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Wednesday, February 24, 2021 Morrow County, Heppner, Oregon

Irrigon looks at starting municipal court

However, move could affect city's sheriff coverage

By David Sykes

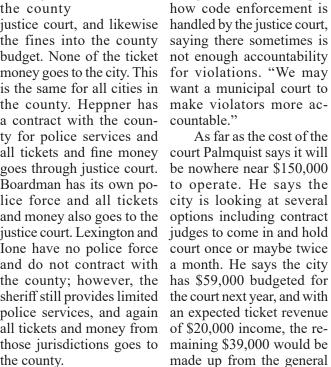
Irrigon is looking to set up its own municipal court and begin handling tickets and violations within the city, a move that would take fine money away from the Justice Court and the county budget. The proposal sparked a long discussion at a recent county commission meeting.

Commissioners talked about how the new city court would impact the county budget, and how the change could affect the county sheriff's police coverage contract with Irrigon. Morrow County Sheriff Ken Matlack was at the February 2 meeting and part of the discussion.

Matlack, who lives in Irrigon and sits on the city council, explained that if the city does set up a municipal court it would handle only tickets and code violations and no misdemeanors

or felonies. Irrigon currently contracts with the sheriff's office for police coverage and all tickets writlimits go to Matlack





At the February 2 meeting commissioners expressed concern the money taken away from justice court would have an impact on the county budget and could even reduce justice court and sheriff's office staff, therefore changing how policing is done in

Irrigon. One county commissioner believes Irrigon is starting the new court because it has done financial analysis and thinks it could make more money on ticket income than the cost of operating the new court. "I would think Irrigon did look at this because if they think if they hire a municipal judge and assistant and pay a combined \$150,000 and then they get ticket income at worst it will break even and at best it will make a little revenue for them," Commission Chair Don

Russell said.



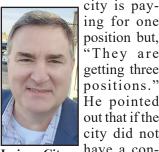
Justice Court offices in Irrigon

cials say it's not about the to provide a police protecmoney but more about action contract, in which he countability, oversight and says Irrigon gets more than supervision of the court. they pay for. "I don't think "That's what this is about," the board (commissioners) says Irrigon City Manag- would go along with a coner Aaron Palmquist. "We tract where the county is aren't going to tell the mu- getting paid for one posinicipal court what to do, but tion that equals 160 hours some oversight," he said of give 450 to 650 hours every He gave as an example told the commissioners the how code enforcement is handled by the justice court, saying there sometimes is countable."

As far as the cost of the be nowhere near \$150,000 to operate. He says the city is looking at several options including contract court once or maybe twice the justice court. Matlack a month. He says the city has \$59,000 budgeted for lot of police work to do in an expected ticket revenue council and understand of \$20,000 income, the retheir issues. Because of

court has been in the works disputes the sheriff's hours, city adopted an ordinance to Irrigon incorrectly and and duties. The court will time spent in the city. not handle misdemeanors required to be a member of the Oregon State Bar and to

have malpractice insurance. the city. Irrigon currently the justice court. pays the county \$95,000 per year for 40 hours of tract to provide police with police protection per week. the county for many years. Palmquist says he has been It started out years ago at in talks with the sheriff to three positions and 120 provide next year's ser- hours a week, but in recent vice at \$98,000. Matlack years is two positions and tied the city's decision to 80 hours per week. Hep-



Irrigon City

ing for one position but, "They are out that if the deputies. city did not tract with the sheriff's of-

fice then all

violations

judges to come in and hold will automatically go to added that Irrigon has a the court next year, and with the city. "I am on the city maining \$39,000 would be their growth they take a lot made up from the general of work on police services. I don't have an answer for Planning for the new that," he said. Palmquist since last May when the saying many are attributed spelling out court functions should not be counted as

Boardman has their or felonies and the judge is own 11-person police department including a chief, lieutenant, two sergeants, a detective, four officers, one The fiscal impact on the school resource officer and county budget of Irrigon an office manager. Russell starting its own court was says the Boardman departdiscussed at length by the ment's budget is a "little commissioners, but at the over two million dollars." same time they talked about Boardman does not have a the county sheriff's police municipal court and all of protection contract with their tickets and fines go to

Heppner has had a conestablish a municipal court pner City Manager Kraig

But Irrigon city offi- into the sheriff continuing Cutsforth says Heppner will pay \$178,683 for its police contract this year. "The city also sets aside money for the purchase of vehicles at a rate of \$15,000 per year," he says. "We have been informed to expect the cost of the contract to raise at least three percent per year we do think we should have per month but in reality we from this point forward." All the tickets and money the Irrigon City Council. month," Matlack says. He from fines goes to the justice court.

Lexington and Ione do not have police contracts with the sheriff's office, but the office still provides getting three police protection, however

Morrow County Counhave a con- cil and District Attorney Justin Nelson said the Irrigon municipal court would take the money-making violations away from the justice court and leave the money costing violations behind. Nelson explained how traffic and other low-level violations are typically tickets that get paid. He said the new city court would handle only those type of offenses and not the more expensive misdemeanors and felonies. He said those higher-level crimes typically require court appointed lawyers, and on top of that the defendants don't normally have the money to pay fines that are levied against them. "They cost the county money," he told the commissioners.

Lori Roach resigns from Heppner Chamber



Lori Roach, who began her new job as executive director of the Heppner Chamber on July 1, has decided to resign. Roach took over the position from Sheryll Bates when Bates retired.

Lori and her husband, Rick, moved to Heppner in April 2020 from their most recent home in North Bonneville, WA, which is just across the river from the Bridge of the Gods. While living there, she and Rick operated Studio 6 Designworks where they published The Gorge Business News newspaper that is distributed from Lyle to Camas in Washington and from Troutdale to The Dalles in

Lori and Rick intend to stay in Heppner where Lori will work as an independent business consultant.

Lori wrote the following letter to the residents of Heppner, Lexington and

Dear Heppner, Lexington and Ione,

I moved to Heppner in April 2020 at the very beginning of this pandemic we are all involved with, to become the executive director of the Heppner Chamber of Commerce. I came with high hopes that the chamber would be a perfect fit for me. I soon found out, that while there were a lot of great things about working at the chamber, it also came with some challenging aspects I did not expect. I started eight months ago and sadly my role as the executive director of the Heppner Chamber of Commerce has ended this week, two weeks after I tendered my resignation to my board of directors.

Times are tough and change can be hard. I don't think the job was quite what I had expected, and I don't think I was quite what my board had expected, so we will be parting ways. I believe I can better represent and help businesses throughout Morrow County and northeast Oregon as an independent, creative business consultant.

I want to say thank you to so many of you that welcomed me here with open arms. I have made some great friends along the way and recently bought a house with my husband Rick, so we do not plan on leaving any time

I often joke that I have had so much fun since coming to town, because all I have done is give away money and Christmas presents. While that is partially true, it was the process of getting to know those of you who came into my office that I am most thankful for. Together we hammered out grant paperwork, or brainstormed about your business, or found joy in the great Christmas presents that were donated for the Heppner Christmas event. The friends I find along the way are always my biggest blessing, and if we happened to find each other here, please know that just because I am no longer at the chamber does not mean that I am done cheering you and your business on. Please feel free to call me for brainstorming sessions, help with grants, and 'hey you can do this' encouragement. My new email is lori.mcbn@gmail.com if you would like to contact me that way.

I want to thank my Heppner Chamber of Commerce positions." no city code enforcement board and my Willow Creek Valley Economic Develop-He pointed is done by the sheriff's ment Group board for giving me the opportunity to meet so many wonderful people. My work in Morrow County is only just beginning, and I am so excited for the direction my journey is taking me. It has been great getting to know those of you I have gotten the chance to know. I appreciate your understanding of this personal decision and I look forward to working with all of you, for the betterment of our communities, over the coming years.

Lori Roach

Irrigon now is the citizens of Irrigon pay county taxes which in part fund the for all county services," sheriff's office. That money people contend should be counted as money paid to the sheriff for services. "The discussion is 'we don't want to pay more because we are already paying taxes.' Maybe they are paying more. I can't answer that," Matlack said.

Commissioners were told that with the property valuations within the Irrigon city limits those Matlack said an argu- properties pay \$255,000 per

ment being heard around year into the county. "Two hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars isn't a lot Russell pointed out. The sheriff's office is about 21 percent of the general fund county expenditures, and eight percent of the total overall yearly county budget.

> Commissioner Melissa Lindsay said some work needs to be done on a fiscal analysis of all this, including how much of the sheriff's budget the Irrigon tax-

-See IRRIGON/PAGE TWO

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