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Taxing districts get \$2 million from Amazon disbursement

New school support fee could make CREZ negotiations more difficult

By Andrea Di Salvo

Two million dollars out of Amazon's recent \$5 million Community Development Contribution will be split among the affected taxing districts, the Columbia River Enterprise Zone III board decided last week.

Of that, one million is divided equally among the affected districts. The other million is to be divided according to the percent of taxes each district would receive if Amazon were paying taxes on the property.

The remaining \$3 million will be divided among the enterprise zone's sponsors, with \$1 million each going to Morrow County, the Port of Morrow and the City of Boardman.

While the disbursement of the Amazon funds was the biggest item on the agenda, most of the meeting was spent discussing Oregon House Bill 2009, which established a mandatory school support fee for enterprise zone agreements.

The bill went into effect Sept. 24, and the new fee is a requirement for any tax abatement agreement the enterprise zone makes going forward. Affected school districts work with the enterprise zone sponsors to determine an amount



between 15 and 30 percent of what the company would have paid in taxes. The company is then required to pay that in addition to any other payments required by the enterprise zone.

"The school district bills that and collects that money, and it goes into the school funding formula," said CREZ III manager Greg Sweek.

Sweek said there seems to be no set process for how that gets accomplished, but there does have to be some sort of agreement in writing between the parties.

"I don't know how we get there," he added.

On the surface, that seems like more money for local school districts. However, both Sweek and Boardman Mayor Paul Keefer said it was their understanding that, rather than being added on top of the district's state funding,

whatever amount the school district chose would be withheld from the state's normal disbursement to the school district.

"Whatever money they get from this fee, they lose from the state," added Port of Morrow Commissioner Rick Stokoe. "It offsets itself."

The enterprise zone's governing bodies have a say in the amount chosen, but to what extent is unclear. It also seems unclear whether the school district's initial decision would remain the same for all future businesses or whether the percentage chosen could be changed. Morrow County Assessor Mike Gorman said his understanding is that it is a "one and done" decision that would remain the same through all future contracts.

Keefer said it seemed like it would be in the

school district's best interest to charge the least amount.

"To keep that money in Morrow County," he said. "I could ask for the moon and get 30 percent, but that's not going to increase the amount of money I get from the state."

"It makes sense on the school district side to make it a lower amount to keep most of the money in the area," Keefer added. "Why would I want to give the money that comes in here to the state?"

Morrow County School District would likely be the only county school district affected by the change, since there is currently no enterprise zone property within Ione School District. Stokoe said he had spoken with Morrow County School District Superintendent Matt Combe, and Combe was also unclear about the details.

"It's not a very well-defined process," said Stokoe.

"I think that this agreement with the school district absolutely needs to be in writing and signed by both the CREZ board and the school district," said Gorman, who is also Mor-

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New faces of Morrow County Extension Office

Makenzi Evans, Morrow County 4-H Outreach Program Coordinator: Makenzi Evans was born in Heppner and grew up in the Morrow County 4-H Program. Currently she lives in Hooper, WA with her husband Cole, and their one-year-old daughter; Cole runs the cattle for McGregor Land and Livestock. They met at Blue Mountain Community College on the Livestock judging team, after graduating from BMCC with her Associates she went on to obtain a Bachelors of Ag Science from Oregon State University. Makenzi formerly worked for McGregor L&L and built custom furniture and home decor. Makenzi is excited to return to Morrow

County, join the OSU Team and begin serving the county as the new 4-H Program Coordinator.

Amanda Wight, Morrow County Administrative Office Manager: Amanda Wight is a Senior Accountant with a demonstrated history of over ten years working in the agriculture industry. She graduated from Eastern Oregon University with her B.A. in Business Administration in 2010. Following that, she returned and received her Post Baccalaureate Accounting Certificate in 2019. Amanda was born and raised in Heppner, OR and in her free time, she enjoys the outdoors with her family and friends.

Senior's Matter Annual flu shot initiative

South Morrow Co. Senior's Matter combined with Community partners to provide seniors with the opportunity to get their annual flu shot with a delicious meal. Jerry Conklin, chairman of the board of SMSM shared that over 60 shots were received and over 90 meals enjoyed.

"The annual flu shot initiative is a crucial aspect of prioritizing the health and well-being of our seniors. We want to ensure that our elderly participants have easy access to flu vaccinations and this seemed the perfect vehicle," stated Conklin.

Molly Rhea, a retired nurse and vice chair of SMSM, said, "This proac-

tive approach helps to safeguard our seniors from seasonal influenza, reducing the risk of complications and promoting a stronger immune system. By integrating flu shots into our annual routine, we contribute to a healthier and more resilient senior community, fostering an environment of care and protection."

The St Patrick's dining room, located in the heart of Heppner, has been a crucial source of sustenance for seniors, offering hot meals and companionship. However, the board members of SMSM saw an opportunity to elevate this service by providing more than just food. Julia Brown from

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County votes to support Umatilla County appeal of siting decision

Says local control could be at stake in EFSC decision

By Andrea Di Salvo

The Morrow County Board of Commissioners voted to proceed with a legal brief in support of local control in land use and planning at its meeting in Heppner last Wednesday. The support will take the form of an amicus brief in support of Umatilla County in that county's appeal of an EFSC ruling concerning wind turbine requirements.

The county commissioners had discussed Umatilla County's request for an amicus brief at its Sept. 20 meeting and directed staff to look into it more before proceeding. Morrow County Counsel Justin Nelson and attorney Daniel Kearns were at the Oct. 4 meeting to provide an update and details on the appeal.

Kearns, who will write the brief for the county, specializes in land use and zoning law and often consults with Morrow County on the legal aspects of land use and planning.

According to Nelson, the Oregon Energy Facility Siting Council (EFSC) recently granted approval to the Nolin Hills Wind Power Project, a 48,196-acre wind and solar generation facility in Umatilla County.

Umatilla County code requires a two-mile setback of wind turbines from homes, without exception, but the EFSC determined

there was no need to enforce the local provisions as long as the project otherwise complied with statewide planning goals.

"The concern, I believe, from the Umatilla County Board of Commissioners there, is lack of local control," said Nelson.

Umatilla County is appealing the project approval and has asked Morrow County to file an amicus brief to support local planning and land use laws. An amicus, or "friend of the court," brief may be filed with a court by an individual or group who is not a party to the litigation but who has an interest in the court's decision.

Nelson said the brief, if approved, would not support the specific Umatilla County rules, but would instead focus on the need for EFSC to apply local rules when approving a project.

"We don't have a position or comment on the two miles or anything like that," Nelson said, "but really the idea that there's local conditions or rules in place. Those should be followed or considered by the state, not just passed over."

Nelson said he had spoken with Umatilla County Counsel Doug Olsen, who said that kind of support was what Umatilla County is looking for in the brief.

"In Umatilla County,

it's the two-mile setback, but I think for all counties, it's this ability of EFSC to totally ignore all the local siting criteria, even though the statutory path that the applicant took in this case requires them to comply with all 'applicable substantive criteria,'" said Kearns. "EFSC said, no, we will ignore all local criteria that are not specifically and directly required to comply with the statewide planning goals, which isn't what the statute says."

"This was kind of a big deal over the years when Umatilla County finally adopted a two-mile setback, and I think this is the first project in many years...that hasn't complied with the two-mile setback," added Kearns, saying he suspected the whole situation was being done to test that aspect of the code. "This has never been an issue before."

Morrow County Planning Director Tamra Mabbott said she didn't know if Umatilla County had reached out to the Association of Oregon Counties (AOC) for support, but that the case is particularly impactful for Morrow County.

"Being a neighboring county, one of a handful of counties that enjoys wind turbines and renewable energy, it's more significant for our county, probably, than all of AOC," said Mab-

bott.

Morrow County Board of Commissioners Chair David Sykes expressed his support and asked whether a court decision against Umatilla County could have "spillover" into other areas of local control. Kearns said that was a strong possibility.

"That puts even a little more importance on what we as Morrow County is doing, I think," said Sykes, "I'm just trying to reinforce the importance of us moving forward with providing this brief."

"It just isn't good to have Umatilla County arguing over this two-mile setback when the larger issue affects all counties," agreed

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November Special Election Ballots will be mailed out Oct. 18th

Upcoming Election – November 7, 2023, Morrow County Clerk will be mailing out November Special Election Ballots on October 18, 2023. These ballots renew the current five-year Local Option Tax Plan Supporting General Operations of the Morrow County Health District. The last day to register to vote for this election is October 17, 2023, if you are a new voter. If you are inactive, you are still eligible to update and receive a ballot if you update before the last day to vote. Ballots can be mailed or dropped at any county in the State of Oregon on or before the November 7th deadline. If you mail on election day November 7, 2023, please make sure that you get your ballot stamped by the post office for the

7th. Postmarks do count. Morrow County Drop-sites are as follows: https://www.co.morrow.or.us/sites/default/files/fileattachments/clerk/page/11201/2018_drop_site_information_with_pictures.pdf. All outdoor boxes are open all day closing on November 7, 2023, at 8:00 p.m. Heppner: County Clerk's Office Rm. 104 in the Original Courthouse or in the outdoor box in the parking lot of the Bartholomew Building, Lexington: Public Works Parking Lot, 365 West Hwy 74 outdoor box Ione: Spring St. before intersection to 3rd St. Boardman: 101 NW Boardman Ave. – Parking lot of the Morrow County Boardman Annex Irrigon: 215 NE Main St., Irrigon Government Building parking lot.

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