



Dollar General touts economic growth, opponents gather signatures against

Store pens positive letter to council as opposition presents 153-signature petition against

By David Sykes

The battle over locating a Dollar General store in Heppner continued to play out at the Heppner city council Monday night, as opponents of the store presented a 153-signature petition against the retailer, while the council was given a two-page 832-word letter from Dollar General officials in support of the new retailer.

Saying the store would be detrimental to existing local businesses and to the citizens of Heppner, opponents John Murray and Drew Brannon called on the council to enact a six month “moratorium” against the store’s efforts to locate here. On the other hand, Dollar General’s Steve Brophy, vice president of government affairs, and Crystal Luce, senior director of public relations, wrote to councilmembers saying the store would have a positive economic effect



in Heppner. “At Dollar General, we strive to be a positive business partner and good community neighbor,” the letter said. “We believe the addition of a new store in Heppner would represent positive economic growth within the community by providing new jobs, additional tax revenue for the city and help keep retail sales local as many residents now travel to Hermiston to purchase everyday essentials, which our store would aim to provide,” they said. (See the entire text of the Dollar General letter in this week’s Letters to the Editor section of the Heppner Gazette-Times).

Murray repeated to the council his previous arguments on the negative impacts a store would have on Heppner, mainly causing the local grocery store to go out of business leaving Heppner in a “food desert” with no place for residents to buy fresh vegetables, fruits and meats. He said this loss of the existing grocery store would cause a deterioration in the health of local residents. As Murray said at a previous council meeting Dollar General does not sell fresh foods and would merely skim the profits from the local grocery store by undercutting prices on more profitable preprocessed, canned and less healthy prepacked foods.

He has advocated the council pass an ordinance requiring Dollar General, if it wants to open here, be required to sell fresh food which he says would create a “level playing field” in competition with the local existing market. He admitted that passing such a law would stop the store from building in Heppner, since

carrying fresh foods is not in Dollar General’s business model. Murray has also told the council the store is not the kind of business we should want in Heppner, as it sells defective and toxic products, treats its employees poorly and has been fined extensively for its business practices. At a past meeting Murray presented the council with numerous media articles he says backs up his negative criticisms of the chain.

Dollar General, on the other hand, says its stores provide service and value to their customers. “We are a small-box general merchandise store that provides significant value on the essential items that American households use and replenish most often and play an important role for customers who are looking for a convenient option,” their letter stated. The letter also quoted the Mayor of Fargo, Georgia who said the store has been a “godsend” to the community. “It is a big boost to our local economy. That will help boost sales tax revenues, which is a big part of our budget. As an addition, I can say that I have had a few residents say that they no longer even go out of Fargo to shop, since they can get pretty much everything they need right here. The opening of the new Dollar General store in Fargo has been a godsend,” said Mayor Roy Abbott.

The letter also touted the store’s employment saying it now employs about 600 people in Oregon and that 75 percent of their current store managers were promoted from within the organization.

At this point the store has its eye on a piece of property on Main Street where a gift shop and RV park are now located. A purchase has not yet been completed on the property, but company representatives have been negotiating with the property owner and working with city officials to comply with all zoning and other laws. Since the store is not required to seek variances or conditional uses from the city to build the store, and the city does not have businesses licenses or issue building permits, it is not clear how the city government could stop the store if the council did decide to make that effort. Two city councilmembers were concerned on how the city could pass an ordinance blocking one specific business without stopping all new business development within the city. Murray and Brannon didn’t give details on how a moratorium ordinance could be worded, however, they cited efforts by other cities as evidence it could be done. After dis-

cussion, the council took no action on the requested moratorium.

Gorge Net talks internet service

Also at Monday’s meeting was a representative of internet service provider Gorge Net, which recently bought out PrineTime for services in Heppner, Lexington and Ione. Dan Bubb, President, Gorge Networks LLC said the company is moving forward with plans to put “fiber to the home” a term used when putting high speed fiber optic cable into homes for high-speed internet access. PrineTime had started the process of putting in the service in south Morrow County when it sold out.

Bubb said the company is stringing fiber now in Ione and would soon be offering it in Heppner once planning is done. He said the company would still offer internet through its wi-fi service, which is how most people were familiar with PrineTime before the sale. He said if people sign

up the fiber will be faster than wi-fi. He also said the company would probably offer free wi-fi in the parks for people to connect, and also offer some connectivity for city facilities as part of its offerings.

He did not give an exact date for when the new fiber to the home would be offered in Heppner, but the company would begin advertising when it is ready to start doing hookups. The company is headquartered in Hood River.

Heppner Outreach disbanded

In other action the council voted to disband the Heppner Outreach Committee, which in the past has put on community events such as First Fridays. COVID was the main reason given for disbanding the group since no activities have been able to be held since the pandemic started. The group can continue meeting, it was said, it will just no longer be an official committee of the city of Heppner.

MS Awareness Week this week



Pictured (L-R) back row: Debbie Sumner, Merilee McDowell and Chris Nix. Front row: Barb Fairchild Orwick, Crystal Holmes, Jean Wood and Jan Moffit.

This week, March 7 – 15, is MS Awareness Week. Multiple sclerosis, or MS, is a disease of the central nervous system that can cause symptoms throughout the body. It is believed to be an autoimmune condition, in which the immune system mistakenly attacks normal tissues — in MS, the immune system attacks the myelin sheath that normally protects nerve fibers in the brain, spinal cord, and optic nerve. As the myelin sheath is gradually destroyed, the

resulting scar tissue (sclerosis) disrupts the electrical impulses between the brain and other parts of the body. But it is not clear what causes the onset of this immune reaction, and most people diagnosed with MS have no known risk factors.

“It is MS Awareness Week and I’m proud to be a part of this movement, along with others who have MS in Morrow, Wheeler and Gilliam counties, changing the world for people living with MS,” said

PUC grants UEC petition

By David Sykes

The Oregon Public Utility Commission, PUC, has granted Umatilla Electric Co-op’s, UEC, request for a certificate of public convenience which will allow the co-op to move forward with a proposed 4.3-mile overhead transmission lined planned near Boardman. The certificate will give the co-op the authority to use property condemnation if necessary, to complete the project.

Winding its way through public hearings, PUC approval, and a lawsuit the certificate request has been a hurdle UEC needed to clear in order to move forward with the project, which they say is necessary to service a growing demand in the Boardman area, which has grown 13.3 percent over the past seven years. According to the co-op, at the end of 2019 energy sales were up approximately 20 percent over the prior year and approximately 125 percent over the last five years. UEC is now the largest electric cooperative in the ten western states in terms of power sales.

The transmission line will run from Highway 730 switchyard to a planned substation near Olson Road in Boardman. Co-op officials say the line will address local area capacity growth and provide added system reliability in the Boardman area. If the co-op cannot reach agreement with two landowners in the area it could require condemnation of those properties on which to place the line.

During the decision

process, the UEC examined three alternative routes and found that in terms of cost benefit and impact, the chosen route is the best for cost and minimal impact on property, environment and agriculture operations. Expenses for building the new line are expected to be entirely paid for by the increased sales in the Boardman area.

The PUC also looked into claims that the line is being built for the benefit of one customer, a new Amazon server facility being built in the Olson Road area. UEC says the line is necessary to add reliability to their grid and a limited number of customers is not a reason to deny the certificate.

A route north of Interstate 84 was pushed by some as a better route for the line, however UEC claimed that path was not less impactful than the proposed route and other alternative routes considered. It was also found the I-84 route would be “much more difficult, if not impossible to site.”

Under the proposed route plan the UEC will still have to gain approval from both the county planning department and the city of Boardman. The county will need to grant road crossing permits, and the city has advised UEC’s land use team about a planned loop road to enhance traffic safety in the Laurel Lane Road, Interstate-84 interchange area (Port of Morrow Interchange). UEC says the design will accommodate the city’s road development plans.

had to put the meetings on hold, continued McDowell. This Thursday, March 11 at 10:30 a.m., the group will begin meeting again with coffee, sharing and laughing (lots of laughter) followed by lunch. People with MS and their families are welcome to join them, with masks and distancing in place. “The owner of The Drive In, Vicki, and her waitress have been really good to us with our own special place in the back,” said a member of the group.

Those with MS, their friends and families will have another chance to get together, have fun and raise funds to help those with MS during “Virtual Walk MS,” sponsored by NMSS, happening in April. Look for more information in a future issue of the Heppner Gazette-Times.

DEADLINE:
MONDAYS
AT 5PM

the HEPPNER
GAZETTE
TIMES
OUR NEWLY UPDATED WEBSITE MAKES IT EASY TO:
•Submit news
•Submit birth, engagement and wedding announcements
•Send us photos
•Submit letters to the editor
•Place ads
•Start a new subscription
HEPPNER.NET
Weekly deadline for all news and advertising is Monday at 5pm.
188 W Willow, Heppner
541-676-9228

Going On Now!

20% off all In Stock Apparel
30% off Select UTV/ATV Winches

Contact Lexington Parts Department

Morrow County Grain Growers Inc.
350 Main Street
Lexington, Oregon 97839
541-989-8221
mcgg.net