

State ethics investigation

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utes that we were able to review, it appears that he disclosed the conflicts, but further investigation is needed to obtain and review minutes, and as with Mr. Padberg, we would also review the minutes and recording of executive sessions to determine whether Jerry Healy was met with those conflicts of interest in those executive sessions," said Myers concerning Healy's Port involvement, but added, "It does appear that the CREZ board discussed negotiations with Amazon's new data centers. Because those negotiations could result in financial impact on Windwave, Jerry Healy was met with a potential conflict of interest. The CREZ meeting minutes do not indicate that he made any conflict of interest disclosures."
"I'm always taking my services to the community seriously with the best interests of the community and county first," Healy said in response. "I've made every effort to follow the ethical path, and I've never knowingly violated standards of ethical behavior. In my public service experience, I have never had any issues with conflicts of interest before."

"When it comes to these issues with Amazon, my partners and I did our best and, I believe, complied with the demands of the law," he added

Gary Neal, formerly of Boardman, was the Port of Morrow general manager from 1989 until December of 2018. He also served on the CREZ and CDA boards. Myers said his case differed from the others in that the ethics commission's jurisdictional period over his term was relatively short; OGEC's jurisdictional period began Sept. 18, 2018, and Neal retired from the port on Dec. 21, 2018. Neal moved from Boardman to his hometown in Eastern Washington after his retirement.

"Again, the question in this case is, did he participate as the Port's general manager in matters concerning the Amazon data centers, which could, potentially, have a financial impact on Wind-

wave?" said Myers. "Then, as a member of the CREZ board, which was negotiating contracts for these data centers, did he participate in matters that would benefit Windwave?"

A response to the inquiry asserts that Neal recused himself from taking any official actions relating to Amazon in his role at the Port in Sept. 2018, but the commission investigation had not been able to confirm that recusal in the meeting minutes.

"It does appear from the CREZ board minutes that Gary Neal may have continued to participate in board meetings at least into Oct. of 2018," Myers said when she asked for further investigation to review minutes and conduct interviews to determine whether Neal participated in any decisions, recommendations or actions that could have a financial impact on Windwave.

"I have taken my career and the role I played very seriously, and I'm proud of the accomplishments that I was part of during my career," Neal responded. "I always did my best to try to comply with my ethical obligations serving in a public capacity. I do not believe I violated my ethical obligations related to this complaint or at any other time during my 30-year career. I take this ethics complaint seriously and look forward to having this issue resolved."

Because several of the men involved had mentioned contacting the OGEC help line, OGEC Commissioner Daniel Mason asked if the ethics commission kept a record of such general calls for advice. OGEC Chair David Fiskum responded that there were sometimes emailed responses or conversations, but no call log was kept. Myers put in that she recalled two or three occasions when she spoke with Russell and possibly Healy, and that the minutes indicated that Russell spoke with former investigator a number of times.

OGEC Vice Chair Amber Hollister said she was impressed by any public official who would take the time to

call the ethics commission for guidance, but that she was struggling to review the complex facts of the cases.

"It seems in some instances Amazon may have just come up generally, and in some cases Windwave may have been specifically mentioned in application or clearly linked to that business, and so I just wanted to note that underlying question I have," said Hollister. "I do think this is a situation where the facts are so complex that we would benefit from an investigation, although I don't feel like I've made any kind of determination. Honestly, it's difficult to do so given the complexity."

Commissioner Mason said he agreed.

"When you have an issue that is this complex and is getting public attention, it is best to go through the investigative process for everybody's benefit," he said. "I think that this investigative process should go forward and needs to go forward for everybody's clarification on the issue, and that would be the main reason why I would support a motion to move forward with the investigation."

Hollister moved that there was substantial objective basis that the men may have committed the ethics violations and that investigation should move forward, and the eight-member board voted to pursue investigations in each case.

After the vote, Chair Fiskum said he approved the use of the word *may* in the vice chair's motions.

"Under Oregon law, by deciding to move from a preliminary review to a full investigation, we have *not* decided that there has been an ethics violation or violations. Rather, we have decided that we need to conduct a further investigation to determine *whether* a violation or violations occurred," he told those present. "This is an important distinction, one that is not always well understood, my belief is, by those affected or by those who follow our actions, so it's important for all of us to understand that distinction."

Lexington city council wraps up year

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the maintenance and fire department computers will not meet the requirements.

"I'd like to take a look at the specs on all the computers and see if we need to buy something else," she said.

Veronica Hess said she thought the town already does daily backup of QuickBooks and would like to check into that before spending money on a backup server, but agreed the town recorder's PC needed cleanup. She added that the Amazon technology enhancement funding was about to be unlocked and wasn't set for a particular project, and that the IT situation would probably fall under acceptable use of the money. The council agreed to have Gordon move forward with a contract for the council to review.

In other business, the council:

-Updated the list of paid holidays for town employees to align with state and federal guidelines;

-Discussed setting up an administrator for the town's business account at Bank of Eastern Oregon. The administrator can't be the town recorder or mayor, but the administrator can assign other administrators and sub-users. Gordon signed as administrator with Imes to be added as co-administrator.

-Heard from Veronica Hess and Imes about the mayor sending a letter of support to the League of Oregon Cities Homelessness Task Force. "It's not going to take a whole lot of time to say, 'This is an idea we have, and we support your initiative,'" said Imes. "And then they roll with it and take it to legislation."

-Heard a progress report from Imes regarding the housing improvement plan update being led by the Morrow County Planning Department. "They hired a consultant to come in and look at the three Willow Creek Valley cities and really just dig in to see

why is it that Ione, Lexington, Heppner, our populations are slowly going away," Imes said, adding that the planning director should be in Lexington in the next couple of months for an update. "The exciting thing about that work is that it will help us in our infrastructure improvement projects," she added.

-Heard from Imes about the Morrow County GOAL 9 work plan and inclusive outreach plan, which is similar to the housing plan, but focuses more on the economy and bringing business to south county. Consultants will be reaching out to the council to come do outreach in the community.

-Voted to repeat last year's Christmas bonus to town employees at \$250 for each employee. The vote was unanimous, but Imes added that she thought it was important for bonuses to be included as a line item in the budget going forward.

Boardman among communities to receive affordable housing funds

Washington, D.C.— U.S. Senators Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley announced last week that Community and Shelter Assistance (CASA) in Oregon will receive \$200,000 from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to provide ongoing management of long-term affordable housing in communities all over the state.

Boardman is one of several communities slated to receive funding to develop long-term, affordable housing options.

"As we enter the coldest months of the year, I'm gratified to see federal dollars go to keeping roofs overhead for Oregonians in communities throughout the state," Wyden said. "While building more long-term affordable housing remains an ongoing challenge, CASA is providing crucial services to main-

tain and expand the long-term affordable housing we already have. I will continue to fight so that in the wealthiest, strongest nation on earth, all Oregon families have a warm, safe, affordable and stable place to call home."

"Everyone should be able to afford a safe place to call home, and as we are faced with a housing affordability crisis, it is crucial that we support efforts expanding access to housing options," added Merkley. "This funding, going to CASA of Oregon to support housing cooperatives across the state, will ensure Oregonians have greater access to affordable and reliable housing options."

CASA, located in Sherwood, provides ongoing technical assistance to housing cooperatives to ensure long term viability as affordable housing options.

CASA will use the Rural Development grant dollars from USDA along with \$96,500 it raised to provide assistance to communities in Gold Beach, Leaburg, Boardman, McMinnville, Idleyld, Dexter, Cottage Grove, Redmond, Warrenton, Clatskanie, Winston, Estacada, Rainier, Madras, Welches, and Newport.

"We are grateful for these much-needed resources that will allow us to find long-term solutions to the housing crisis that too many Oregonians—especially those living in rural areas—face," said Rose Ojeda, Director of CASA's Manufactured Housing and Cooperative Development Center. "We look forward to working with our local partners to develop programs tailored to their unique needs that create more sustainable, healthy and just communities."

Local families find Christmas scavenger hunt a success



Cold weather and illness made for lower attendance than expected at the second annual Searching for Christ in Christmas scavenger hunt in Heppner last Sunday, but event coordinator JoAnna Lamb said it was still a good evening for those present. Several churches and individuals combined their resources to create stations around town where families could go to warm up, have a treat and learn about the true meaning behind Christmas. "Next year, we will be looking to add more congregations and some patio heaters!" said Lamb. The Chick family of Heppner was the winner of the special gift basket containing books, a DVD of *The Chosen* and the special surprise of tickets for 16 people total to the Sea Lion Caves in Florence, OR. -Contributed photo

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