



# the HEPPNER GAZETTE TIMES

50¢ VOL. 143 NO. 4 8 Pages Wednesday, January 25, 2023 Morrow County, Heppner, Oregon

## Engineering firm requests additional funds, Heppner council says no

**By Andrea Di Salvo**  
The Heppner City Council held a hot debate over a request for additional compensation from engineering firm Ferguson Engineering at its last meeting Jan. 9, eventually denying the request with a 3-2 vote. Council president John Bowles was absent from the meeting.

Ferguson had requested additional compensation in the amount of \$18,043.22 on its contract for work on the city street project. Heppner City Manager Kraig Cutsforth told the council that Ferguson Engineering signed a contract with the city right after HB 2017 was appointed. At that time, Cutsforth said, they contracted a rate about 20 percent below their going rate. Cutsforth said he doubted anyone could have predicted the pandemic and inflation that would occur in the last few years it has taken to complete the project.

“By the time we completed this, we were looking at rates as much as 50 percent less than what you see out there. We put them in a pretty bad spot in that sense,” he said, adding that the same went for Premier Excavation.

He said at the time Premier bid on the project, they were the low bid at 2.2 million, but the city then went on to add more to the project. That also required Ferguson to do more engineering and surveying than were in the original project parameters.

“They (Ferguson) asked at that time about their rate, and I held them to that rate,” he said. “I told them if there’s money left over at the end, we’ll come to the council and we’ll see.”

He said he also collected other bids at the time to compare, and the bids he received were 28 to 35 percent higher than what Ferguson’s standard rates are. He requested giving them the additional compensation, which averaged out to about a seven percent increase on what they had been paid.

He said part of his reasoning stemmed from the inability to get engineering firms to come to Heppner and, if they did, to get them to come back.

“I would like to do what’s right, at least in my opinion,” he added. “So that we can keep at least that connection there. If

we don’t, I fear that we’re going to have trouble in the future for the City of Heppner getting people to come.”

He said that the city was about \$100,000 below its state contract, and if they paid the reimbursement, they would be about \$80,000 below what they were allowed to spend, so the city would still be within budget. The funds would be reimbursed by the State of Oregon and are an allowable expense.

“It’s not coming from our budget. It’s coming from our project,” he told the council.

He said the state was aware of it and okay with the extra money, because “they’ve seen it in more case than one.”

“Of course, we’ve never seen this COVID thing and everything that has happened in such great numbers,” said councilor Sharon Inskeep. “I understand that the state’s going to pay that, but they (Ferguson) were not on time, they didn’t complete what they said they were going to complete last year.”

Cutsforth pointed out that work like striping was the responsibility of the construction contractor, Premier Excavation.

“But they did cost us quite a bit on change orders,” put in Sweeney.

“I will not say they are by far the best I’ve ever seen,” said Cutsforth. “I will not do that. I’m just saying if you have one dentist in town, you don’t want to make that one mad at you.”

“But you don’t pay them off, just because you don’t want to make them mad,” said councilor Adam Doherty. “It just seems weird to me. I’m maybe not wrapping my head around this after-the-fact additional charge.”

“We can’t see the future. We don’t know the future. If we did, everybody would go, ‘I’m going to pencil out 17 additional percent on that because in the future it’s going to be more,’” he added. “They budgeted this out. They timed it. Why are we getting dinged for them not coming over and taking care of their business?”

He added that they had a hard time getting Ferguson to come over, and when they did the city was charged for change orders.

“Last time I checked, we weren’t flush with funds either,” he said.

Cutsforth reiterated that the money wasn’t coming from the city, and that the additional charge still fell within the state’s parameter. Councilor Dale Bates pointed back to Cutsforth’s statement that any other engineering firm would have been much more, as much as \$200,000 more, Bates guessed. Both Inskeep and

-Continued to PAGE SIX

## Community action group questions county commission on nitrate issue

**By Andrea Di Salvo**  
Oregon Rural Action (ORA), a community-based organization out of La Grande, brought several Boardman community members to the table as they placed county government in the hot seat at the last meeting of the Morrow County Board of Commissioners.

Zaira Sanchez, Director of Community Organizing with ORA, Zoomed in to the meeting from a remote location during the regular board meeting Jan 18. She first thanked Commission Chair David Sykes for attending Sen. Jeff Merkley’s tour of Boardman’s West Glen community Jan. 15 but said community members had a lot of questions about what was going to happen next now that the emergency declaration has ended.

“There’s many people who still don’t have safe water, and people have been depending on the water delivery to have access to safe water,” Sanchez told the commissioners. “Many people are not sure if they have safe water yet, because there’s a possibility that some people still haven’t



**Zaira Sanchez, Director of Community Organizing with ORA- Contributed Photo** received testing.

“We have someone in this room who, back in August, tested at 22 and recently did a water test again, and the results went up, so we know that people’s nitrate levels can fluctuate,” she added.

She also said the filters weren’t “a hundred percent functioning” for everyone, depending on their nitrate levels, so there is a need for continued testing. Sanchez then have the floor to several of the community members gathered at the ORA Zoom site.

Ray Akers, who identified himself as a 45-year Boardman resident, told the commissioners that he relies on his well for drinking water, but that it had tested 25.3 milligrams per liter for nitrates, or 2.5 times the federal safe drinking water standard of 10 parts per million. He then said he understood that as of Jan. 13, the county would no longer offer free well water testing for nitrates.

“Is this true?” he asked.

Commissioner Sykes referred the question to Morrow County Emergency Manager Paul Gray, who explained that the county would no longer be testing only because the state would be taking it over and doing a “more robust”

testing, which would include testing for more than nitrates. He said once they had a date on which the state would take over, the county would set a date to stop testing so there would be no lapse in service.

“Why have we stopped the well-water testing currently?” asked Akers.

“The well-water testing has not stopped. It is still going, at least until Jan. 27,” said Gray. “Whoever is spreading that it stopped is not giving you the correct information.”

Sanchez interjected that a lot of people were not aware that testing was still happening and asked how the county was alerting people. Gray countered that the county was partnering with ORA in getting the information out.

“Have we not?” he asked.

Sanchez agreed that was the case.

“Then part of the answer is, we need you to also assist us in getting that message out,” replied Gray. “But I’m not going to put out a public release without having all the facts in that document.”

“Do you want the correct information, or do you want the partial information to be released that will actually make people be more worried that something’s going to happen without having a definite answer?” he added.

“Things have already happened to a lot of people in the community health-wise,” responded Akers. “And there’s still a bunch of people who haven’t been notified, so I guess any kind of knowledge that could get to the folks who don’t know would be huge.”

“We know there’s a problem,” he added. “In my opinion there’s a lot of people who don’t know about the problem, so we’ve got to do what it takes to get the problem out in front of the folks so they know that they may or may not have a problem with their drinking water.”

Kelly Doherty of Boardman also spoke to the commission. Kelly Doherty is the wife of former commissioner Jim Doherty, who was recalled in a special election certified Dec. 27. He had been spearheading the county nitrate response until that time.

-Continued to PAGE SIX

## Fundraiser for Nelson, Stutzman families a big success



The Morrow County Fairgrounds was crowded last Sunday as community members gathered for a fundraiser to benefit the Nelson and Stutzman families. -Photo by Chris Sykes



Savanna Greenup on Blueberry. Savanna had the fourth fastest run out of 75 runners. -Contributed photo

Organizers of the benefit for the Nelson and Stutzman families last Sunday said the event was a huge success, with \$22,978 raised as of Monday and more donations still coming in.

The event at the fairgrounds Jan. 22 included a barrel race, soup feed, and auction and raffle. Proceeds went to the families of Kellie Nelson and Ron and Tami Stutzman, all three of whom were killed in a fatal

crash Dec. 30.

Tiffanie Greenup said the barrel race had 75 runners and brought in \$1,951. (Runners who received payouts are listed below.)

The soup feed, which was organized by Jeanie Collins, raised \$4,200 to go to the families.

The auction and raffle had raised \$16,827.15 as of Monday. There were 126 items donated. Julie Baker organized the auction and

-Continued to PAGE THREE

## National association names Grant Coach of the Year



Grant speaks to the Mustang football team during the semifinals game against Oakland last season. -Photo by Kirsti Cason

Heppner Jr./Sr. High School football coach Greg Grant has been named Coach of the Year for 11-player football by the National Federation of State High School Coaches Association.

Grant was selected in large part because he has compiled an outstanding 330-76 record in 41 years of coaching. He has led his teams to three Oregon School Activities Association (OSAA) state championships (1992, 2015 and 2019) and three runner-up finishes (1989, 2007 and 2014).

Grant, who ranks No. 4 on the all-time Oregon football coaching victories list, has received numerous state and conference Coach of the Year awards. In addition to coaching football at Heppner High School since 1990,

Grant also has served as the school’s athletic director since 2001 and has been an assistant coach for several other sports.

Grant has served on the Oregon Athletic Coaches Association and the Oregon Athletic Directors Association Boards of Directors, and he has served on several OSAA committees.

Grant’s philosophy of athletics is to “capitalize on the lessons available in athletics to enrich every player’s life now and into the future.”

“It is my goal that players leave our program realizing that attendance, timeliness, effort and accountability are actions that will set them up for success in every facet of their lives,” Grant says.

**POLARIS**  
UPGRADE YOUR RIDE

ELEVATE YOUR ADVENTURE

**NEW FOR 2022**

CHECK OUT THE ALL-NEW 2022 POLARIS LINEUP. WE'LL HELP YOU LOCK IN WHAT YOU WANT.

**Morrow County Grain Growers Inc.**

**CALL 541-989-8221 ext 204 for more information**

**POLARIS | OFF ROAD**

WARNING: Polaris® off-road vehicles can be hazardous to operate and are not intended for on-road use. Driver must be at least 16 years old with a valid driver's license to operate. Passengers, if permitted, must be at least 12 years old. All riders should always wear helmets, eye protection, and protective clothing. Always use seat belts and cab nets or doors (if equipped). Never engage in stunt driving, and avoid excessive speeds and sharp turns. Riding and alcohol/drugs don't mix. All riders should take a safety training course. Call 800-342-3764 for additional information. Check local laws before riding on trails. ©2021 Polaris Inc.