



the HEPPNER GAZETTE TIMES

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VOL. 141 NO. 7 8 Pages Wednesday, February 16, 2022 Morrow County, Heppner, Oregon

School prepares to put up \$138 million bond

By April Hilton-Sykes

The Morrow County School District released design photos of the proposed changes to schools in preparation for the \$138 million bond measure to go before voters on May 17. If the measure passes, the district would be awarded a matching grant from the Oregon School Capital Improvement Matching Program for \$4 million.

MCSDD announced that the proposed bond and grant funds, if passed, would finance the following:

-Heppner: “New secure entries and offices with a reconfigured line of sight; new auxiliary gym and locker rooms; a new building added to current seven-12 building to include elementary students (at the current Heppner High School site); and a reconfigured playground and parking.”

-Irrigon: “New secure entries and offices with a reconfigured line of sight; new competition gym and locker rooms; reconfigure three classrooms at A.C. Houghton Elementary; construct new front office at ACH; reconfigured traffic and parking at Irrigon Elementary and Irrigon Jr./Sr. High.

-Boardman: “new secure entries and offices with reconfigured line of sight; new competition gym and locker rooms; four new elementary classrooms; four new Jr./Sr. High classrooms; reconfigured traffic and parking between Sam Boardman Elementary and Windy River Elementary.

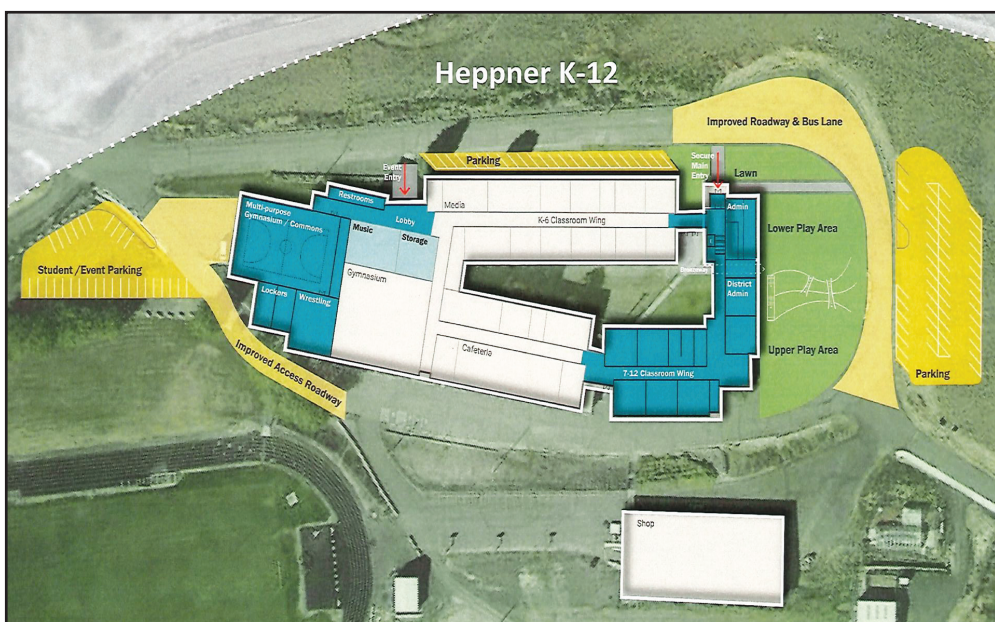
“If the proposed measure passes, the proposed bond would mature in 20 years or less and the bond rate would be an estimated \$2.67 per \$1,000 of assessed property value, although the actual levy rate may differ. If the proposed measure passes, it is estimated that a taxpayer who owns a house assessed at \$200,000 would pay approximately \$534 per year,” according to the district “proposed bond measure information.”

“If the proposed bond measure does not pass, the grant money would not be received from the state, the proposed projects would not be completed and tax rates would not increase.”

Also at the meeting, Superintendent Dirk Dirksen reported on the increase in attendance district-wide from only 76



Artist renderings of proposed new Heppner K-12



percent 11 years ago, to 96 percent now. “I don’t have the right words to say,” he said. “It’s really wonderful,” attributing “attention to detail” by teachers and administration.D

Dirksen said he expected some new guidelines on COVID 19 to come from the state which would increase school’s local control, albeit with “some strings attached.” He expects a federal decision on or around March 31. “So stay tuned,” he said. “I’m hoping to get more local control. We’ve done a great job keeping the masks on. We didn’t have to shut the schools down.”

In other business the board: learned of the hiring of Barb Phillips, the new executive secretary taking over from current secretary Cheryl Costello, following her retirement at the end of the school year. Dirksen is also retiring at that time.

received the following revenue statement: as of January 31, the district received \$28,937,833 in revenue, with \$28,092,874 in expenditures, with \$844,959 in revenue over

expenditures for a beginning fund balance of \$4,508,248 and a projected ending fund balance of \$5,353,207.

received the following enrollment report as of February: A.C. Houghton Elementary, Irrigon-209; Sam Boardman Elementary-356; Heppner Elementary-182; Irrigon Elementary-255; Heppner Jr./Sr. High School-159; Irrigon Jr./Sr. High School-376; Riverside Jr./Sr. High School, Boardman-485; Morrow Education Center, Irrigon-67; total-2,274.

Enrollment by community is as follows: Boardman-an increase of 41 from 1,055 in 2021 to 1,096 in 2022; Heppner-an increase of 22, from 319 in 2021 to 341 in 2022; Irrigon, a loss of 2, from 772 in 2021 to 770 in 2022; Morrow Education Center, a loss of 56, from 123 in 2021 to 67 in 2022; district totals, a gain of five, from 2,269 in 2021 to 2,274 in 2022.

approved the 2021-22 Spring Coaching List to rehire (Heppner listed only): Timothy Wilkins, head high school baseball coach, Scott Coe,

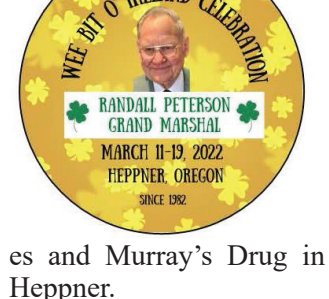
assistant baseball coach, Russ Nichols, head track; Alaina Lemmon, half-time assistant track; Alan Scott, half-time assistant track, Ken Grieb, head high school golf, Carri Grieb, assistant high school golf, Petra Payne, head high school softball, Madison Rosenbalm, assistant high school softball, Antonia Nichols, junior high head track, Stephani McAninch, junior high assistant track.

approved the following employment action for February: resignations-Krystal carroll, IJSHS ed assistant, Whitney Coffman, IJSHS head cheerleading coach, Misty Johansen, SBE head cook, Julia Longoria-SBE first grade teacher, Dulce Pena, SBE ed assistant, Sybil Stewart, HES second grade teacher; retirements-Robin Graff, PERS retiree, working the remainder of the school year; employment/promotions/transfers-Yisel, SBE temporary teacher, Rachel Flynn, RJSBS language arts teacher 2022-23, Robin Graff, RJSBS career and technical ed teacher 2022-2023; Alejandra Gomez, MCSDD behavior tech, Alicia Perez,

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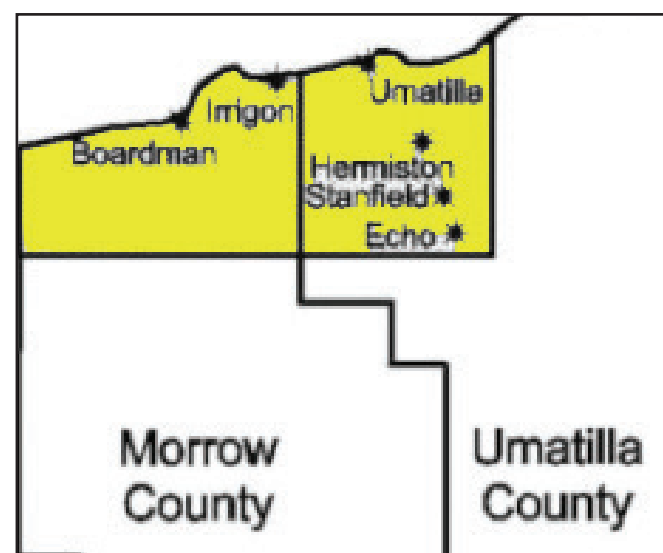
2022 St. Patrick’s Collector’s Button for sale starting this week

The 2022 St. Patrick’s Collector’s Button will be available to purchase this week. The St. Patrick’s 2022 Collector’s Button is being made and will highlight 2022 St. Patrick’s celebration Grand Marshal, Randall Peterson. The button will be available for purchase for \$3 at the Chamber of Commerce, the City of Heppner offic-



es and Murray’s Drug in Heppner. No \$100 “Pot O’ Gold drawings this year and a limited supply of buttons will be made.

Morrow & Umatilla Counties urge state to lock in nitrate water research funding



Lower Umatilla Basin Groundwater Management Area has long history of high nitrate levels in the drinking water. Concern over nitrate levels has increased recently with the DEQ charges against the Port of Morrow.

By David Sykes

Morrow and Umatilla counties have joined together in urging The Department of Agriculture (ODA) to expediate the hiring of, and lock in funding for, a researcher to study nitrate levels in their two counties. The effort comes on the heels of a recent \$1.3 million fine by the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) against the Port of Morrow for exceeding nitrate application on farm ground in the area over the past three years.

The DEQ says the Port violated their permit more than a thousand times, resulting in 165 tons of excess nitrate being applied to farm ground in areas already identified with high nitrate levels. The two county governments are apparently so concerned about the impact of the violation that they wrote a joint letter to the Oregon Department of Agriculture urging them to lock in \$250,000 in already allocated funding for the nitrate research. “It is our current understanding that the procurement documents related to the hiring of a researcher are currently under review. As you are aware, time is of the essence regarding the use of these one-time funds provided by the Legislature, as the funds are set to expire in June 2023,” the letter said. “We appreciate your efforts in furthering the review of this procurement and the hiring of a researcher,” the Feb. 9 letter said.

In the letter the counties also asked the funds be reallocated if the research work is not completed by the deadline. Morrow County Planner Tamra Mabbott was at the Feb. 9 meeting of the county commissioners, urging them to approve the letter. Mabbott said new studies are needed since most of the available data on nitrate levels is outdated.

The DEQ and the Oregon Department of Ag-

riculture (ODA) declared the Lower Umatilla Basin a Groundwater Management Area (GWMA) in 1990 because regional nitrate-nitrogen concentrations exceeded 7 milligrams per liter. The area encompasses Morrow and Umatilla counties including Hermiston, Boardman, Irrigon, Stanfield, and Echo.

High nitrate concentrations in drinking water are linked with serious health concerns for infants and pregnant or nursing women. Sources of excess nitrate in water include fertilizers, septic systems, wastewater treatment effluent, animal wastes, industrial wastes and food processing waste waters. The Port of Morrow especially takes the food processing waste water from the businesses located in its industrial park at Boardman and spreads that water over farm ground in the area. It has a permit with the DEQ for how much of the nitrate-rich water it can apply over a period of time, a permit the DEQ says the Port exceeded, and the reason for the fine. The Port is in the process of appealing that fine.

At the commission meeting Mabbott said the request to lock in the funds was needed because those involved do not think the research will be done by the June 2023 deadline. Commissioner Don Russell asked Mabbott if the DEQ target of 10 parts of nitrate per million for safe drinking water was arrived at by science, or “just a dart thrown at the wall.” Mabbott said that threshold had some science behind it since it was developed by the Federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Centers for Disease Control.

Russell also pointed out that those nitrate safe drinking water standards were adopted some time ago and perhaps they need updating. “Those were set

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