

The Official Newspaper
of the City of Heppner and the County of Morrow

Heppner
GAZETTE-TIMES
U.S.P.S. 240-420

Morrow County's Home-Owned Weekly Newspaper

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Published weekly by Sykes Publishing and entered as periodical matter at the Post Office at Heppner, Oregon under the Act of March 3, 1879. Periodical postage paid at Heppner, Oregon. Office at 188 W. Willow Street. Telephone (541) 676-9228. Fax (541) 676-9211. E-mail: editor@rapidsolve.net or david@rapidsolve.net. Web site: www.heppner.net. Postmaster send address changes to the Heppner Gazette-Times, P.O. Box 337, Heppner, Oregon 97836. Subscriptions: \$31 in Morrow County; \$25 senior rate (in Morrow County only; 65 years or older); \$37 elsewhere; \$31 student subscriptions.

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CREZ III gets organized

New enterprise zone comes with changes

By David Sykes
Columbia River Enterprise Zone III is underway and open for business, and the new board of directors met last week to lay out the ground rules for the latest zone, which will govern its operation over the coming years.

The rules are important since the zone will not only attract and expand new businesses to Morrow County, but also will decide how and where millions of dollars in lieu of tax money collected from these businesses will be spent.

The board members making these decisions in the coming years are the three members of the Morrow County Commission, Melissa Lindsay, Don Russell and Jim Doherty, along with Rick Stokoe, Ryan Neal and Joe Taylor

from the Port of Morrow. The members could change over the years, and they will also most certainly be joined in the future by representatives from the city of Boardman. Jerry Healy and Lisa Mittelsdorf from the port were chosen as alternates and will fill in during an absence of a regular port member. Alternates for the commissioners have not yet been announced.

Before the board gets into negotiating with prospective businesses over tax abatement deals, however, it needed to hammer out its own operating rules. Much of its operating rules will be the same as the CREZ II, which statutorily expired after 10 years, but there will be some changes. One area discussed at length was how to handle bonded debt, or the money raised not through regular property taxation, but the issuing of bonds by special taxing districts like the schools.

In CREZ II some of the businesses claiming long-term 15-year tax abatements are paying more when special districts issue bonds, and other businesses do not pay specifically for that bond. It was reported at the meeting that Lamb Weston and Tillamook Cheese, even though the bonding language was included in their original tax abatement contracts, were surprised when assessed the additional bond tax. Other businesses such as Amazon made it known they did not want the uncertainty of future unknown bonded debt tax bills and were given a different payment from the CREZ. Instead of being hit with potential new unknown bonded debt payments in the future, Amazon elected to pay a fixed amount over the years. Some of the new CREZ

III board members thought every business should pay for new bonded debt over the life of their agreement. "It is my opinion they need to all be paying for bonding," Commissioner Lindsay said. She said in the past when companies have pushed back against paying for the bonds CREZ has given it up rather than lose a business deal. "We want to make sure those things near and dear to us are taken care of," she said. Port Manager Ryan Neal said it depends on the deal, asking, "Do you really want to pass up a good deal over this?" Commissioner Don Russell said the company should pay and arrangements have been made using a defined amount set aside. "Maybe they don't want an unknown cost, but they have their kids in the schools too," he pointed out. Enterprise Zone Manager Greg Sweek told the board the rules they are laying out now are not binding on the negotiations. "This is not binding. It just goes to the company (preparing to open negotiations with the CREZ on a tax abatement agreement) so they have an idea of what they need to do to get a significant tax break," Sweek said. "It is just a guideline and subject to the situation at hand in front of you," Russell added.

Of course, the other big question the new board will face is: How will the money collected from businesses in lieu of taxes be spent? The CREZ is different from any other regular taxing district. The members of the board are not elected per se (as with a school or medical district or city council for example) and they do not have to formulate a budget, publish a budget, or hold public hearings on a bud-

get and how their money is spent. Nor is there an annual audit done on its spending as with every other public entity that receives public property taxes. The board has great leeway on how and where in the county its money will be spent.

In the past the CREZ II allotted the money under four broad categories of housing, education, public safety and community enhancement. Another category was added last year for infrastructure spending. However the new CREZ III is not bound by those categories and could come up with a totally new distribution system for the millions of dollars expected to be collect over the coming years. "It is appropriate to re-visit how we spend the money, and this conversation should be in front of the public," Lindsay said.

The new board was not ready to tackle the spending question last week, however, and decided to deal with it at a future meeting. It was suggested that a joint meeting be held between the CREZ II and III boards to talk about the "philosophical questions" of how and where the money will be spent in the county. It was also pointed out that CREZ III does not currently have any money and will not for several years until new deals are in place.

Another topic discussed was the money companies with enterprise zone agreements pay to community and civic groups in the county that can then be used as an offset against those companies' tax bills. It was suggested that CREZ keep a list of contact people at the companies so people in the nonprofits and other civic groups can then contact those companies and ask for donations.

Cicada killer wasps showing up in our area



The western cicada killer

Last week a G-T reader brought in a wasp found in Lexington wondering what kind it was. We put the question to our readers and one knowledgeable person called to tell us the unfamiliar insect was a cicada

killer wasp. The reader, who said she used to work in "bug management," said although the wasps look pretty intimidating, they are actually not very aggressive and are also a beneficial insect for plants and gardens. The wasps earn their name for targeting cicadas, the winged insects that make the buzzing and clicking sounds heard during the summer. Female wasps paralyze cicadas with their venom and carry them back to underground burrows where they bury the cicadas alive next to their

eggs, which become hungry larvae. Apparently eastern Oregon has an ideal climate and soil conditions for the cicada killers. They burrow in particularly sandy soils, and this area is ideal for the females to dig a burrow, about eight to 10-inches deep and to lay their eggs. An outbreak of the cicada insect has led to a rise in the western cicada killer wasps in eastern Oregon, which measure about 1.5 to 2 inches in length. They will reportedly take down the large cicada insects midair to feed to their young.

ALL NEWS AND ADVERTISEMENT DEADLINE: MONDAYS AT 5:00 P.M.

SPECIAL TRANSPORTATION FUND (STF)

Looking for Committee Members We Have Five Vacancies in the STF Committee



STF PURPOSE
This Advisory Committee is established in the interest of transit system users (seniors, disabled, veterans, Hispanic and any other pertinent person groups) in Morrow County. Its purpose is to advise the Morrow County Commissioners/The Loop on matters that pertain to the Special Transportation Fund and all matters regarding the transportation needs of those utilizing the transit system. The Advisory Committee will make recommendations that encourage and promote the accomplishments of those needs that directly affect the welfare of those who desire and/or require such services.

If you are interested in serving in this committee, please contact Katie Imes at The Loop: 541.676.5667 or kimes@co.morrow.or.us

STATEWIDE TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT FUND (STIF)

Looking for Committee Members We Have Two Vacancies in the STIF Committee



STIF PURPOSE
The Committee shall assist the Commissioners in tasks and duties supporting local and regional transportation services funded through the State Transportation Improvement Fund (STIF) and allocated to Morrow County, for distribution to Public Transportation Service Providers within and adjacent to Morrow County.

If you are interested in serving in this committee, please contact Katie Imes at The Loop: 541.676.5667 or kimes@co.morrow.or.us

June averages much warmer than normal

Second warmest June on record

According to preliminary data received by NOAA's National Weather Service in Pendleton, temperatures at Heppner averaged much warmer than normal during the month of June. The average temperature was 69.5 degrees which was 6.8 degrees above normal. High temperatures averaged 84.0 degrees, which was 7.4 degrees above normal. The highest was 109 degrees on the 29th. Low temperatures averaged 55.1 degrees, which was 6.2 degrees above normal. The

lowest was 37 degrees, on the 7th. On 10 days, the temperature exceeded 90 degrees. It was at least 100 degrees on three days. Precipitation totaled 0.51 inches during June, which was 0.87 inches below normal. Measurable precipitation, at least .01 inch, was received on four days with the heaviest, 0.38 inches reported on the 16th. Precipitation this year has reached 4.25 inches, which is 4.41 inches below normal. Since October, the water year precipitation

at Heppner has been 7.73 inches, which is 4.99 inches below normal. The outlook for July from NOAA's Climate Prediction Center calls for above normal temperatures and below normal precipitation. Normal highs for Heppner during July are 85.7 degrees and normal lows are 53.9 degrees. The 30-year normal precipitation is 0.33 inches. This was the second warmest June on record. The warmest was 70.6 degrees in 2015.

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