



# Dollar General looks to open Heppner store

## Several businesspeople seek to block

By David Sykes

Nation-wide store chain Dollar General is looking to locate a store in Heppner and some local businesspeople are organizing to stop it. Dollar General has 16,278 stores in 46 states across the country and wants to add Heppner to its list, but some local businesspeople have made it clear they don't want them here, and they are looking for ways to keep it out.

"I believe there will only be negative impacts on our already established businesses and the small community we all love so much," said local businessman Drew Brannon who along with his wife Tayllor are spearheading the effort to stop the store. "The predatory practice that Dollar General establishes is to target failing communities and Heppner is not a failing community," Brannon said on a Facebook post and letter to the editor in last week's paper. Drew and Tayllor own the Breaking Grounds Coffee Shop and Breaking Bread distributorship in Heppner and both are adamantly opposed to the new store. The Brannons have enlisted other businesses in the effort and plan to attend a February 8 city council meeting and let their concerns be heard. They have also urged others to attend the 7 p.m. meeting and voice opposition to the new store, however because of COVID restrictions there will be limited entrance to the night's meeting. (see city manager letter to editor).

The couple's efforts have sparked a lively debate on Facebook with people on both sides weighing in on the positive and negative effects of a store like Dollar General. The Brannons say not only would the store be in competition with existing Heppner businesses, but would also provide products already for sale here, offer limited employment, not support the local economy, lack community support for schools and public events, and "take away our small-town pride and character on Main Street."

Businesses signing on to Brannon's statement of opposition include Murray's Drugstore, Sage Clothing, Two Old Hags Pizza, Heppner Auto Parts, Brannon's Auto Repair, Peterson's Jewelry, Breaking Grounds Coffee and Breaking Bread Distribution. The majority of comments from individuals on Facebook have also been negative and opposed to the locating of a Dollar General Store in Heppner.

Some individuals, however, have weighed in saying Heppner needs the economic stimulus of a new business with new employees and the spillover effect of more money being spent at all local businesses. Supporters also say the store would attract new shoppers



Nationwide discount chain Dollar General is looking to establish a store in Heppner and is currently negotiating to purchase the Cornerstone Gallery and RV Park property on Main Street. -Photo by David Sykes.

from the surrounding area that don't currently buy in Heppner, and also offer local people lower pricing on food and other household supplies. According to Dollar General's website, their stores offer low prices on items including food, snacks, health and beauty aids, cleaning supplies, basic apparel, housewares, seasonal items, paper products and necessities such as laundry detergent, toilet paper, soap, shampoo, socks and underwear.

The options for actually stopping the store seem limited however, as Heppner City Manager Kraig Cutsforth explains the store will be locating in a commercial zone under an allowed use, which means there shouldn't be any need for the city to grant either a variance or conditional use. Cutsforth also pointed out that Heppner does not have business license requirements and does not regulate what businesses operate within the city limits. (See Cutsforth's letter to editor in this week's paper). Cutsforth also pointed out that the city follows all zoning codes and offers free advice as to their purpose when someone wants to find out if it is a permitted use in a particular zone. This is information he has given to Dollar General representatives as they research the Heppner location. He says all the zoning information is also available on-line at the city's website (cityof-heppner.org). "In regards of what information has been asked of the city, so far it has only been on permitted uses of a property and what utilities are available," he says of his discussions with Dollar General. He also pointed out that any building licenses sought by the store would be obtained not at Heppner City Hall but from the building inspector's office in Boardman.

Some people have suggested the city adopt an ordinance similar to one in Tulsa, OK that opponents say might be able to block the store from locating here. The Dollar General store will not be on the city council agenda next Monday as a separate discussion topic but will come up under the public comment and discussion section, which is part of each month's city council meetings.

The property being considered for the new store is currently owned by local businessman Alvin Liu, who in addition to owning the RV Park and

Cornerstone location, also owns the Northwestern Motel across the street and the Gateway Café on Main. Liu also runs a catering business which has a food trailer called Happy Pappy's Catering Service.

Liu told the Gazette-Times Monday that he is currently in negotiations

through a real estate agent with an agent of Dollar General for sale of his property, but nothing has been finalized. "They came to us," Liu says of his contact with Dollar General. "They said this property is the most suitable in Heppner."

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# \$65 million in Port bonds to finance Lakeview wood waste biorefinery

## Court to determine legality of funding project outside Morrow County

By David Sykes

The Port of Morrow is in court to determine the legality of issuing \$65 million in revenue bonds to fund a jet and diesel fuel biorefinery under construction in Lakeview, Oregon. The petition, filed in circuit court January 22, is required to determine if the Port can legally issue bonds for a project constructed outside its jurisdictional boundaries. The Port's boundaries are the same as Morrow County.

If approved the bond proceeds would then be loaned to Red Rock Biofuels for help financing the company's new biorefinery nearing completion at Lakeview, Oregon. The plant will convert wood waste into jet and diesel fuels and the company reportedly already has a contract with Shell Aviation to distribute the low-carbon product.

The Port decided to issue the bonds for the benefit of Red Rock after a \$10 million tax exempt bond opportunity to finance a local Morrow County solid waste disposal facility became unneeded. Congress only allows a limited amount of tax-exempt bonds issued each year, and rather than let the special tax-exempt funding opportunity it possesses expire, the Port decided to combine the \$10 million tax-exempt with another \$55 million in regular revenue bonds to help the Oregon project. The Port will also reportedly realize "a small monetary gain" from the deal. Tax exempt bonds are coveted by investors as the interest income is federally non-



Bonds from the Port of Morrow could help fund this biorefinery in Lakeview, OR.

taxable.

The tax-exempt bond opportunity had originally been allocated by the state to the Port for use in financing a local solid waste project called Three Mile Canyon Project. Three Mile ended up not needing the money, so rather than lose the special bonding opportunity which expires at the end of 2021, Port commissioners voted to issue the bonds and then loan the money to Red Rock. The Port did not have another project in Morrow County that qualified for the bonds so they would have gone unused. "Helping a fellow, small eastern Oregon community, Lakeview in this case, realize a sizable economic gain appeals to me as we may need their help in the future, whatever that might be," Port Commissioner John Murray told the Gazette-Times about his decision to support the

# Small towns have rewards



A new Veterans memorial is on display at the cemetery thanks to a local citizen's generosity. -Photo by Giselle Moses.

By Giselle Moses

Living in a small town always comes with challenges. It also comes with rewards.

A local townswoman saw a vacancy that needed to be filled. The Veteran's memorial at the Heppner Masonic Cemetery was missing something. The trees that once graced the spot had died and been removed. It "needed something," the woman told the

Gazette.

She also said she has always had respect for the military. The only veteran she can recall in her family was her great-grandfather. She continued saying she always liked the "Wounded Soldier," so she commissioned Steve Marlatt to create what is now on display at the Heppner cemetery.

The donor asked to remain anonymous.

finery is scheduled for completion in spring of this year. Once operational, it will be the world's first commercial scale plant to utilize waste woody biomass from forests to create sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) and cellulosic renewable diesel.

"This has been one of the most devastating wildfire seasons on record," said Red Rock CEO Terry Kulesa. "We have seen wildfires grow in intensity, acreage, and damage to public health and the environment." He said a benefit of the new facility is to reduce the wood waste on the forest floor and help mitigate the spread of these wildfires. He said the new facility producing fuel from wood waste will also support the "decarbonization of aviation and heavy transport" and protect the environment.

Red Rock says SAF and wood waste renewable diesel are expected to be up to 80 percent lower in carbon emissions than conventional jet fuel. The SAF will be supplied to airports through the Shell Aviation distribution chain using existing airport infrastructure and can be used blended by airlines without requiring technical modification to their current fleet, the company says.

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