

Lexington Town Council water rates Commissioners vote to support solar, data center plans

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collecting back payments was the right move,

“I’ve sent bills out with the amount due, and people have paid them,” she said.

Council members agreed that they didn’t want to go back and collect money that hadn’t been billed correctly.

“Cut our losses,” said Lexington Councillor Will Lemmon.

Moving forward, however, meter readings will be correctly billed according to the existing tier rate, which may result in some customers seeing an increase in their bills. The tier rates will be published on the town’s website, and Ferguson said she would try to fit the rates on water invoices so customers are aware of the rates.

At the beginning of the meeting, Lexington Mayor Juli Kennedy introduced new Lexington Maintenance Director Larry Hess. Hess is no relationship to previous maintenance director Keith Hess.

“Larry comes with a great wealth of knowledge, and we’re greatly excited to have him here,” said Kennedy.

Hess has already had to hit the ground running, as some projects have fallen behind during the position’s vacancy over the past couple of months. Ferguson said that she had already spoken with Hess regarding an inventory of trees in the town and scheduling a tree-trimming day.

“We’ve actually had a complaint about trees here on F Street blocking the stop sign. I know a lot of people have had that concern in the past,” said Ferguson.

She said there were also concerns about the big trees near Bailey’s, some in a yard and one in the right-of-way.

“Even, I’m sure, all these Morrow County Grain Growers trucks are hitting those branches,” she said.

“I’ve seen a lot of their other work,” she said. “As soon as they’re not so busy, they’re going to give us a bunch of their time to get a brochure together.”

She said she had already sent the town’s logo to them and some of their design people were working on ideas. Progress on the brochures should be underway within a few weeks. Meanwhile, she said, she would work on the “guts” of the brochure content.

Lexington Councillor Katie Imes was not present at the meeting, but Ferguson said she and Imes had worked together to write and submit a ChangeX grant for \$10,000. Ferguson said the grant would hopefully be used to cover the remainder of the unexpected costs for the town hall paving project.

Ferguson said the town had already received \$10,000 from Willow Creek Valley Economic Development Group (WCVEDG), but it would cost around \$30,000 to complete the parking lot pavement project and get everything ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) compliant.

“Hopefully we’ll get that extra \$10,000, and then we’ll do our \$10,000 contribution,” she said.

The town also qualifies for a Wildhorse Foundation grant of up to \$30,000. The current deadline was Oct. 1, but Ferguson said she was not rushing to meet the deadline because she had “a lot of grant stuff going on” and the Wildhorse grant is awarded several times throughout the year.

“It will give us more time to plan a great, solid application,” she said.

Ferguson added that, in writing the grant, she and

Imes would most likely focus on transportation safety needs such as radar speed lights. She said she had gotten quotes from Oregon Dept. of Transportation (ODOT) and they were “pretty pricy.”

“So that would be a great use for the funding,” she said. “And the proper crosswalk signage that we need to keep up with, etc.”

Regarding other funding opportunities, Ferguson reported that she had submitted the service line funding interest form for public water systems in Oregon. She said the funding interest form has to do with the lead line inventory communities had been asked to conduct.

“They’re already starting to take surveys on who would be interested in funding, who you think has lead service lines,” she said. “I registered us as an interested party because we know we have lead service lines.”

She also said she completed a training for technical assistance grants by Dept. of Land Conservation and Development (DLCD). She said the deadline for technical assistance grants was Oct. 3, and she had some ideas she hoped to put together and submit for that so the town could get more studies completed.

Ferguson said she had planned to go after more funding for a Little Free Pantry for the town but had been notified that there was no more funding available for that grant. The town already has a Little Free Library by the town hall.

“It’s still a great idea. In the future I’d like to figure out way we can set these types of things up for the community, for people in need,” said Ferguson.

While that idea may have fallen through for the moment, the Lexington Town Council did learn of an upcoming food drive in the community. Barb Orwick of Heppner was at the meeting representing the Neighborhood Center of South Morrow County.

While the Neighborhood Center operates a thrift store to raise funds, the center’s main service is its food pantry that helps local families in need.

Orwick said the center’s main source of food is CAPECO. She said they received more than 5,000 pounds of food from CAPECO and gave away 71 food boxes in July. In August, she said, they gave away 78 food boxes but only received half as much food due to widespread need.

To meet local needs, the Neighborhood Center will conduct its annual food drive throughout South Morrow on Nov. 2. Lexington community members can bring donations of non-perishables to Lexington Town Hall for pick-up that week.

Orwick also said that the Neighborhood Center can help with things like water and electric bills, and residents only need to stop by and ask about bill assistance.

“We may not be able to pay their full bill, but part of it,” said Orwick.

Kennedy asked Orwick to provide the town with a list of services so they could make it available to residents who might not be aware of the Neighborhood Center’s services. The center is located in Heppner across from the library and Heppner City Park.

In other business, Ferguson said the town had received and installed two AED units, one in town hall and one in the fire hall for firefighters to take on calls. A third will be installed at the Sinclair gas station. An AED and CPR training is tentatively scheduled for Wednesday, Oct. 25, at

6:30 p.m. at the Lexington Fire Hall.

The training will be conducted by Morrow County Health District (MCHD) and Lexington Fire Department. MCHD donated the AED units to the town.

Ferguson said she hoped to publicize the event and get as many community members as possible to attend.

“It’s there available 24 hours a day for people in our community,” she said of the unit installed on the outside of town hall, “and we want them to know how to use it.”

Ferguson reported that she had found out that the pests in the town hall were not termites, but only ants. She said she would have a pest control company come out to take care of the problem.

Ferguson also said she had attended a training with the League of Oregon Cities in Echo, and several participants had mentioned that timers were a good way to keep meetings on track. Lexington Councillor Will Lemmon commented that the town had used timers in the past.

“So maybe we just have it handy, and if we ever need to use it, it would be a good way to kind of control the meeting,” Ferguson responded.

Lexington Councillor Bobbi Gordon reminded the council that they now have a town email system and should no longer be using their personal email addresses.

“I’d love to see everyone use that email,” she said.

The next meeting of the Lexington Town Council will be Tuesday, Oct. 10, at 6 p.m.

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because Sunstone is such a large project, the company would have many areas in which it could choose to spend money on mitigation.

Morrow County representatives, including Planning Director Tamra Mabbott, had spoken with company representatives, who indicated they would like to schedule a work session with the board of commissioners to discuss preferred mitigation projects.

“It’s a large project, it’s a large impact, so there’s multiple areas they might spend this mitigation money,” said Wreescis. “Instead of having an outside agency pick them, we’re just going to have mitigation money and let the county pick where we want them to spend that mitigation money.”

Also at the meeting, the board furthered Rowan Percheron LLC’s plans for a data center on land owned by Threemile Canyon Farms near Boardman when it voted to amend the county’s comprehensive plan and rezone the proposed property.

The board of commissioners had previously held a public hearing on the issue on Aug. 16, which was then continued to Sept. 6 to allow the applicant time to respond to issues raised by the Oregon Dept. of Land Conservation and Development (DLCD) and 1,000 Friends of Oregon.

The main issue seemed to be the rezoning of 274 acres of agricultural land for industrial use, which would be necessary for the data center to develop and operate a data center on the property.

At the Sept. 6 hear-

ing, the board voted unanimously to approve Rowan Percheron’s three land use applications, saying there was ample evidence that the development would not negatively impact agriculture at the proposed site.

It also conducted the first reading of an ordinance amending the county’s comprehensive plan and changing the property from Exclusive Farm Use to General Industrial.

The board of commissioners conducted the second reading of the ordinance on Sept. 20 and then unanimously adopted both the ordinance and Rowan Percheron’s findings of fact.

Also on the industrial development front, the board adopted a resolution approving an agreement for a long-term rural enterprise zone agreement between Columbia River Enterprise Zone (CREZ) III and Lamb Weston.

The CREZ III board had previously voted to approve the agreement, but state law requires the board of commissioners adopt a resolution approving the tax exemption before it can take effect.

The City of Boardman had to adopt a similar resolution since the property falls within its area of influence.

The commissioners approved the resolution 2-0 with Wenholz abstaining.

In other business, Morrow County Administrator Matthew Jensen presented a draft position description for the Morrow County Community Development Director, a position that has been empty since early 2021. However, the commissioners said they weren’t sold on the idea yet.

“This is a big bite,”

said Sykes, “especially with Morrow County, with the amount of change and development we’re going through right now. This would be a pretty influential position.”

It was decided to hold a work session on Oct. 18 to discuss the details, as well as other proposed personnel changes for the next budget year.

The county also approved an intergovernmental agreement (IGA) with the Oregon Dept. of Corrections (DOC) for grant-in-aid and other state funding.

Morrow County Sheriff John Bowles told the commissioners the agreement is the normal IGA the county makes with the DOC. The two-year contract, Bowles said, allows the county to receive money from the state; the \$1,035,956 in state funds was already approved in the current budget.

He also said that going forward, he would recommend putting the agreement on the consent agenda.

“The only thing that changes each year is the dollar figure changes just a little, and the dates,” Bowles said.

The board also ratified the Morrow County Sheriff’s Office Association union collective bargaining agreement, retroactive to July 1 of this year. The agreement is effective until June 30, 2026. The union had voted to approve the agreement, but it required ratification by the county board of commissioners to take effect.

DEADLINE:
MONDAYS
AT 5PM



The Morrow County Livestock Growers would like to thank the following for their support of the 2023 Morrow County 4-H/FFA Auction!





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