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County adopts flexible employee work options

Most popular is four-10s work week and shortened lunch hour

By David Sykes

County employees will now have more freedom to adjust their daily work schedules following adoption of a "Flexible Work Schedule Policy" last week by county commissioners.

Under the new policy employees, with approval of their department heads and the county administrator, will be able to, among other things, adjust the time they start and end their workdays, switch to working what is commonly called four-10s (working 10 hours per day four days per week leaving a three-day weekend each week) and shortening their lunch or mealtime from 60 to 30 minutes.

County Human Resource Manager Lindsay Grogan presented the commissioners with results of a survey she sent to all 17 county department heads seeking opinions on the proposed new policy. Grogan said 11 responded, with nine being in favor of the flexible option, one a maybe, and one department head saying no. She said some departments, such as the county road department, which is already on the four-10s work week, are already using flex options, but she wanted the new policy to have consistency in the county's employment policy. Grogan said the most popular flex time option was the four-10s work week and the shortened lunch hour.

Grogan said out of the 17 county departments six are already offering some type of alternative scheduling, four are giving flex on a case-by-case basis and seven are not offering flex scheduling at all. The commissioner heard arguments on both sides of more flexible scheduling. Commission Chair Don Russell said he liked the ideal of more flexibility for the county employees as he thought it would help to retain quality employees. "I like the option, and then department heads can decide what to do," Russell said. "In a tight labor market, we need to be flexible to get and keep quality people. Especially in a county where the school district only works four 10s and students are in the classroom only four days a week," he argued. Russell said having people work five days per week puts a burden on people for childcare on that fifth day, Friday. "We need to

continue to be an attractive employer and still get the people's business done in a timely manner." Russell liked that the new policy would leave it up to the department heads to run their offices as efficiently as they can, with input from the administrator and, on rare occasions, the board of commissioners.

In the department head survey, seven said the flex time would help with recruitment and retention and six said it would help improve office culture, morale and productivity. Only three rated it important to childcare and employee satisfaction amongst the county workforce.

While ultimately voting in favor of the new policy Commissioner Melissa Lindsay asked Grogan if many of the departments are already using flex time, why was it coming to the board of commissioners? "If this is the current policy, why are we talking about this now?" Grogan said, as the human resource person, she thought the policy should be formal to add to consistency across the county departments. Lindsay also wanted to know if adopting the policy would affect future negotiations with the county workers union and was told it probably would not make a difference.

Also discussed was the possible reduction in services to the public caused by the policy. "We are a service organization," Commissioner Jim Doherty said. "And that is what we do. I hear more constituents say: why can't I go to the road department and get a permit on a Friday?" The county road department has been on a four-10s schedule and closed on Fridays for some time. It is also the only county department that is currently closed on Fridays. It was pointed out that while some departments, like the courts, are not operating on Fridays, they all have someone in the office five days per week. Grogan admitted that while it may be more efficient for the road department to work only four days per week, there are public service complaints about the department being closed Fridays. Lindsay agreed, saying she hears complaints about the road department being closed on Fridays. "Some positions could be flex, there is a place for that, but I do hear complaints that there is nobody at the public works department on Fridays," she said. "We are taking services away

from the folks out there," Doherty said of the new policy. "I don't hear from the constituency out there beating my door down telling me I need to allow people to work less. We have to weigh that as well," he said.

Grogan said any employee going on a flex time arrangement would be subject to a probationary period to make sure it works. "If a department head is saying, 'I'm getting too many complaints', then they could pull them off. It's built into the policy," Grogan told the commissioners. After discussion the commission passed the new policy with Russell and Lindsay voting yes and Doherty no.

In other action at the meeting the commission declined to approve a set of job descriptions for elected officials developed by the human resource department. The job descriptions were requested by the compensation committee as an aid in making salary recommendations for elected officials, however commissioners and county legal council agreed it was better to leave the elected officials job descriptions to just what is now written in state law. Employed staff of the county still all have written job descriptions for use by the all-volunteer public compensation committee.

In other business at an earlier meeting the commissioners voted to approve June 19th as an official paid time off county holiday. The day is already a federal and state paid time off holiday. The holiday would begin with June 19, 2022 and would always be celebrated on the 19th unless it fell on a weekend, and then the day off would be given on the closest business day either the preceding Friday or the following Monday.

About the new holiday the county issued the following statement: "On June 19, 1865, Union General Granger rode into Galveston, Texas and issued General Order Number 3, which required the immediate freedom of more than 250,000 enslaved African Americans in Texas. Union troops marched throughout Galveston to spread the word that all slaves were free. Juneteenth is also known as Emancipation Day, Jubilee Day and Freedom Day. "This holiday serves to honor the freedom of enslaved people in the United States. Recognition aligns with the county's third value, professionalism, which

has been defined as: Leading by example to conduct business in an ethical manner that promotes equity and inclusiveness with a deep sense of social responsibility as trusted public servants," the statement said.

In other business the county voted to change the Morrow County Special Transportation, or as it is commonly known "The Loop" to Morrow County Public Transit. The name change was requested because The Loop is changing its range of services from providing special transportation services, to offering more public transit like the new bus service now going in between north Morrow County and Umatilla County.

The commission also voted to renew its cleaning contract with Patriot Building and Grounds Maintenance for the cleaning of nine county-wide buildings and facilities for \$8,244 per month.

They also learned that Deputy District Attorney Richard Tovey, who also serves as county legal counsel, will be leaving. The commissioners discussed how legal counsel to the county would be handled in the future.

OSP seeks information regarding injured person in Sherman County

Oregon State Police received a 911 call for a welfare check on a person lying face down in the gravel in front of his 2015 Ford F350 that was pulling his 2019 Keystone Cougar travel trailer on September 25 around noon. OSP troopers found the truck and trailer matching the description on I-84 parked at the bottom of the off-ramp at exit 109 westbound in Sherman County. When troopers arrived around 12:30 p.m., the driver was behind the wheel of the truck but was unresponsive.

The driver was identified as Derek Martell, 38, who was returning home to Veneta, OR from an elk hunting trip in eastern Oregon with friends. Troopers reported he was suffering from serious head trauma and was life-flighted to an

Young lady sees flag, recites pledge of allegiance



Finley Winters recites the pledge of allegiance when she sees the flag at Two Old Hags Pizza.

Finley Winters, age 5, recently spied the American flag hung at the entrance of Two Old Hags Pizza in Heppner and immediately ran over to it, stood with her hand over her heart and recited the pledge of allegiance. Finley was visiting Two Old Hags with her grandmother to discuss helping the owner, Dawn, with Halloween decorations.

Finley lives in Heppner and attends school as a kindergarten student. Her parents are Travis and

Laura Winters, and grandparents are Dave and Caroline Browne and Dave and Rhonda Winters, all of Heppner. Dick and Lynnea Sargent, who submitted the photo, are Finley's Nana and Papa.

When Finley's grandmother, Rhonda Winters saw her patriotism, she said, "Oh, my heart. It was priceless." Her proud parents and grandparents continued, "May our legacy march forward in a country we love."



Derek Martell (inset), his Ford F350 and Cougar travel trailer.

area hospital for treatment. OSP discovered Martell had spoken to his wife at 11:30 a.m. and there were no reported issues. They are requesting anyone who might have been traveling

from Arlington to Rufus during that time or anyone with information regarding the incident contact Oregon State Police dispatch at 800-442-2068 and reference case # SP21274660.

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