



# the HEPPNER GAZETTE TIMES

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## Lexington housing growth depends on additional water, infrastructure

By David Sykes

To see more housing growth in Lexington the town needs more water, county planner Tamara Mabbott was told at a town council meeting last week.

Mabbott was at the meeting to explain a new program she's developing to remove roadblocks and find funding for housing development in south Morrow County. She has already spoken to and received approval from the Heppner City Council, (See Oct. 13 G-T), and was now laying out the details to the Town of Lexington.

Under the plan, consulting firm ECO Northwest will work with Heppner, Lexington and Ione to find money for new infrastructure and increase available housing lots. Mabbott said the number one obstacle to developing new housing in south county is infrastructure. Streets, sidewalks, gutters, water and sewer lines as well as water sources and sewer facilities are needed before homes can be built in south county. You can have all your land but if you don't have infrastructure, it's not going to happen," Mabbott said. She said Boardman and Irrigon are "growing like gang busters" so don't need the help with housing.

At the Lexington meeting Mabbott was told new water sources are what's needed for additional housing development. "We need more water," councilmem-



County Planner Tamra Mabbott talks infrastructure with town council. -Photo by David Sykes.

ber Will Lemmon said. The town has only one well and in the past has looked at ways to develop a second one, not only for backup but to provide more supply for new homes. The town is on a central water system, but each home has its own septic system.

Lemmon also questioned if the town had enough available vacant land for building. "We don't really have that much space to build in this town, do we?" he asked. Lemmon pointed out that some private developers have already been doing some housing development but wondered if there is vacant land available. Mabbott pointed to a 2019 buildable lands study that showed Lexington has 19 partially vacant acres and 29 vacant acres that could support

development, however 25 of those acres being difficult to serve without infrastructure. She said more building lots could be made available in Lexington if the town were to consider expanding its urban growth boundary. In any case it was generally agreed for the town to grow with new housing and residents, it would need another water source, such as a second well.

Mabbott was asked about the recently enacted county rural residential lot ordinance, allowing 10 acres of land to be created from larger farm parcels for residential building. While that option is available, she said the state of Oregon makes it very difficult to create the smaller lots. "Creating rural residential minimum 10 acres; I have talked to some people (in Morrow County about it) but nothing has developed yet," she told the council. "I spent 20 years as a planner in Umatilla County, and we did two of them," she said of the difficulty in creating the lots. However, she says if it was done, making the smaller building lots could help with the housing crunch. "It just takes planning and paperwork, but it is possible," she said.

Mabbott said there is also a state land use law that allows even smaller lots than 10 acres to be created from larger farm-zoned parcels, but that is even harder to accomplish.

"There is a way to create smaller acres in Oregon, but I don't know anyone who has done it," she pointed out. Since most of the cities in south Morrow County are surrounded by large farm parcels, not being able to create smaller building lots is contributing to the rural housing shortage.

After much discussion, Mabbott said the town clerk Janette Eldrige had agreed to serve on a technical advisory panel to work with the consulting company on the project, but she was asking for additional citizens to volunteer. "Any grant that comes from the state of Oregon now has an emphasis on addressing populations that are underserved, and that includes people of color and people of low income and very low income," Mabbott told the council. "If there are folks that you think need housing or whose voice is not represented very well, we would do everything we could to address those housing needs at every level," she said. The study will not cost the cities any money as the consulting firm is being paid for with a state grant.

At the Heppner City Council meeting it was brought up that many people who could volunteer for the advisory committee hold full time jobs and are not available to meet during working hours. Mabbott said she would take that into consideration.

In other business at the meeting the council heard a report from Eldrige who said she had finished a report to Willow Creek Valley Economic Development Group detailing what work was done with the \$3,549 grant the town received. The town painted, carpeted and installed a new air conditioning unit in the town hall building. She also reported that the town's new billing system was up and running and working well. "It's easy to use," she told the council of the new system.

## Vaccine mandate

### Health District not expected to lose staff; School District says no impact on education

Oregon Governor Kate Brown has mandated that in order to keep their jobs, all health care workers and school employees receive the COVID-19 vaccination or provide accepted proof of a medical or religious exemption. That mandate went into effect on Monday. In anticipation of the mandate the Gazette-Times contacted both the medical and school districts for comment on the effect the mandate was expected to have on staffing and operation of the districts.

"Yes, on August 25<sup>th</sup>, Vaccination Requirements

for Teachers and School Staff was put into effect making it unlawful for school districts to employ, contract with or accept the volunteer services of any individual over the age of 16 that is not fully vaccinated or have a documented medical or religious exception," School District Superintendent Dirk Dirksen told the Gazette.

"We currently have 306 full time employees and roughly 60 substitutes that the mandate will affect. With the deadline of October 18<sup>th</sup> still upon us, we currently do not know what staffing impact that we might have," he explained. "We continue to work with all employees to support them in any personal decision they make, while complying with the law. We are not planning on there being any impact on student education. We do

know that the mandates are frustrating given the lack of local control, but staff is determined to give students the best education experience possible," he said.

Emily Reynolds Roberts, Interim Health District Administrator, said the district intends to fully comply with governor's vaccine mandate and the Oct. 18 federal mandate. Roberts said the mandate affects all 180 (approx.) employees of the district.

When asked if the district expected to lose employees, Roberts said, "We hope (and expect) that we will not lose any employees. We are working closely with each of our employees and volunteers to ensure that we have appropriate documentation, which would be either proof of vaccination or a documented religious/medical accommodation," she said.



School Supt. Dirk Dirksen



Interim Health District Admin. Emily Reynolds Roberts

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

## Good crowd turns out for hometown author's book signing



Bestselling author Scott McEwen signs one of his books for Jean Collins, while Flood Town Books owner Andrea Nelson looks on. -Photo by David Sykes

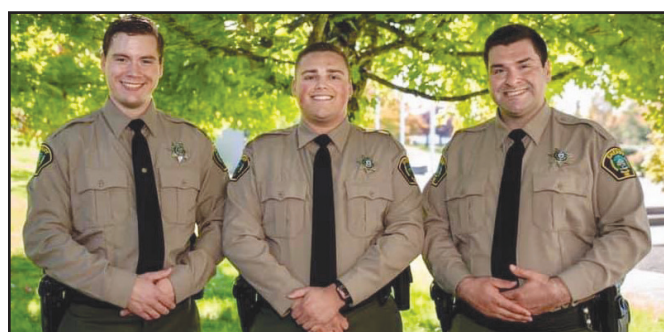
Hometown author Scott McEwen, now of San Diego, was back in Heppner Saturday for a book signing at the new Flood Town Books bookstore on Main Street.

A good crowd turned out to visit and have their books signed by McEwen, who so far has written 10 books, including his first one American Sniper, which is based on the life of Navy SEAL Chris Kyle. American Sniper, published in 2012, was an immediate New York Times best seller, remaining at number

one for three months. It was eventually turned into a very successful Hollywood movie directed by Clint Eastwood and starring Bradley Cooper. McEwen said it has become the highest grossing war movie of all time.

McEwen, who graduated from Heppner High School in 1979, told the crowd he is very concerned about the direction of the country, and that he is currently working on a new book about the second amendment.

## Morrow County deputies graduate



Pictured (L-R): Collin Brill, Jacob Stutzman and Zachary Kilgore.

Jacob Stutzman, Collin Brill and Zachary Kilgore, all Morrow County deputies, graduated from the Department of Public Safety Standards and Training (DPSST) at the Oregon Police Academy on Friday, October 15.

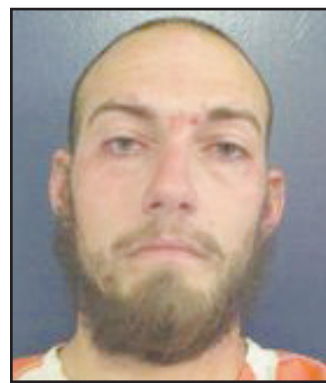
According to the MCSO press release, the

training is normally completed in a 16-week timeframe, but due to COVID delays the training was 20 weeks. Each deputy will also complete a 12-week field training program with the sheriff's office and the additional required 84 hours of training over the next three years.

## Robbery suspect arrested

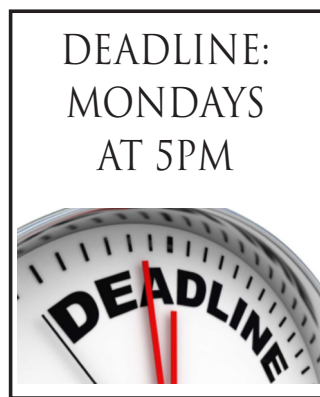
Jace Allan Hendren, 28, was arrested following a robbery of the Irrigon Shell Station on Monday, October 18. The Morrow County Communications Center received a 911 call reporting the robbery at approximately 2 a.m. Deputies were close by and were on the scene within one minute of the call.

Deputy Miguel Flores and Deputy Ivan Dike began the investigation and within 30 minutes had detained Hendren in a nearby home that he had entered uninvited. The property and money from the Irrigon Shell Station was recovered



Jace Allan Hendren and returned.

Hendren was arrested, charged with Burglary I, Theft II, Criminal Trespass II and Criminal Mischief III and lodged at the Umatilla County Jail with bail of \$57,000.



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