



# the HEPPNER GAZETTE TIMES

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## County commission still debating over Boardman ambulance service



An ambulance belonging to Boardman Fire Rescue sits unused at the fire hall in Boardman. -Contributed photo

By Andrea Di Salvo

During the Morrow County Board of Commissioners meeting Nov. 23 in Irrigon, Commissioner Don Russell revisited the Boardman ambulance controversy when he brought up a weather event that he understood had resulted in 12 ambulance calls in a 90-minute period in Boardman, which overwhelmed the system.

"If for nothing else, that's a reason we should support Boardman Fire's application for an ambulance license, so when we have these events—and I know that they're rare, but they're not unheard of—people can get help."

The dispute over ambulance services has been ongoing between Morrow County Health District and Boardman Fire Rescue. The conflict has produced accusations, caustic statements and both sides hiring attorneys. The county government is involved since commissioners will be the ones approving any license for Boardman Fire Rescue's ambulances to transport patients.

Undersheriff Brian Snyder, who was in the audience, added that MCSO had responded and, in one instance, had two people entrapped and had to wait an hour for medical. "When we have resources we can't use, when we run into situations like that, it makes it hard," he said.

Commission Chair Jim Doherty responded that it wasn't that simple. "Eighteen months ago, some of those folks that we're trying to work through the process with had the opportunity to sign an IGA (Intergovernmental Agreement) under the ASA (Ambulance Service Area) and have the ability to be operating both," he said, "so we want to bear that in mind as we have these discussions."

"I think 18 months ago if they'd worked with the partners on the IGA under the ASA, probably 18

months ago they'd (Boardman Fire Rescue) have had a transport license," he added.

Russell pointed out that the county had hired a mediator and that one party had backed out of negotiations "for whatever reason."

"Because you bullied them out of the room, just like you bullied me to shut up," said Commission Vice-Chair Melissa Lindsay. Russell responded that he had not been aware of any bullying.

Lindsay also added as part of her commissioner report that she had attended a fire panel at the AOC conference, which included the state fire marshal and representatives of the Oregon Health Authority and Oregon Emergency Management. She had the chance to speak to them about the ambulance issue, and said they told her it was a complicated issue.

"I asked them to please, please lean in and, frankly, take over, because someone needs to bring some level of realistic conversation to the table." She said she also spoke to commissioners from several other counties who experienced similar issues, including Baker County.

"They have a really good story about how this is a huge and complicated issue, even though some would like to simplify it," she said.

Mediator Elizabeth Heckathorn had been scheduled to brief the commissioners early in November on progress made from two sessions already held between the two battling districts. However, according to Doherty, who sets the meeting agendas, she pulled out. The action came following objections from the health district that any public mediation reports would violate Oregon's confidentiality laws.

Over the past months Boardman Fire Rescue representatives have made repeated commission meeting appearances and requests to be issued a license or be put on the county agenda to discuss gaining an ambulance license so they could begin transport patients, all to no avail.

The fire district has three ambulances stationed at the fire house in Boardman along with trained personnel. The Morrow County Health District also has ambulances and trained personnel stationed

in Boardman which are licensed and regularly answer calls there. The entire county is included in the health district's boundaries.

A further kink was thrown into the process when the health district last month asked to "pause" mediation talks and a new mediator be found. In an Oct. 7 letter to the county commissioners, health district board chair Marie Shimer said while the district endorses engaging a mediator to help settle the dispute, an atmosphere of verbal harassment has taken over the talks.

Doherty had said Heckathorn would be on the agenda with her mediation report Nov. 2, and then the following week he would schedule an agenda discussion about licensing. However, after Heckathorn's cancellation there was no ambulance business on the Nov. 9 meeting agenda.

At the Nov. 9 meeting, representatives of the fire district once again showed up at the commission meeting.

"We are requesting to be on the agenda," Boardman Fire Chief Mike Hughes told the commissioners. "We have been vigilant carrying thru the process."

In old business, the commissioners heard from Public Works Director Eric Imes regarding an abandoned cistern in Heppner. The cistern, which is owned by the county, is on property surrounded by and owned currently by Willow Creek Valley Economic Development Group (WC-VEDG). Imes visited the site and said he estimated \$20,917.60 to demolish and remove the cistern, which would require a job foreman, shear and operator, excavator and operator, and two trucks and drivers to move the approximately 100 cubic yards of concrete. The cost was based on hiring the equipment and having the county road crew do the work.

"I would probably prefer if it went to contract, but if it's going to save the county a whole lot of money, I think it makes sense for us to do it," Imes said. He said it would probably take a week with the shear, as there is a lot of rebar in it, and they would haul probably 20 truckloads.

The commissioners voted unanimously to try to have public works work it into their schedule over

the winter but to have it put out for bid if they can't.

In his November road department report, Imes said they had been grading roads around the county. "We've got almost every single blade we've got out and about," he said. He also said the road department had to repair a guard rail out at Ione/Gooseberry. "The vehicle is gone, and we have no way to find out who did it, so at county cost I sent two guys out there and got it repaired," he said. He also reported setting up sand sheds in various locations to be able to respond better in bad weather.

Russell brought up need to put up a dead end or no trucks sign on Toms Camp Road in Boardman to prevent trucks from going down there and doing damage when they have to turn around. Imes said he ordered the signs. "They're just way behind," he said. "Stuff we ordered in April just showed up."

In other business, Morrow County Sheriff John Bowles approached the board asking that Morrow County Sheriff's Office be allowed to establish a full-time patrol lieutenant position, which would replace the operations lieutenant. The patrol lieutenant

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## Recall election this week



Interested citizens can view ballot processing on this monitor in the Morrow County Courthouse lobby in Heppner, which shows the ballot processing in real time. -Photo by Andrea Di Salvo



Assistant clerk Theresa Crawford (left) and Rachel Hughes open recall ballots Monday in Heppner. -Photo by Andrea Di Salvo

By Andrea Di Salvo

The Morrow County Clerk's office was a flurry of activity this week as staff worked to count ballots for the Nov. 29 recall election and wrap up the Nov. 8 election.

At the top of Morrow County voters' minds is the recall election concerning county commissioners Jim Doherty and Melissa Lindsay. Results of the votes received by the election deadline were not available at press time but were posted to the county website after 8 p.m. election day.

According to the county clerk's office, only 30.53 percent of recall ballots had been received as of Monday morning.

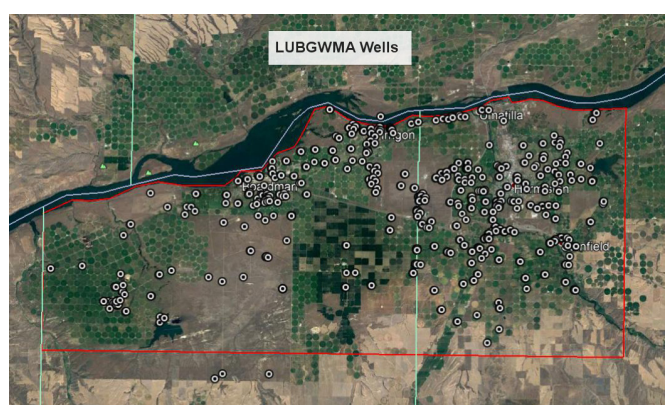
With little space in the clerk's office for observers, the county set up a real-time monitor in the courthouse lobby for the public to view ballot processing. The live feed shows the processing of local ballots from

the verifying of signatures through to the actual count. The feed began Tuesday, Nov. 22, and will continue until Dec. 21, or until all qualified ballots are counted.

All ballots had to be received or postmarked by Tuesday. By Dec. 20, the county clerk's office expects to have information identifying any challenged ballots—those with missing or non-matching signatures—available for public inspection, with certification after 5 p.m. that evening.

Meanwhile, Tuesday was also the last day to resolve ballots for the Nov. 8 General Election. Childers told the Gazette that the clerk's office had to run two ballot counting machines during this process, since the state would not let them count ballots by hand or run the general and recall elections on the same machine.

## County revisits nitrate issues



Wells located within the Lower Umatilla Basin Groundwater Management Area (LUBGWMA)

By Andrea Di Salvo

Water nitrate issues, the funding for solutions and homeowner privacy were at the top of the Morrow County Board of Commissioners agenda on Nov. 23.

Interim Public Health Director Robin Canaday spoke to the commissioners about Program Element 75. PE 75 would provide funds to help with the county's high nitrate water issues; it allows outreach and education, conducting well-water

screening events, supporting sample collection, and supporting water treatment and maintenance.

"I wanted to bring this before the board to give us a chance to accept these PE 75 funds and move forward here," Canaday said.

Doherty added that the work plan from the state was put together before the county declared a state of emergency. It was unknown what the county would ultimately receive, but Board

Chair Jim Doherty said right now the state has committed \$120,000 toward an FTE (full-time equivalent) through the end of July. Doherty said he and Rep. Greg Smith met with Oregon Health Authority Director Patrick Allen recently, and Allen implied PE 75 is unique in that it is just Umatilla and Morrow counties.

"They want to implement part of their plan through a more local source," he said, adding that the funds don't expire. "Right now, the state has got those dollars queued up and ready to go."

The commissioners voted unanimously for Canaday to work with Morrow County Human Resources to implement PE 75.

Morrow County Planner Tamra Mabbott reported that the county had issued a request for proposal (RFP)

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