

County commissioners talk broadband, transit at Dec. 14 meeting

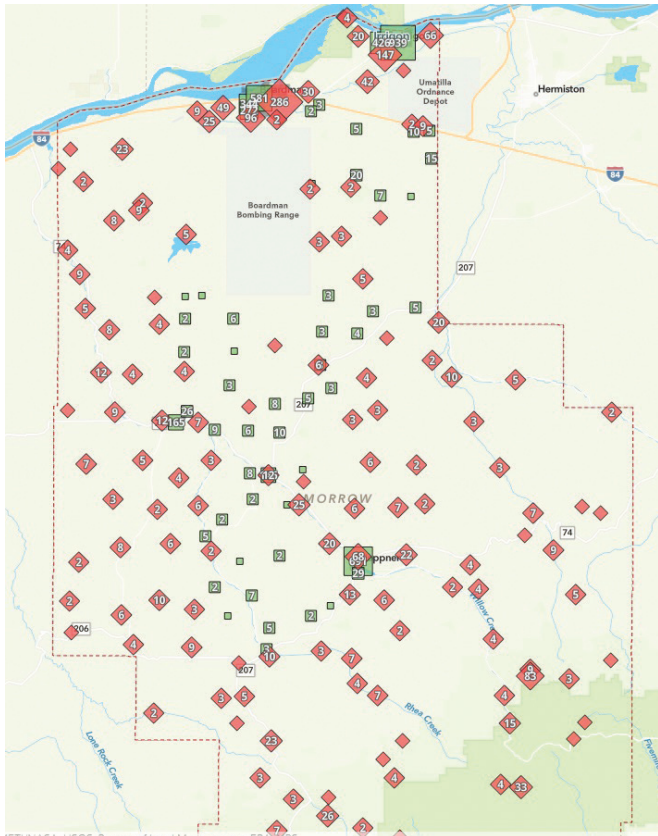
By Andrea Di Salvo

It was all about transportation and communication at the Dec. 14 meeting of the Morrow County Board of Commissioners in Heppner this month.

At its Dec. 14 meeting in Heppner, the Morrow County Board of Commissioners heard an update from Aaron Moss, Broadband Action Team Coordinator. The coordinator said the project had high-level designs and was ready for grants.

“The next steps for us are to get two projects out of that one high level design, the one for the north end of the county and the one for the rest of the county, including the middle,” he said. “Those will most likely be different partners, so our next step is to split that project while we’re waiting on the maps from the State of Oregon for eligibility of their programs.”

Moss said he expects assistance from the state in the next couple of months. “And that’s going to get us from high level designs to engineering designs, and designs that are actually actionable to build out. So we’re moving forward there, and we’re really just waiting for the state in that



This map shows address points that have availability to speeds of 100mbps Upload and 100mbps Download. The green or “served” areas are where residents have or will access to internet service offerings of at least 100mbps download speed and 100mbps upload speed. The red or “un-served/under-served” do not, and are the focus of our Broadband Action Team’s infrastructure-building efforts.

realm,” he added.

Much of the conversation centered around the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, or “Bipartisan Infrastructure Law,” which President Joe Biden signed into law on Nov. 15, 2021.

The Biden Administration touts the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law as the largest long-term investment in infrastructure and economy in the nation’s history. It provides \$550 billion over fiscal years 2022 through

2026 in new Federal investment in infrastructure, including in roads, bridges, and mass transit, water infrastructure, resilience and broadband.

Moss informed the board that the money from the first infrastructure bill will come out about six months after the application is complete and will total about \$57 million. Following that in a year or two will be the bigger money, about \$600 million. He said there was some problem with the way the state fund is handled, and several individuals and organizations have been working on advocacy at the state level to make sure the state funding gets fixed and the state is able to secure federal money and spend it according to federal standards.

Moss said he had been keeping state and federal legislators updated, and that Sen. Ron Wyden’s office was having a webinar concerning the federal broadband maps, which was important to the topic of Moss’s update.

Moss explained that the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) releases a new broadband map every five to 10 years and recently released a map

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County, cities discuss housing concerns in Willow Creek Valley

By Andrea Di Salvo

The Morrow County Planning Department is stepping in to help the cities in Willow Creek Valley address their housing concerns, Morrow County Planning Director Tamra Mabbott told the Morrow County Board of Commissioners at a meeting earlier this month.

At the board’s regular Dec. 14 meeting, Mabbott told the board of commissioners that county planning was awarded a housing grant by the Department of Land Conservation and Development (DLCD), intended to help the cities within the Willow Creek Valley.

“The genesis really was some work that was done by my predecessor with all of the cities in Morrow County, that looked at housing issues, primarily the land-based needs, so we did the buildable lands analysis, and the inventory available for each of those cities,” said Mabbott. “So I reached out to all three cities and said, ‘Hey, I’m happy to submit a grant application to the Department of Land Conservation and Develop-

ment on your behalf. Are you interested?’ and the three cities in the Willow Creek Valley said yes.

“Irrigon and Boardman said, ‘We’re busy, we’re growing, no thanks,’” she added.

Over the past year, consultant ECONorthwest worked with Heppner, Lexington and Ione along with the county planning director to develop a plan that focused on two barriers to housing—a lack of infrastructure and a lack of developer capacity in the area. As part of their analysis, ECONorthwest also identified another barrier, capacity to advocate for and pursue additional funding for infrastructure and amenities such as playgrounds, bike paths, recreational facilities, etc.

Each of the three cities already have contracts with Anderson & Perry Associates to develop plans to address water and wastewater infrastructure.

According to the consultant’s report, cities across Oregon are struggling to attract housing development. A common theme among small cities in Oregon is capacity, which was also an issue that arose prominently in the Willow Creek Valley study.

“I do want to say that that lack of capacity is not that there’s not some super-capable staff there, it’s just that when you’re a small city, especially when you’re a one-person shop, planning might not be your priority,” Mabbott said.

“Generally, the capaci-

ty to do anything other than the basic functions is a real challenge,” she said, adding that that was why she decided to take the initiative on behalf of the cities.

ECONorthwest’s report recommended that, to alleviate capacity restraints, the cities take a collaborative approach together with the county and regional organizations in order to 1) upgrade water and wastewater infrastructure, 2) pursue investments to overcome transportation and floodplain barriers and 3) attract developers or contractors for near-term development.

Mabbott said there was a definite lack of developer capacity in the South Morrow region. She said South Morrow has capable builders who tend to do single-family homes or maybe duplexes, but “We don’t have the Developers with a capital D who come in and might do an entire subdivision. Our neighbors Irrigon and Boardman are seeing that,” she said. She also pointed to a lack of funding for infrastructure and desired amenities.

“There’s a theme throughout here of capacity,” said Mabbott. “In particular Lexington and Ione, the existence of a floodplain is a very significant barrier, so any new development would have to meet FEMA’s insurance requirements, which means you significantly increase the initial cost, and then you have a permanent, long-term requirement to insure those houses.”

Lexington Town Coun-

cilior Katie Imes was the only city representative able to be at the meeting, but she expressed her gratitude for the county’s help in the process.

“I think it’s very, very key that we all work together to improve our infrastructure, improve housing, improve the economy here in the south Willow Creek area,” Imes said, adding that Lexington is just wrapping up a sewer and water study, which she said is really exciting.

“It just puts everything on paper and really gets the ball rolling,” she said. “It does take time, of course. It’s a slow process, and it will have to be primarily grant funded because of the lack of resources here in Lexington.

“This project really helps to bring everything to light and to be able to say, ‘Look at the big picture here. What do we have to do and what direction are

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Recall vote results certified

By Andrea Di Salvo

The recall effort against Morrow County commissioners Jim Doherty and Melissa Lindsay has been successful, according to official election results certified by Morrow County Clerk Bobbi Childers this week.

The original certification date was set for Dec. 20, but challenges from Doherty and Lindsay pushed the certification back a week to Dec. 27. Even so, the election results stand, with county voters recalling Doherty 1,339 to 1,174 and Lindsay 1,265 to 1,244.

To all appearances, that leaves Morrow County Commissioner Don Russell as the county’s sole com-

missioner as of Tuesday afternoon.

An article in the East Oregonian referenced a letter sent from attorneys Steve Elzinga and Joe Huddleston to Childers on behalf of Doherty and Lindsay alleging “numerous errors” in the recall election. However, the Heppner Gazette-Times did not receive a copy of that letter and is not aware of any legal action being taken against the election results at this time.

Lindsay lost her bid for reelection in the 2022 general election, and so would have left office early in January in any case. Doherty would have been up for reelection in 2025.

Heppner holds alumni basketball games



Heppner Basketball Alumni women’s participants (L-R) Shelley McCabe, Madelyn Nichols, Madison Rosenbalm, Paige Grieb, Janelle Ellis, Jessica Kempken, Petra Payne, Kelly Barnett, Mindy Wilson and Savannah Poorman.

-Contributed photo

The Heppner Mustang boys basketball team hosted the 10th annual Mustang Basketball Alumni games this past week. The games brought back former Mustangs to showcase their talents once again the Heppner gym. Both the men’s and women’s games were very exciting to watch. In the women’s game, the “more experienced” women won by the score of 44-25 and the men’s game went into two overtimes and saw the “young guns” beat the “old dogs” by the score of 63-61.

The women’s game was much closer than the final score indicates as the “young gals” were ahead 22-19 at halftime. The “more experienced” team took over in the second half and ran away with the game and won by the score of 44-25.

Leading the way for the winners was Shelley McCabe, who poured in 23 points. Madison Rosenbalm was next with 10 and Janelle Ellis had five points. Petra Payne scored four points for the team and Mindy Wilson finished with two.

The “young gals” were led in scoring by Kelly Barnett, who had 11 points. Madelyn Nichols finished with five and Paige Grieb had four. With three points was Jessica Kempken, and Savannah Poorman had two.

The men’s game was a defensive battle from the

start. The “young guns” led at halftime 23-22 and the game finished in a 38-38 tie. A long overtime period was played and the score at the end of that was still tied at 61-61. A shorter second overtime period was played and the “young guns” were the only ones to score, taking the victory by the score of 63-61.

Leading the way in scoring for the winners was CJ Kindle, who had 15 points. Mason Lehman was next with 14 and Jake Lindsay had 11 points. Logan Grieb followed with 10, Blake Carter four and Kevin Murray had three. With two points each were Beau Wolters and Hunter Nichols. Patrick Collins scored one point and not scoring in the game was Brock Hisler.

The “old dogs” were led in scoring by Jeremy Rosenbalm with 26 points. Stephen Thompson was next with 11 and Tate Gentry had seven. With five points each were Brian Rill and Andre Rauch. Lane Bailey finished with three points and with two each were Leon Luna and Blas Elguezabal. Brian Knowles and Rocky Turner contributed mightily but did not score in the game.

Lots of fun was had, and no one was injured playing in the game. Plans are already underway for next year’s 11th annual Mustang Basketball Alumni games.

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