

Grant writer hired for Ione, Heppner infrastructure projects

Federal money could help construct sewer & water systems, reduce flood plain at mill site

By David Sykes

To help with three large south county infrastructure projects, commissioners recently authorized \$10,000 to hire a professional grant writer to seek federal funding for the projects. Community leaders in Ione are seeking a new sewer system, Heppner wants money for a subdivision water system, and the Port of Morrow needs money to reduce the size of its flood plain at the old Kinzua mill site it owns outside of Heppner.

In Ione, the plan is to set up some type of centralized sewer system and move the city away from individual septic tanks and systems now in use on each property. Getting the new central system would free up more building lots and generally spur development in the area. However, building a new sewer system is one of the most expensive and difficult infrastructure projects a city can tackle, so backers of the plan are looking for additional funding.

Heppner community leaders are searching for grant money to build a water system at a planned 13-lot subdivision above Rock Street overlooking the city. The 22-acre parcel has been purchased by the Willow Creek Valley Economic Development Group; however, it has since been learned the city's current water system cannot handle the capacity or water pressure needed for the new development.

Currently the city has no storage and limited source of water in that area, and pressure is already below standard. The development of a well, storage and system connections would increase "resiliency" in the city's water supply as the current system is dependent on a single 12-mile distant water source, developers on the project say. A new

water system on the hills east of Heppner would also benefit the hospital, county courthouse and other public and private facilities that are affected by low pressure in that area. Cost estimates for the new water system are around \$1.3 million. Total cost to get the subdivision ready to sell lots is \$2,065,000. It is estimated it will take 18 months to have the subdivision ready once funding is secured.

The third project seeking funding is an effort to reduce the flood plain at the old Kinzua Mill site near Heppner. A reduced flood plain would allow more business development there and hopefully stimulate needed economic activity in south county. The Port of Morrow owns the property but has indicated it does not have the time to apply for the grants needed to pay for the flood plain reduction project.

Under a flood plain reduction plan developed by engineers, excavation and embankment improvements along Willow Creek, which runs through the site, would allow the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to revise the current flood map and allow for more development on the 80-acre site. Currently only about 25 acres is out of the flood plain and usable for business development. The old mill site is the only industrial zoned property in south county and reducing the flood plain there would allow for industrial manufacturing and small industries a place to locate. The land has been mostly vacant since the closure of the mill and loss of 138 direct jobs in 1998.

The flood-plain-reduction-plan is currently under review by FEMA and will take 60 to 120 days before approval. After approv-

al, funding for excavation and embankment improvements, expected to cost between \$750,000 to \$1.2 million, will be sought.

The grant writer hired by the county is Nicholas Ducote of LaGrande. Commissioner Melissa Lindsay, along with county Planning Director Tamara Mabbott, have been working on identifying the above projects eligible for the federal funding. The money Ducote will seek comes from the federal Economic Development Administration (EDA) program for coal communities impacted by "changes in the coal economy that have resulted in job losses and layoffs in any coal-reliant sector." Morrow County is considered a coal community since the closure last year of the Boardman Coal Fired Plant and loss of jobs there. The EDA has dedicated \$300 million to help these types of coal-impacted communities across the country. The commissioners voted unanimously to spend \$10,000 on the grant writer to apply for the funding. The money will come out of federal funds the county earlier received to mitigate the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In other action at their October 27 meeting, the commissioners voted on several appointments. Britany Casperson and Alita Nelson were appointed to the county fair board. County Planner Stephanie Case was named to the Special Transportation Fund and Statewide Transportation Improvement Advisory Committee. "Stephanie will be a great addition. She has a wealth of knowledge and fits right in with what she does at planning," County Commission Chair Don Russell said. At an earlier meeting the commissioners had appointed David Sykes, Ed Rollins, and Russell to the County Board of Property Tax Appeals (BoPTA). Russell will be the chair. Rollins is an executive vice president with the Bank of Eastern Oregon and is being reappointed to the position. Sykes is owner of Sykes Real Estate in Heppner and replaces Dean Kegler who moved out of Morrow County. County property owners who disagree with the valuation placed on their property, can appeal the value to BoPTA.

EMOTIONAL HEALTH

-Continued from PAGE FIVE

ing enrollment report for November: A.C. Houghton Elementary, Irrigon-214; Sam Boardman Elementary-338; Heppner Elementary-177; Irrigon Elementary-180; Windy River Elementary, Boardman-249; Heppner Jr./Sr. High School-164; Irrigon Jr./Sr. High School-370; Riverside Jr./Sr. High School, Boardman-497; Morrow Education Center, Irrigon-74; Total-2,263.

Enrollment data shows that Boardman schools gained 59 students over last year with 1,084 students in November of this year, compared to 1,025 last year; Heppner schools gained 30 students from 311 in 2020 to 341 in 2021; Irrigon schools gained 10 students from 754 to 764; Morrow Education Center lost 48 students, from 122 in November 2020 to 74 in 2021; the district gained 51 students in 2021 from 2,212 to 2,263.

-approved the following statement of anticipated revenue for 2021-22-with \$28,518,411 in total revenue and a beginning fund balance of \$3,668,651 for \$32,187,062 in total re-

sources.

-approved the following employment action:

-Resignations-Gabriela Balcazar, A.C. Houghton ed assistant, Luis Campos, IJSHS assistant boys' soccer coach, Myrtle Conlon, WRE head cook, Breanna Gammell, ACH assistant custodian, Michael Hughes, RJSJS head junior high football coach, Stephani McAninch, HJSJS library tech, Ken Thompson, IJSHS head high school football coach, Anna Wedding, HJSJS head junior high girls' basketball coach.

-Retirements-Superintendent Dirk Dirksen and Cheryl Costello, executive secretary/human resources assistant, both June 20, 2022.

-Employment/promotions/transfers-Gabriela Balcazar, ACH ed assistant, Myrtle Conlon, WRE head cook, Stephanie Edwards, temporary ACH ed assistant, Angela Frederickson Wells, IES head cook, Dulce Pena, SBE life skills ed assistant, Toni Stanger, ACH assistant custodian.

-Extra duty contracts-Karla Jimenez, RJSJS assistant high school girls' basketball coach, Tif-

fany Locey, IJSHS assistant girls' basketball coach, William Maddox, RJSJS head junior high wrestling coach, Eric Solis, IJSHS temporary head high school boys' basketball coach, Nathaniel Verley, IJSHS head junior high boys' basketball coach.

-approved the following winter coach rehires (Heppner schools listed only): Jeremy Rosenbalm, head high school boys' basketball coach, Ken Grieb, assistant high school boys' basketball coach, Robert Wilson, head girls' high school basketball coach, Russ Nichols, assistant high school girls' basketball coach, Mark Lemmon, head high school boys' wrestling coach, Alaina Lemmon, head high school girls' wrestling coach, Rocky Turner, head junior high school boys' basketball coach, Michael George, junior high assistant boys' basketball coach, Rick Worden, junior high assistant girls' basketball coach, and Charles Miles Binger, junior high head wrestling coach. The head junior high girls' basketball coach position remained vacant as of press time.

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