

County contracts with company for 'water coordination'

By Andrea Di Salvo

The Morrow County Board of Commissioners approved a contract with GSI Water Solutions, Inc. to provide water coordination services for the county during a short meeting Dec. 20 in Heppner.

At an earlier meeting, the commissioners had authorized Morrow County Planning Director Tamra Mabbott to issue a Notice of Intent to award a contract to GSI Water Solutions, Inc. and to work with Morrow County Counsel Justin Nelson to develop a contract.

The contract approved Dec. 20 was for GSI to provide consulting services as "water coordinator" over a two-year period (2023 and 2024) to help organize and guide the county's response to the "long-standing water quantity and water quality issues" facing the county and the region. The contract is for a not-to-exceed \$140,000 budget and ends Dec. 31, 2024.

As water coordinator for the county, GSI will work to communicate with and educate county residents about water issues, as well as work with Morrow County Public Health to help address or mitigate impacts of those issues. The company will also support the development of policies and programs for a sustainable water supply for the county, coordinate county responsibilities for programs and activities related to water quantity and quality, and help position the county to secure funding to support implementation of water-related programs and activities.

At the meeting, the board also awarded a six-month janitorial contract for north and south county buildings to Patriot Building and Grounds Maintenance, ending June 30, 2023. The proposal from Patriot was the only one the county received and is for janitorial work in county buildings at both the north and south end of the county. Patriot Buildings & Grounds maintenance was the single proposal received. The monthly total for south end work is \$6,191.80 and the north end will cost \$3,198 per month. Morrow County Commissioner Melissa Lindsay gave an update on the reclamation of the old gas station in Ione. (See "County commissioners hear update on Ione gas station" in the Dec. 21 G-T.)

Also at the meeting, Hermiston engineer Ron McKinnis requested the board sign a Sixth Street replat for the City of Irrigon.

The purpose is to remove plat lines and replat for development of multi-family structure. The commission unanimously approved the replat.

Morrow County Commissioner Melissa Lindsay and Morrow County Public Works Director Eric Imes approached the county commission about the need to revise an agreement with the U.S. Forest Service regarding USFS Road 21. The 21 Road (Old Western Route) is a major means of forest access. The county had entered an agreement with the forest service in 2018 in which the county agreed to help maintain the road. Lindsay said the agreement was made with the understanding that grant funding was available for that maintenance, but that the grant funding has not materialized.

"There are a lot of roads in the county that need work, and we have even some public access roads that we've talked about need work," Lindsay said. "I'm not sure why we would take on the federal government's roads when we struggle to maintain our own."

She requested the board direct Imes and Morrow County Assistant Roadmaster Mike Haugen to terminate the 21 Road agreement and begin discussions regarding an intergovernmental agreement (IGA) for minor maintenance such as annual blading.

Imes agreed that the grant money had not been forthcoming and likely would not be. He also added that he was concerned about being saddled with other, more complicated road maintenance.

"It's just beyond what I think the road department should be involved with on a non-county section of road," he said.

Board of Commissioners Chair Jim Doherty said

the lack of funds was concerning and that he supported the idea of establishing an IGA so the residents who use that road could still have it maintained more than the forest service might do.

"We're already maintaining that 17 miles. To do it once every couple years is absolutely feasible," Imes said.

"It would be nice if it doesn't cost the county any money and the road maintains some drivability," added County Commissioner Don Russell. "I'd hate to see it fall into disrepair like some of the forest service roads."

The board unanimously voted to terminate the current agreement and pursue an IGA for acceptable maintenance.

Morrow County Human Resources Director Lindsay Grogan advised the board that the 2023 Morrow County Compensation Board had one vacancy due to a resignation. The compensation board has five members and prepares a recommended compensation schedule for county employees for the county commission each year.

The vacant position had been held by Kalie Davis, who resigned after moving out of the county. Grogan recommended appointing Christine Gray to the four-year term, which ends December of 2026.

Gray is the human resource director at Community Counseling Solutions (CCS) in Heppner and has more than 15 years of HR and payroll experience. She has also served on the Joseph School Compensation Board, been trained by the Oregon State Economist in wages and compensation and has several years' experience performing organizational wage studies and implementing pay structures.

"I don't personally know her," said Grogan,

Reminder to insulate water meters

The City of Heppner would like to remind everyone to insulate their water meters this winter.

"It is important to protect the meter from freezing before the temperatures drop," said a statement from the city, adding that Pettyjohn's and other building supply stores carry the proper insulation for a low price—much lower than

the \$75 plus materials the city charges for the repair of any uninsulated meter that becomes frozen.

Anyone that has a difficult time accessing their meter to insulate it is encouraged to contact the City of Heppner for assistance. Anyone with questions or concerns is asked to call 541-676-9618 or stop by Heppner City Hall.

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