



# the HEPPNER GAZETTE TIMES

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## Heppner passes homeless ordinance

### Sen. Hansell may back proposed water project

By Andrea Di Salvo

The Heppner City Council unanimously approved a new city ordinance dealing with homeless camping on city property at its meeting last week in Heppner.

The ordinance regulates the ability of those experiencing homelessness to “site, lie, and sleep” on city-owned property. It prohibits camping on nearly all city property, including city facilities, sidewalks and rights-of-way, city properties, city parks inside city limits and any other property that’s fenced and gated or posted no trespassing.

At the same time, the ordinance specifies how and when, and for how long, any homeless person may camp in allowed areas.

Violations are considered a class B violation. The entire ordinance is available at Heppner City Hall.

This was the second reading of the ordinance, which is required by a state law that took effect July 1 of this year. The first reading was held July 10. The council held a brief public hearing before its vote but

received no public input.

In other city business Aug 14, Heppner Interim City Manager Thomas Wolff said he had been approached by Kim Cutsforth and Melissa Lindsay, who had spoken with State Sen. Bill Hansell at a recent economic summit. Hansell plans to come to Heppner within the next couple of weeks and review the site of a proposed water project on Cross Hill.

“All of our water crosses a single pipeline across Balm Fork Bridge, and if that were to be compromised, we’d be out of water. Period,” said Wolff. “It wouldn’t matter how many wells we have up Willow Creek.”

A well on Cross Hill would be an alternative source to provide pressure to the east side of town, as well as a redundant water source if something should happen to the city’s other water sources.

“And that seems to be the ticket that got the senator’s attention,” Wolff said. “He apparently is willing to find some money to support the drilling of that well and

the construction of that reservoir as a redundant water source for the citizens of Heppner.”

If the project were to come through, that would also open up development of a subdivision Willow Creek Valley Economic Development Group (WCVEDG) would like to build on the hill above the hospital.

“They dovetail together,” said Wolff.

Wolff also asked what the council intends to do with the two properties it recently acquired and cleared on N. Chase St. Wolff said he had already been approached by two parties asking if the city plans to sell the property. Heppner Mayor Corey Sweeney said it was the city’s intention to put those properties up for bid at some point.

Wolff also mentioned a fence being installed between 270 and 290 N. Chase and said he wanted to clarify that the city was not installing or paying for the fence, strictly speaking. The city and the adjoining landowner are sharing the cost of the fence, and the

city is using a portion of the WCVEDG grant used for clearing the property to pay for its portion.

“There are no dollars out of the city’s pocket for our cost share of that fence,” he said.

Plans are also being made to put in a new sidewalk section around Morrow County Sheriff’s Office on Willow View Drive.

The city had apparently planned a sidewalk in that area in both 2014 and 2017, which MCSO objected to. Now, however, the sheriff’s office has returned to the city to request the sidewalk be put in after all, citing safety issues for pedestrians.

The council referred the decision to the Heppner Utilities Commission, which met June 29 and determined the sidewalk is needed.

“It’s not real long,” said Wolff. “But I believe, as a safety issue, it needs to be constructed.”

The project is not in this year’s budget but will be planned for in future

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## Lamb Weston considers expansion at Boardman plant

By Andrea Di Salvo

The Columbia River Enterprise Zone (CREZ) III and Lamb Weston reached a tentative agreement Monday regarding additional investment at the food processor’s Boardman West plant.

Lamb Weston approached the CREZ III board requesting a 15-year Long Term Rural tax abatement to expand and modernize its 50-year-old Boardman facility on Columbia Ave. The facility is apparently the oldest plant in the community.

The \$230 million investment would include a 25,700 square foot expansion of the existing facility, as well as upgrades and additions to machinery and equipment within the plant.

Members of the Lamb Weston team were at the CREZ III meeting Monday in Boardman to provide details about the investment and discuss the terms of the proposed agreement.

Plant manager Brian Jackson told the CREZ III board that the expansion would all be attached to the current structure. He said he didn’t anticipate much impact on the plant’s footprint and that there should be no negative impact on its water or wastewater.

At the same time, the \$160 million in machinery and equipment will allow the plant to automate and to add different product lines at the facility. Rather than costing jobs, that is expected to create an additional 50 full-time jobs at the plant.

The plant currently employs around 500 people, while all of Lamb Weston’s Morrow County enterprise zone properties employ 1,222 people. All of the new

positions would receive “very competitive” wages and full benefits, Jackson said.

Lamb Weston staff also said the new production lines would be for products currently produced at other plants but that they are “all within the platform.”

The new jobs would come both from the additional product lines and from the operators needed for new, high-tech equipment.

While no agreement was finalized at this week’s meeting, the parties at the table worked through details similar to ConAgra’s 2012 agreement with the enterprise zone. Under the proposed agreement, Lamb Weston would make a \$1.2 million annual fee payment each year of the agreement.

Of that, \$200,000 may be used as a discretionary payment reduction. That is, the company can use that money to benefit local charitable organizations directly, and that amount will be deducted from the overall payment. If Lamb Weston uses the entire \$200,000, its remaining payment to the county would be one million dollars per year.

Lamb Weston staff said they appreciated the discretionary component of the fee, believing that it provides “meaningful involvement in the community.” In the past, the company has directed spending to organizations like FFA and 4-H, Oregon Trail Library District, school activities, senior centers and day care centers, among others.

Also included in the discussed agreement was payment of 100 percent of bonded debt and an employee wage rate of 130

percent of the county average.

While both the CREZ III board and Lamb Weston representatives expressed agreement at the terms, the final document has to be drafted before it can be approved by the two parties. Once the CREZ III board approves the agreement, the CREZ III sponsors also have to individually approve the agreement.

CREZ III sponsors are Morrow County and the Port of Morrow, while the City of Boardman has a seat at the table through its Area of Influence.

The CREZ III board also heard an update from enterprise zone manager Greg Sweek and Morrow County Assessor Mike Gorman regarding Oregon House Bill 2009. The legislation will affect long term rural facilities beginning Sept. 24.

The biggest concern is a required school support fee of between 15 and 30 percent. While that sounds like good news for local school districts, Gorman said the school support fee does not go directly to the school district. Rather, it will go to the state for distribution, including to school districts that are not within operational enterprise zones. So, while a company’s enterprise zone payments will go up, the local school district may not actually see any of those funds.

“In their funding formula, nothing changes,” said Gorman.

Also at the meeting, the CREZ III board discussed concerns about online executive sessions. Oregon law states that regular board sessions must have an on-

line option but does not specifically address executive sessions.

The concern raised by several board members was that there was no way to control who else might be in the room with an online attendee and might therefore overhear confidential details.

“I don’t want to be personally liable if someone overhears something I’m on the hook for,” Port of Morrow board member Rick Stokoe said, referring to sometimes confidential negotiations with companies within the enterprise zone.

Morrow County Commissioner David Sykes also pointed out that Zoom participants can name themselves anything, and there’s often no way to verify they are who they say if their camera is off.

The board determined to provide no virtual option for executive sessions going forward. Participants such as members of the media are allowed by law but must attend in person.

## G-T closed Labor Day

News, ad deadline the Friday before

The Heppner Gazette-Times will be closed Monday, Sept. 4, for the Labor Day holiday.

The deadline for all news and ads for the Sept. 6 edition will be Friday,

Sept. 1, at 5 p.m. Normal business hours will resume Tuesday, Sept. 5.

The G-T wishes everyone a safe and happy Labor Day.

## Lone school board faces backlash over complaints against former board chair



The Lone School Board faced some citizen backlash over several topics at last week’s meeting, not the least of which was the board’s silence regarding a formal complaint against former board chair Rob Crum. Pictured L-R: Board secretary Kim Thul, board chair Lisa Rietmann, vice chair Paola Cabrera, and board members Rob Crum, Liz Peterson and Ed Rietmann. -Photo by Andrea Di Salvo

By Andrea Di Salvo

An Lone teacher has resigned, and the Lone School District is in a state of turmoil over accusations made against one of its school board members.

There was tension in the Lone School Library on Aug. 15 when an unusually large crowd turned out for the Lone School Board Meeting. Several of the members of the public were waiting for one of the last items on the agenda, hoping for a resolution regarding

complaints made against board member and former board chair Rob Crum.

Early in the meeting, the Lone School Board elected Lisa Rietmann as the new board chair, and Crum handed the gavel to Rietmann to conduct the rest of the meeting.

Crum is facing accusations of cyber bullying from former Lone sixth-grade teacher Alison Ogden, among others. The Lone School District had

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## MCSO stays the course as schools continue to deal with Covid setbacks

By Andrea Di Salvo

The Morrow County School District is largely staying the course with its goals for the 2023-24 school year, the school board decided during a work session before its regular meeting Aug. 14 in Irrigon.

During the work session, MCSO Superintendent Matt Combe said the district had made few adjustments to last year’s goals due to ongoing effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and gaps staff are still seeing.

“We felt, as a staff, that the goals would be best served without a lot of major changes,” said Combe.

He said it is an opportunity for the school district to continue establishing a new baseline for a year after two or three years that were “anything but normal.”

“We still felt the effects of poor attendance habits this past school year. We also saw some glitches in accountability,” Combe said. “I don’t think now is

the best time to make any major changes.”

One change that was discussed was the need to address safety concerns in the goals.

“I don’t disagree,” said Combe. “Just about every time we meet, we talk about some kind of safety related issue.”

“I think safety, to all of us, is a given,” said MCSO Board Member Mary Killion.

During the regular meeting following the work session, the board approved the following four goals for the coming school year:

Goal 1: During the 2023-24 school year, all Morrow County School District students will demonstrate academic achievement growth proportionate to or above their Oregon peers using a variety of measures. Students are expected to grow academically a minimum of one year at every grade level, in preparation for

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