

New sewer treatment system top '22 goal says Heppner council

By David Sykes

Continuing to work on a new sewer treatment system for the city of Heppner is the top goal for 2022, the city council decided during its regular yearly goal-setting session. At Monday's meeting the council adopted 18 separate goals for the coming year on improvements it would like to see around town.

Developing a new sewer disposal system has been a long-term project for the city since the department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) has said Heppner needs to reduce the amount of ammonia being dumped from its aging treatment plant into Willow Creek. To solve the problem the city council, officials and the engineering firm have settled on installing a lagoon settling system as the best option.

Some of the other goals adopted at Monday's meeting are to:

- Improve information signage, fix sidewalks and continue to replace trees downtown.

- Continue rehabilitation work on Jones and Willow View Streets.

- Decide what to do with the \$200,000 the city received this year from the Columbia River Enterprise Zone.

- Chip seal Water and Barratt Streets; install cameras in the parks; crack seal Court Street; and clean up and add gravel to Chase and May

streets.

Neighborhood Center gave out 1,314 food boxes

In other business at the meeting the council heard from Barb Orwick of the local Neighborhood Center, who reported on all the help the center has given out during the past year 2021.

Orwick said the Heppner Neighborhood Center: gave out a total of 1,314 food boxes last year; delivered meals to the elderly and homebound to eight individuals; gave emergency gas assistance to 21 families; housing assistance to 13 families; utility assistance to pay electricity and water bills to 40 families; clothing to 48 individuals; prescription assistance to five people; household items to 25 families; gave 24 families a happier Christmas with the Giving Tree, and gave 37 families a kids' shopping day.

On the donations side, Orwick said the center received a total of 3,402 pounds of food from the community; 4,607 volunteer man-hours were contributed; and the center received clothing and household donations from community members valued at \$45,437. Orwick told the council the center currently has lots of clothing and other items for sale at its store and invited people to come and check it out. "We need shoppers," she emphasized.

Garbage collection rates going up

In other action the council voted unanimously to grant the city's franchise garbage collector Miller & Sons Disposal Services an approximate two percent increase. "The last increase we had was a substantial one in 2020," Miller owner Ryan Miller said in a letter to the city asking for the increase. "In the preceding years we have incurred annual wage increases, increased fuel costs, insurance costs and dump fees," he said. Miller said his fuel has gone up \$2,200 a month the last three months. "These are costs we can't continue to absorb alone," he said about the raise in rates, adding that the increase will just be enough to cover their increased costs.

Under the new rate schedule, local Heppner and Lexington in town residents' charge will go from \$22.50 per month to \$23; local businesses dumpsters up two dollars to \$82 per month; rural pickup will go up two dollars to \$26, while rural dumpsters will now be \$82. The company is also increasing the large dumpster fees and charges to haul the transfer station containers to the Finley Buttes landfill or to Hermiston.

Miller also told the council that since their last increase to keep up customer service the company has purchased another au-

tomated truck, one additional 30-yard roll-off box, 20 300-gallon dumpsters and 60 65-gallon carts. "As our customer base grows, so will our inventory. Thank you for your cooperation and help through this process," he said.

Bring back the Volkswalk

In other business the council heard from local man John Edmundson who said he is working to bring back the Volkswalk to Heppner. The Volkswalk is a nation-wide group that sponsors healthy walking in various communities and venues around the country. Billed on its website as 'America's walking club,' the American Volkssport Association is a "non-competitive sports organization committed to fun, fitness and friendship."

Edmundson said he wanted to bring back and promote Volkswalking in Heppner, and asked the council's permission to repaint 300 small shamrock on sidewalks around town in preparation for the walk. The small shamrocks will guide walkers on the route to take when they come to participate in a walking event. In years' past Edmundson had painted 680 shamrocks, but says he is spacing the shamrocks farther apart so will not need as many. The council voted unanimously giving him permission to paint the shamrocks.

WATER

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updating. "Those were set back in the 40s," Russell said. "We have come a long way to understanding things and maybe that number is too high, or maybe it's too low. It is 70-year-old science," he pointed out. Mabbott said the target amount is actually seven parts per million of water "which is considered safe drinking water." She said the point of the new studies would be to update data on the ground water in the GWMA and try and find out what is causing the contamination. Mabbott said back in the 1990s there were "hundreds of wells monitored" for nitrate levels and now "there is a couple of dozen."

The commissioner voted unanimously to send the letter with Commissioner Jim Doherty saying he was in favor. "This is some dollars we can use to bring somebody in and find out what is going on, the positives and the negatives. And why it is going on." Commissioner Melissa Lindsay is the co-chair on a subcommittee of GWMA looking at nitrates issues.

In other nitrate and drinking water news, the commissioner at their previous meeting Feb. 2 discussed ways to aid people in north county in getting their wells tested for nitrates.

Doherty said he'd talked to a local testing lab who gives out water testing sample bottles for free and maybe the county should obtain a number to make available for people at the county health department office in Boardman. He discussed whether the county may be able to set up a fund to help people who cannot pay the \$35 fee to have the water tested.

Russell said homeowners can also install filtration systems that take out the nitrates from their well water. "You can put in a whole house system that takes out the nitrates or put in a drinking fountain one source. I put in the system myself all plastic pipes. It's pretty simple," he said.

Russell also said some areas seem to have higher levels than others. "I do know the Eastregaard area (of Boardman) has been above the 10 parts per million threshold for more than 20 years. That is one of the higher areas in the area. Generally, in the Boardman area, the further west you go the less nitrate levels. It's kind of hit and miss throughout the county," he said.

In other business at the Feb. 9 meeting the commission voted unanimously to grant one of the county's franchise garbage collectors, Miller & Sons Disposal Services of Heppner, an approximate two percent increase. "The last increase we had was a substantial one in 2020,"

Miller & Sons owner Ryan Miller said in a letter to the commission asking for the increase. "In the preceding years we have incurred annual wage increases, increased fuel costs, insurance costs and dump fees," he said. Miller said his fuel has gone up \$2,200 a month the last three months. "These are costs we can't continue to absorb alone," he said about the rise in rates, adding that the increase will just be enough to cover their increased costs.

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Miller also told the commissioners that, since their last increase, to keep up customer service, the company has purchased another automated truck, one additional 30-yard roll-off box, 20 300-gallon dumpsters and 60 65-gallon carts. "As our customer base grows, so will our inventory. Thank you for your cooperation and help through this process," he said.

Before approving the rate increase, which was earlier approved by the county Solid Waste Advisory Board, the commissioners held a public hearing. No one testified either in favor or against, but the commissioners also held a discussion about the garbage rates.

Lindsay said she would like to see Miller and the other franchise garbage collector in the county, Sanitary Disposal, get together and talk about the most efficient routes for them to cover. She felt they were crossing paths and it was not a good use of fuel. "There should be a discussion about re-analyzing routes. There are some ridiculous crossings and that is not productive in good fuel use," she pointed out.

Public Works Management Assistant Sandi Pointer said she thought since Sanitary Disposal recently purchased the waste disposal franchise for part of the county, that company would probably be doing cost analysis soon on their routes. "This (Miller) is a profit driven company," Doherty said. "And if they are going to bump it up because of the cost of fuel then it is fair to say make it as efficient as you can." Doherty also said it was better for the franchisees to increase their rates gradually like this than wait and do a big increase all at once.

BOND

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SBE ed assistant, Barbara Phillips, MCS D executive secretary/human resources assistant; Amber Savage, SBE ed assistant, Aracely Urenda, IJSHS CARE coordinator, Kyle Wyant, IJSHS temporary special ed teacher; extra duty contracts-Krystal Carroll, IJSHS head cheerleading coach, high school assistant track coach, Trisha DeBard, IJSHS head softball coach, Ivan Navarrete-IJSHS head high school track coach and Madison Rosenbalm, HJSHS assistant softball coach.

-approved the 2021-22 spring coaching list to rehire: Heppner-Timothy Wilkins, head high school baseball coach, Scott Coe, assistant high school baseball coach, Russ Nichols, head high school track coach, Alaina Lemmon, half-time assistant track coach, Alan Scott, half-time assistant track coach, Ken Grieb, head high school golf coach, Carri Grieb, assistant golf coach, Petra Payne, head high school softball coach,

Madison Rosenbalm, assistant high school softball coach, Antonia Nichols, junior high head track coach, Stephanni McAninch, junior high assistant track coach.

- adopted the corrective action plan for the June 30, 2021 audit findings for a "significant deficiency."

- accepted a resolution accepting and appropriate unanticipated revenues as follows: Sam Boardman Elementary-\$200 from the family of Millie Baker; Riverside Jr./Sr. High School-\$3,338.77 from Deborah Wryn, \$120 from a surplus sale; Irrigon Jr./Sr. High School-\$40 from a surplus sale.

- viewed a presentation from the Riverside Jr./Sr. High School FFA program.

- received the following financial update highlights concerning significant transactions for the school district: The district received more in property taxes than originally budgeted and reported to the Oregon Department of Education the updated estimates for revenues and enrollment; the district

is continuing to report to grant agencies the second quarter expenditures and will see additional receipts; the district made an interest payment for debt service in January.

- learned of a "June-teenth" federal holiday.

- heard the following announcements: the next six board meetings will be held at the North District Office On March 14, April 11, May 10 and June 13; there will be no school on Monday, February 21 for the President's Day holiday;

classified appreciation week is March 7-11; a special board meeting of the superintendent search/screening committee will be held Thursday, February 17, at 7 p.m. at the North District Office/Zoom; a special board meeting for the superintendent search will be held Wednesday, February 23, at 6 p.m. at the North District Office/Zoom; the next board meeting will be held Monday, March 14, at 7 p.m. at the North District Office/Zoom.

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