



the HEPPNER GAZETTE TIMES

50¢

VOL. 141 NO. 13 8 Pages Wednesday, March 30, 2022 Morrow County, Heppner, Oregon

\$11.5 million Amazon money to be spread across county

Cities will get \$200,000 each

By David Sykes

A \$11.5 million dollar Amazon windfall payment recently received by Morrow County, will be paid out and spread across all the county taxing entities, the commissioners reaffirmed last week.

The county had received the unexpected large payment when it was recently discovered Amazon incorrectly underpaid its taxes last year. An error was made by the Oregon Department of Revenue when evaluating new equipment installed at Amazon's data facility near Boardman. Under law the company wasn't required to pay the money to the county, but decided, as a show of a good corporate citizenship, to do so anyway. "Amazon said they wanted to go ahead and pay it, so they paid \$11.5 million which would have been part of their tax bill," Tax Assessor Mike Gorman said in explaining the unexpected one-time windfall.

Commissioners kicked around several ideas on how to spend the funds, which came with virtually no strings attached, before finally settling on a formula seeing nearly every taxing district in the county getting a piece of the pie. From small districts like the Ione-Lexington Cemetery, \$36,596, up to the county general fund, nearly \$3 million, amounts varied depending on a district's normal taxing rate. Morrow County Schools will receive \$2.5 million, and Ione schools \$238,677. Also getting funding were the five cities in the county, with each getting identical amounts of \$200,000. As a bonus, this money comes to them with no guidelines.

Before approving the disbursement, commissioners agreed the money should not go to districts outside of the county that have some taxing authority here. For instance, the Gilliam and Pilot Rock Rural Fire Districts regularly receive tax funds from the county, but under the one-time disbursement plan would not. Their amount would have been about \$18,000 each. Several other out of county districts were also excluded, with the commissioners adopting a "keep the money home" theory.

Commissioner Melissa Lindsay wanted to extend the keep-it-at-home funding idea to all entities located outside the county, including Blue Mountain Community College and Intermountain Educational Service District (IMESD).

"I love BMCC. I love the work they are doing, and I know their budget is in trouble," Lindsay said. "However, I don't want to see six hundred thousand dollars going to Pendleton via BMCC." Under the disbursement plan, BMCC's general fund will get approximately \$468 thousand and its bond payment another \$159 thousand. "I think this was for a county-wide disbursement," Lindsay said of her original understanding of how the county would pay out the windfall. "My goal is to eliminate those that are not local. Is IMESD and BMCC where we intended for these dollars to go? That was not my intent," she told the other commissioners.

Commissioner Don Russell argued for the funds to go to the community college. "BMCC has a facility in Boardman and their bond was passed by Morrow County residents. We are part of the Blue Mountain family," he said. He said with IMESD there are two elected representatives from the county that serve on its board. "Just because they are headquartered in Pendleton, we still get great benefit out of them," he emphasized.

There was also a continued discussion on how funds should be disbursed to the two county school districts. It is common practice in the county when giving money intended for education for it to be funneled through each district's education foundation, or through other entities such as the Ione Community Agri-Business Organization (ICABO). If the money is given straight to the school districts, then the state of Oregon will reduce, by that same amount, state money coming into the districts, with no net gain in funding for local education. County Commissioner Jim Doherty has said previously he is not comfortable with the money going anywhere but paid directly to the school districts, however Russell and Lindsay favor the payment method. Morrow County School Superintendent Dirk Dirksen has reportedly said he wants to use the foundation method of receiving education funds.

County treasurer Jaylene Papineau asked for "more clarity" since she is the one making out the checks. Doherty said he was meeting with Papineau and the county legal counsel, Justin Nelson, to discuss the practice some more. The commissioners voted unanimously, however, to continue the education funding method and move forward with the county-wide disbursement plan including the IMESD and BMCC funding.

Salary increases for elected officials

In other business at its March 23 meeting the commission voted to send on to the budget committee recommended salary increases for county elected

2022 Compensation Board Cost Analysis 3/21/2022

Positions	Current	
	Wages	Overhead
Commissioner	\$55,190	\$98,728
Commissioner	\$55,190	\$91,938
Commissioner	\$55,190	\$91,938
Assessor	\$96,002	\$137,302
Clerk	\$78,609	\$122,940
Justice of the Peace	\$78,609	\$129,730
Treasurer	\$78,609	\$126,364
Sheriff	\$113,844	\$162,797
Total	\$611,243	\$961,737

Positions	Proposed	
	Wages	Overhead
Commissioner	\$79,000	\$133,327
Commissioner	\$79,000	\$125,655
Commissioner	\$79,000	\$125,655
Assessor	\$100,322	\$144,091
Clerk	\$86,254	\$135,208
Justice of the Peace	\$82,146	\$137,435
Treasurer	\$82,146	\$133,580
Sheriff	\$118,967	\$170,733
Total	\$706,835	\$1,105,684
Difference	\$95,592	\$143,947

(Difference from current)

Current (top) and proposed (bottom) salaries for county elected officials next year. Overhead is the total needed to cover salary and benefits.

officials for the coming year. The county compensation board, which is made up of community volunteers drawn mainly from the business sector, met in January to come up with the proposed salary increases.

Their report suggests a 4.5 percent cost of living increase (COLA) for the sheriff, assessor, treasurer, justice of the peace and county clerk, all of whom are elected. The committee also recommended the clerk's salary be increased by five percent and county commissioner's salaries be raised to \$79,000 per year. Commissioners are currently making \$55,000. The amount would not include benefits. The commissioners voted to forward the salary increase recommendations on to the budget committee, who will make the final decision to approve, without a recommendation from commissioners. Commissioners also voted to send a three percent COLA salary increase for nonunion county workers on to the budget committee. COLA increases for union workers are always decided during labor negotiations. Following is a table of current and next year proposed salaries for elected officials.

\$1 million for Depot transfer

In other business the county voted to come up with \$1 million to pay for the "conveyance" or transfer of 9,511 acres of Umatilla Army Depot Land into ownership of the five-member Columbia Development Authority (CDA), of which Morrow County is one member. Commissioner Doherty, who was recently appointed chair of the CDA, made the proposal that the county put up the entire one million for the land transfer.

At stake is who will

control a 640-acre parcel that is part of the 9,511 acres lying inside the Morrow County line with Umatilla County. The Port of Morrow had originally planned 15-years ago to take control of the land and use it for development, or to trade for another parcel closer to its industrial park near Boardman. When the original land transfer negotiations were held with the army, the port agreed to put up the one million dollars. However, Doherty, and also Lindsay, now say the verbal agreement between the county and the port 15-years ago, placing the port in control of the transfer process and putting up the money, was nothing more than a verbal agreement and doesn't need to be honored. Doherty now wants the county to put up the funds and have at least some controls over use of the property. "I would suggest we would put up those funds for the entire amount. I think it would be worth it for the economic development for the entire region," he told the other commissioners. He did not say what kind of economic development he wanted on the property.

Doherty said the county action to pay the money

Pastors invited to submit Easter messages

Area pastors are invited to submit Easter messages to the Heppner Gazette-Times for publication in the April 13 newspaper. Deadline for submission is 5 p.m. Monday, April 11. Messages may be emailed to editor@rapid-

serve.net, mailed to Gazette-Times at PO Box 337, Heppner, OR 97836, faxed to 541-676-9211, uploaded to the website, Heppner.net, or brought into the Gazette-Times office, 188 W. Willow in Heppner.

Amazon Gift Payment Final Distribution

Total Funds to Distribute	\$11,545,618.52
Total to Cities	-\$1,000,000.00
Total To Other Dist	\$10,545,618.52

City of Boardman	\$200,000.00
City of Heppner	\$200,000.00
City of Ione	\$200,000.00
City of Irrigon	\$200,000.00
Town of Lexington	\$200,000.00
Mo Co General	\$3,071,633.38
Ione SD Bond	\$188,356.24
Boardman Urb Ren	\$39,688.28
Radio District	\$135,727.24
West Boardman URA	\$39,674.71
MOCO Health Dist	\$657,983.10
City of Board Bond	\$316,665.63
City of Irrigon Bond	\$68,342.64
Town of Lex Bond	\$21,631.21
Port of Morrow	\$76,366.50
Boardman Fire & Res	\$411,707.24
Board F&R Bond	\$114,776.15
Heppner RFPD	\$38,365.40
Irrigon RFPD	\$53,419.00
Ione RFPD	\$65,917.74
Boardman Cemetery	\$29,813.97
Heppner Cemetery	\$33,056.14
Ione-Lex Cemetery	\$36,596.45
Irrigon Cemetery	\$24,896.91
Willow Creek Park	\$68,133.77
Boardman Park	\$140,198.66
Irrigon Park	\$44,652.03
Board Park Bond	\$237,616.62
MOCO Unif Rec Dist	\$333,320.35
Heppner Water Cont	\$21,102.48
MOCO School Dist	\$2,545,582.79
Intermountain ESD	\$437,566.40
BMCC	\$468,554.08
BMCC Bond	\$158,963.72
N Morrow Vector	\$169,289.84
Ione Library	\$32,336.32
OR Trail Library	\$168,359.66
Ione School Dist	\$238,677.79
Heppner RFPD Bond	\$26,495.88
City of Heppner Bond	\$30,150.20
Total	\$11,545,618.52

was "in principal" as he did not know where the funds would come from in the county budget. "It is a big financial obligation. Where do the funds come from? But in principle we're proceeding to put up the full million dollars for the con-

veyance of the CDA property," he said in making the proposal. He suggested the money might come from "Amazon funds." Commissioner Russell, who previously served on the Port

-See AMAZON MONEY PAGE SEVEN



Commissioner Jim Doherty wants county to fund land transfer of the old Army Depot property

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