

County commission hears update on nitrate progress

-Continued from PAGE ONE

people were thinking that it was going to cost them, but if they qualify to get free water delivery, it's free."

The IGA was not on the meeting agenda, so the board did not take action Aug. 2. However, Morrow County Commissioner Jeff Wenholz told Canaday that, if the IGA is needed before the Aug. 16 meeting, the board could schedule a special meeting to approve it.

Morrow County Commission Chair David Sykes asked what kind of reception they had from members of the community. Pineyro said there were some that weren't so good, but most were positive.

"They're eager to know more, they're eager to know what resources are going to be attached to that," she said. "They're willing to make those connections to reach out."

Canaday also said that they have been in contact with the state to hold an open house for those who have questions.

"They're bringing in some experts like toxicologists, epidemiologists, that will really answer the meat of some of those questions that folks have," said Canaday.

The open house will be Aug. 24 from 6-8 p.m. at Riverside High School.

Amazon Fee Distribution

Also at the meeting, the Board of Commissioners approved an intergovernmental agreement regarding Community Service Fee (CSF) distribution for the new Amazon facility on Bombing Range Road. The Strategic Investment Plan (SIP) agreement has been approved by Business Oregon, but now the county and the affected tax districts have to reach an agreement on how the annual CSF payments will be distributed among themselves.

Morrow County Counsel Justin Nelson gave an update on the IGA. The county commissioners and staff met with members of the affected taxing districts at a public meeting July 19.

"During that time a consensus was reached regarding the breakdown, with the county receiving a set amount," said Nelson.

The county's portion will be 20 percent, up to \$500,000, out of the \$2.5 million payout expected each year.

"And then it is broken up from there on a pro rata basis of the taxing districts,

including local options and bonds for those," he added. That means the taxing districts will each receive the same percentage of the remaining CSF as they would any property taxes.

Even though the parties reached a consensus at the meeting, the county and at least 75 percent of the taxing districts need to formally approve the IGA for it to move forward. If 75 percent don't agree, then Business Oregon will step in and decide the distribution breakdown.

The county has asked the districts to submit signed agreements by Sept. 1 so they can be submitted to Business Oregon by the Sept. 9 deadline.

Head Start Block Grant

Morrow County also chose to move ahead with the application for a block grant for a new Head Start addition in Irrigon. The decision was made after a short public hearing at the board's regular meeting on Aug. 2.

The Community Development Block Grant application would be for the maximum amount of \$1.5 million and would be used by Umatilla Morrow Head Start (UMHS) to add onto and update its Irrigon facility next to A.C. Houghton Elementary.

Head Start says it needs the space to add more classrooms and have greater security. The current UMHS facility has been in use for about 30 years.

The funding, which comes through the U.S. Dept of Housing and Urban Development, has to be used for housing or public facilities, primarily for those with low and moderate incomes. The project is estimated to benefit around 200 people, of whom 85 percent will fit that demographic.

UMHS CEO Aaron Treadwell and COO Dan Deltosa were on hand at the June 21 board of commissioners meeting to ask Morrow County to be the lead applicant on block grant, which is administered through Business Oregon. They were back again last week to speak on its behalf at the public hearing.

UMHS is currently looking at expanding through modular building, as Daltosa said that is the most cost-effective building they could get for the \$1.5 million. The Head Start program already uses modular classrooms at its Child Development Center

in Hermiston.

Daltosa added that, if Head Start were able to secure additional funding, they would prefer stick-built because those buildings last longer.

As it stands, though, the project budget comes in at roughly 1.9 million.

"Head Start would pick up the other portion that's above point five," said Deltosa. "That budget is a rough estimate," he added.

He also provided a photo of the modular structure already in use in Hermiston. He said that they're looking at isn't a typical modular structure but is built off-site and brought in.

"I would say, from my standpoint, they can pretty much look any how you want them to," he said. "It's less expensive than your typical construction, so that's why we're looking at this for the grant."

Nick Ducote of Ducote Consulting is working with Morrow County Interim Administrator Roberta Vanderwall on the grant application. He said the county, not Head Start, will be the applicant.

"So all those rules and regulations will fall on the county to figure out," he said, "with the help of the Head Start folks. That's kind of how the relationship will work with this one."

There was no other public input, and the commissioners responded favorably to the presentation.

"It's going to be a good addition and match up with what we currently have well," commented Morrow County Commissioner Roy Drago Jr.

They voted unanimously to proceed with the application.

Fire District Annexation

The county commissioners also held a public hearing regarding the annexation of territory to the Heppner Rural Fire Protection District (HRFPD).

Landowners Glen and Tracie Diehl and Luke Young and Harley Young petitioned that their two mountain properties be annexed to the fire district, primarily for insurability and insurance premium costs.

In a letter to the board of commissioner, HRFPD Secretary Thomas Wolff said that one property is contiguous to the existing district boundary and the second is contiguous to the first. The two properties would add just under 40 acres to the district.

Heppner fire chief Steve Rhea had already expressed his approval to the request, and the public hearing was the next part of the formal process.

Morrow County Counsel Justin Nelson said the issue comes up rarely but does happen. Boardman Fire apparently went through the annexation process some time ago.

"You do have these cases where you have certain landowners (say), 'Gosh, I'd really like to have that protection,'" said Nelson. "It might be a little ways from a fire department, but at least there will be somebody coming."

With no public comment, the commissioners approved the annexation. The next step is to draft and record the district's new boundary and notify the Oregon Department of Revenue.

Intern Reports

The commission also heard an update from Morrow County 4-H summer intern Grace Ogden. Ogden grew up in Ione, graduating from Ione High School in 2022. She is now a sophomore at Oklahoma State University majoring in animal science - business.

As an intern, she has helped with Morrow County Fair preparation, Ag in the Classroom, Cloverbud Rodeo and 4-H Camp.

"Over the summer, that's kind of our biggest job in the 4-H section of that," she said of the fair. She also appreciated the chance to work with 4-H camp. "I went all three years as a camper and four as a counselor, so it's really fun to see kids do that and me be on the volunteer/employee side."

She has also assisted in the office, organized

and judged contests, and worked with superintendents to create layouts for the fair.

She said she also helped Oregon State University extension agent Larry Lutchter with the South Morrow Farm Crawl earlier this summer.

"It's always been a dream of mine to work in the ag education industry, so to be able to do that, especially at such a young age while I'm still studying, is really rewarding," Ogden told the commissioners. "It's kind of a dream come true."

Irrigon High School student intern Caren Cardenas also gave an update on the progress of the Columbia River Heritage Trail.

Morrow County Planning Director Tamra Mabbot, GIS Planning Tech Stephen Wrecsics and the 2022 student intern created a report last year on the condition of the trail. It covered the six sections of the trail, including 29 trail markers, seven interpretive panels and three access points.

Cardenas's report focused mainly on efforts to restore the trail markers and interpretive panels. She told the commissioners that many of the stickers were sun faded or removed, while the metal backings were removed or fallen. The county has ordered new stickers and metal backing and will be reaching out to the community for volunteers to help replace them, along with existing volunteers from Amazon

Web Services.

As for the interpretive panels, Cardenas said the frames are a bit rusted but otherwise in good condition.

"The same cannot be said for the panels themselves," she said. "They've been vandalized, weather damaged and are illegible."

The county has been in the process of replacing the interpretive panels, and at a recent meeting, the board of commissioners approved a contract with Sea Reach, Ltd. to update seven panels, create one new panel and manufacture three metal frames.

Cardenas said she has also been working on a brochure and presented a draft to the commissioners. The brochure will include a QR code that takes people to a map of the trail and shows the interpretive panels and trail markers.

"So if you ever want to see where you're at, or where everything's at," she said.

Cardenas will be attending Oregon State University to study engineering. She hopes to intern with Anderson Perry and Associates next year.

New Morrow County Executive Assistant Valerie Ballard was also introduced at the meeting. Ballard will be training under current executive assistant Roberta Lutchter before assuming the role full time. The next regular meeting of the board of commissioners will take place Wednesday, Aug. 16, in Irrigon.


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