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County debates doing work on public access roads

Privately owned West Glen sparks wider discussion



The West Glen neighborhood near Boardman is served by private roads that need repairs

Morrow County Commissioners spent quite a bit of time last week discussing whether the county should spend taxpayer money making repairs and doing maintenance work on private roads.

The debate arose after public works director Eric Imes presented a petition bearing 10 signatures asking the county to address “the gravel roads in all of the West Glen area in the outskirts of Boardman.” The roads are not in the city limits, not owned by the county and not maintained by the residents.

“Over the past year I have received many requests to grade the roads in the West Glen subdivision,” Imes told the commissioners. He said there are just under two miles of road with 10 intersections and more than 60 approaches onto properties. He said he was also approached by emergency services about improving the roads.

Imes said he found sections of the private subdivision roads to be in “pretty bad shape” and needing attention. He estimated initial improvements to the road would cost \$37,571, with annual maintenance costing \$14,139.

He said during his inspection he also encountered 30 big trucks in the neighborhood, all of them owner operators. Imes said there are quite a few sets of truck trailers at the homes and the big trucks are part of the reason for the deteriorated road conditions. The truck businesses are also not compliant with the zoning ordinances as the area is not zoned for that type of commercial activity.

Maintaining roads in West Glen is not unprecedented for the county, with commissioners remembering several occasions when

past public works directors have requested and sent equipment there to do maintenance and repairs. Commissioners were concerned, however, if doing the work this time would open the county up for other private road residents wanting free county road work done at county expense.

Imes admitted if the county decided to start maintaining all private, or public access, roads across the whole county it would be a big job and expensive. “It’s a big cost and there are lots of public roads all over the county from the north to the south,” he told commissioners.

One of the largest private road systems is in the mountains at Blakes Ranch 14 miles east of Heppner where property owners pay for their own road maintenance. A Blakes Ranch property owner attending the meeting told commissioners there were 119 parcels at Blakes with 50-70 residences. “At Blakes we maintain our roads. All these public access roads in the county, if you are going to do it for one you are going to do it for all and you will have a mess on your hands,” he said. “It can be done, but the neighborhood needs to pay for it,” he said of private road maintenance. The county does plow the main road up to Blakes so the school bus can get up there. “We have a good example of a neighborhood that is working well and that is Blakes Ranch,” Imes added. “Each year people put in money. They are maintaining their roads. It shows that it can be done.

I would like the same thing done in West Glenn,” he concluded.

County Planner Tamra Mabbott said she would like to see the county take a “holistic” approach to dealing with West Glenn. She suggested county officials meet with the landowners and say the county would be willing to come in and improve the roads, “but they would have to comply with all the code violations that are out there.”

Mabbott said half the properties have violations on their properties. “A lot of those trucking businesses are not permitted,” she said. A lot of time it’s an educational thing just bringing it to their attention, she said. “But that’s their livelihood, trucks and truck parts and people repairing trucks,” she explained.

Mabbott said the West Glen neighborhood is not in good shape and doesn’t have central sewer or water. “At one time there were a handful of wells that did not function. Some places did not have running water. And many of them still don’t have potable water,” she said. With the nitrate testing going on there “I would guess it’s really high,” she speculated.

Mabbott said a solution may be a collaborative effort with several agencies. “Sit down with the city and the landowners and maybe the port and say this is in your urban growth boundary. What do we want this area to be, and what can we do collectively, the county and port?” She said annexing the property to the city of Boardman, which

would then be responsible for the roads, sewer and water, was probably not an option. “There is not a city in the state that wants to say I want to take that, annex it and provide water. Cities don’t want to annex an area and maintain a road if it is a substandard road,” she explained. “That is the conundrum. I think we need a dialogue to make those fixes more permanent and have a vision for the neighborhood. And it doesn’t have to be this way.”

Mabbott said maybe it’s time for the county to come up with new solutions rather than going out every several years and just doing maintenance. “Maybe we need to be thinking outside the box,” she told commissioners. “It doesn’t matter that it’s not a county road. Something needs to happen out there. And we need to figure out what the formula is. What do you want this neighborhood to look like next year and five years from now?”

Commissioner Don Russell said there was an example of another subdivision on the west side of Paul Smith Road that earlier wanted the city of Boardman to provide water to, “But they didn’t want to be annexed in. The city has been approached by West Glenn many times about annexation, but the city doesn’t want to “take on the county’s problems and right now it is the county’s problems,” Russell explained. He said the city was more likely to agree with annexation if all the zoning problems weren’t there. “Look at google earth and you can see everything,” he suggested.

“I would like to send a mailer to the homeowners to explain the ORS (Oregon law on local access roads) and when we will be working in the area,” Imes said of a plan to begin. He wants the homeowners and trucking companies using these public access roads to come up with a plan to pay for annual maintenance and avoid costly road repairs paid by the county (in the future). “The road department struggles to maintain the miles of road in our system, especially with materials and services costs continuing to rise,” Imes pointed out. “If Morrow County can bring the

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Knight Watch K9 Trains Police Dogs



Cpl Clark and K9 Bali



Shoulder carry entry on stairs

Morrow County Sheriff’s Office hosted a Police K9 and Decoy training seminar on September 9-11. KnightWatch K9 brought Mark A. Hilger, a prominent police K9 instructor from Nord Rhein Westphalen, Germany to instruct local area K9s and Decoys. Morrow County Sheriff’s Office, Pendleton PD, Union County Sheriff’s Office and USFWS took part. “We greatly appreciate KnightWatch K9 helping us bring such a high-quality training seminar to our region,” said a MCSO news release.

Several “excellent venues” were provided from the old Irrigon Multicultural Arts Center (IMAC building), the Port of Morrow Maintenance yard and a small farm property. During the three days of training at these different locations, training focused on developing handler and decoy skills as well as numerous challenging scenarios and exercises specifically tailored to advance the skills and abilities of each of the K9s present. “This intensive and quality training will allow our area K9s to hone skills and better serve our citizens,” said MCSO.

“These specialized teams of officers/deputies and their dogs work in a wide variety of high-risk environments where skills refined in training like that recently delivered are critical to safe and successful outcomes for all involved. Co-workers, Deputies Killgore and Brill with the Morrow County Sheriff’s Office and Deputy Vora with the Union County Sheriff’s Office, participated in the training as decoys for the dogs and their handlers.



L to R: Lee Hersey KnightWatch K9, Cpl Colleen Neubert and K9 Telly Morrow County SO, Mark A. Hilger Pol. NRW, Dep. Nick Vora Union County SO, Constance Baker KnightWatch K9, Dep. Dane Jensen and K9 Molly Union County SO, Deputy Colin Brill Morrow County SO, Deputy Zack Killgore Morrow County SO, Cpl Cass Clark and K9 Bali Pendleton PD.



Cpl Neubert Prepares K9 Telly to search the upstairs

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