the rules of the new infrastructure grant money being sent to the cities Russell said, "If the city of Ione says we would rather do something else with the money are we okay with that?" "Yes, we are all right with that. If Ione polls their populous and they decide, say 65-35, that they like their existing septic system, I'm not going to tell them they have to put in a sewer system to get this \$200,000," he said. "But if you really want a sewer system this is a good start on how to tackle that problem." Others agreed and said it may be the start of further grant monies in the future for infrastructure. While not a member of the CREZ board, County Assessor Mike Gorman said he thinks the board should have a conversation with each of these cities and get an idea of how much the enterprise zone could help them in future years. "So, we are not just throwing away the \$200,000. If they had a plan, and if something would happen in the next 8-10 years then and they could actually accomplish something," he said of future CREZ assistance.

In other money disbursed, the CREZ board also gave Irrigon an additional \$200,000 this year for infrastructure, however it was part of a larger lump sum of \$1,018,151. Each year the CREZ has given the three economic development groups in the county funds, and in Irrigon's case the city government is also the economic development group.

The south county's economic development organization, Willow Creek Valley Economic Development Group, received \$628,399, the same amount as last year. It has used the money in the past for housing rehabilitation, business assistance and building two new duplexes in Heppner and other community projects. The group currently has a new duplex project going in Ione and has purchased acreage above Rock

Street in Heppner for a new subdivision. WCVEDG serves Heppner, Lexington and Ione.

Boardman Community Development, Boardman's economic development organization, received \$1,017,760, the same amount as last year. Allotment to the economic groups is based partly on population.

Boardman received the most of any city with a lump sum of \$1,310,035 this year. It has the highest population in the county and is also the city most impacted by the growth in the economic development zone. The zone is located mostly at the Port of Morrow which has experienced a large business expansion with multiple new internet "server farms" being constructed by Amazon. Tillamook Cheese and Lamb Weston are also expanding there. This new business growth has put pressure on Boardman's city services and infrastructure. Boardman specifically mentions the large upcoming cost needed to redo the freeway interchange that is in the middle of the town and separates the two halves of the city. The city also has several street projects that need funding.

An additional new expenditure this year went directly to the Port of Morrow, which is responsible for the new business growth that generates the tax money collected. The Port has never taken any money from the CREZ in the past 10 years. The Port got \$1,145,035 this year, which, although not earmarked for any specific project, would be used on infrastructure projects.

Some of the other expenditures included \$1,145,035 to Morrow County government, \$975,736 to the education foundation and \$250,180 to the health district.

Once again, the CREZ shied away from accepting or granting individual requests for funding that have come in over the years, instead opting to give the money directly to the economic development groups which in turn take requests and distribute the funds on down into the communities. Russell and some other CREZ board members were inclined to keep it that way. "People came with asks," said County Commissioner Jim Doherty, who is a member of the CREZ board. "The model was these groups go to their community groups (economic development) to ask for the money. It seems like a wonderful program, so we tell them go to WCVEDG and make their pitch as opposed to coming to us," Doherty said in supporting the current method of disbursing money. In also supporting this method, Russell related how the county previously had a program called Needs and Issues where money from the Finley Buttes landfill tipage fees were disbursed throughout the county. "Everybody in the county came

in with lots of different requests, all of them probably good things," Russell recalls. He said the county commissioners were tasked with who was going to get money. "The requests way outweighed the pocket-book," he says and was not a good way to disburse the funds. "Thankfully, we have three economic development partners that wanted to be involved and we put that in their pocket and let them decide who got funded and who didn't get funded. That is how we have done it in the past," Russell said.

At the conclusion of the three-hour meeting the group talked about how the CREZ disbursements have grown over the years, and what is the future for the funding. "In 2013-14 we disbursed \$257,724 and we thought that was great," Russell said. "We were doing wonderful things with it. Last year we disbursed \$6.5 million, and this year it is more yet. Everyone has done well with the funds we gave them," he said. Doherty suggested the board come back and meet in six months for a planning session and talk about the future spending of the CREZII, which will continue to receive large amounts of tax money under its current agreements for many more years.

Although CREZII expired this year it will still be collecting tax money and making disbursements from current contracts for the next 15 years. In addition, there is a new CREZIII coming into existence next year, and it too will be making additional tax contracts with expected new business development, and disbursing money throughout the county in the coming years.

Morrow County District Attorney Justin Nelson has released the following report:

-Pablo Alonzo Hernandez was convicted of Criminal Mischief 2 - Class A Misdemeanor offense and sentenced to 60 days in jail. He was also convicted of Resisting Arrest - Class A Misdemeanor offense receiving a sentence of 30 days jail. Also, for Criminal Mischief 2 - Class A Misdemeanor offense, he was sentenced to 24 months of probation, 180 days jail if probation violated and no contact with victim (who is also neighbor) during the two years of probation.

-Sierra Dennis was convicted of Criminal Misdemeanor in the First Degree - Class A Misdemeanor offense and sentenced to 24 months bench probation, 80 hours of community service and 180 days jail if probation violated. Also, must comply with DHS conditions and successfully complete a Parenting Skills Class through a court approved provider.

-Jose E Guzman Garcilazo was convicted of Harassment - Class B Misdemeanor offense and sentenced to 18 months of probation, 90 days jail if probation violated, 30 hours of community service, anger management assessment and treatment and no contact with victim. Also, Harassment - Class B Misdemeanor offense sentenced to 18 months' probation, 90 days jail if probation violated, 30 hours of community service, anger management assess-

ment and treatment and no contact with victim.

-Zachary James Steagall was convicted of Possession of Prohibited Firearm - Class B Felony Offense and sentenced to 36 months formal probation, 160 hours of CSW, alcohol and drug evaluation and treatment and 180/90 sanction units imposed.

-Florentino Pena Ramos was convicted of Harassment - Class A Misdemeanor offense and sentenced to 60 days in jail, 36 months bench probation, 120 days in jail if probation violated, 120 hours of CSW and no contact with victim.

Cody Thomas Hendren was convicted of Manslaughter in the First Degree and sentenced to 120 months prison sentence. Measure 11 sentence. Three years post-prison supervision. Also convicted of Criminal Mistreatment in the First Degree with 20 months prison sentence - concurrent to other sentence and three years post-prison supervision. He was also convicted of Criminal Mistreatment in the First Degree and sentenced to 25 months prison sentence - consecutive to any other sentence and three years post-prison supervision. The case was open sentencing, with sentence decided by the Court. State requested that each count be run consecutive, and that the high end of the grid block be used for each. State's requested sentence, based on Oregon sentencing guidelines, was 170 months prison sentence.

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The year 2020 has been one of challenges and changes. With change comes new perspective and at Wheatland it brings new and old faces to the office.

After 37 years of commitment and service to not only Wheatland but to South Morrow County and beyond, Nancy Snider has decided to retire November 30th. Wheatland wishes her all the best in this next chapter! Unfortunately, due to COVID restrictions, we are unable to have an open house to celebrate Nancy and thank her for everything she has accomplished.

With Nancy retiring, you might see some new and old faces around town. Stacie Ekstrom has been with Wheatland for nearly 24 years in the Ione office. While she started her career in personal lines, her focus for the past 20 years has been Commercial, Farm and Crop insurance. Stacie has co-managed the office with Nancy this past year and will continue to manage the office after her retirement.

Hometown girl is back in Heppner. While not new to insurance, Amy Wolters is new to the Heppner office. Amy and her family moved back to Morrow County seven years ago. Many of the local kids know her as Ms. Wolters as she worked for the Morrow County School District prior to Wheatland Insurance. Wheatland has been very fortunate for the past 4 1/2 years to have Amy as a valuable part of their team. Amy started out in Ione and transferred to Heppner a couple months ago. She is the assistant manager and handles your commercial and farm accounts.

A new exciting addition to the Wheatland family is Sean Wood. We cannot wait to see what he can do. Sean has had some insurance background but spent most of his time, pre-COVID, flying our friendly skies. Sean will be an account manager for your commercial accounts.

Alicia Doherty still continues to service your personal insurance needs. She has been a valuable member of the Wheatland team for 4 years now. Along with her dedication to Wheatland, you will find her helping out at numerous community events.

Amanda Fenn has been with Wheatland for just over a year. She is the first voice you hear when you call the office.

Since we all live in an ever-changing world, changes are inevitable. What does not change is Wheatland's commitment to the local communities and their clients. Wheatland looks forward to continuing to service your insurance needs and supporting the local communities.

Library board to hold Zoom meeting

The Oregon Trail Library District Board will hold a Zoom meeting Wednesday, December 16 at 6:30 p.m. Items on the agenda include approval of

November board meeting minutes and November financials, board governance policy, draft audit report, COVID precautions and the director report.

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