



the HEPPNER GAZETTE TIMES

50¢



VOL. 143 NO. 46 8 Pages Wednesday, November 15, 2023 Morrow County, Heppner, Oregon

CREZ funds allocated to capital projects as county eyes future needs

By Andrea Di Salvo

A discussion about where to allocate funds received from the Columbia River Enterprise Zone (CREZ) III turned into a larger conversation about capital projects and county priorities at a recent meeting of the Morrow County Board of Commissioners.

The discussion centered around a \$1 million distribution the county received from CREZ III last month. The distribution was part of a \$5 million Community Development Contribution from Amazon Data Services as part of its long-term rural enterprise zone agreement with the CREZ. The funds were divided between the enterprise zone sponsors and affected taxing districts.

Morrow County Finance Director Kevin Ince told the commissioners that, since the distribution was not considered "guaranteed" funds, the county had not included it in the current budget.

"When we receive an unexpected revenue in that amount, it would be a good practice to discuss where those funds should go," said Ince. "I do need some

direction on where to put this because we can't just have a million-dollar check sitting here," he added.

In this case, Morrow County staff recommended that the million dollars be placed in the county's Capital Improvement Projects (CIP) Fund.

"That is the fund where we are accumulating funds for various large, strategic capital projects," Ince said.

More specifically, Ince said he thought the money would be best used for the new circuit court building the county is currently planning in Heppner.

He said he didn't know the exact amount allocated to the project because the county is still trying to close out the previous fiscal year, but as of July 1, about \$6.8 million had been committed to the court building. The CREZ distribution would bring that balance to around \$7.8 million.

Other projects included in the CIP include the county's planned new transit facility, public health building, and public works building.

However, Morrow County Commissioner Jeff

Wenholz said he questioned the use of the discretionary dollars toward the circuit court building.

"I really want to see us be using discretionary dollars for things that we pay for with discretionary funds, whereas the circuit court building is something we pay for with general funds," he said. "I'm just afraid that at some point there's always going to be some need or ask to use the discretionary dollars."

"When we get to the point where we need to spend money on things, we need discretionary dollars to be spent on, we won't have the money, and the opportunity will pass us to allocate these monies to that," he added.

Such projects might include needed repairs or upgrades to roads and bridges, Wenholz said. Earlier in the meeting, the commissioners had heard an update from Oregon Dept. of Transportation Region 5 Manager Ken Patterson. Part of that conversation had centered on the need for new bridges, interchanges, and overpasses along I-84. Much of the funding for those projects will have to come out of the

county budget.

"I do get it that here's an opportunity to put money towards [the circuit court building]," Wenholz said.

"I'm just afraid that if we keep spending the discretionary dollars that, when the time comes that the bridge falls down, we have to spend the money then and we won't have it," Wenholz added. "The bridge is going to be a 30-, 50-year asset."

Ince replied that, regarding bridges specifically, the county had established a reserve in the road fund this year to begin accumulating funds for a bridge program. The amount budgeted in that fund this year was \$500,000, he said.

"The plan, I believe, was to carry that forward for the next three to five years to accumulate funds," said Ince.

"We addressed a number of those in this budget by establishing reserves for that," he added.

Wenholz said the cost of a bridge deck was around \$460 per square foot or more.

"It doesn't take very

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Morrow County passes the MCHD five year operation levy

Boardman: Yes - 166, No - 416
Irrigon: Yes - 330, No - 232
Lexington: Yes - 132, No - 59
Ione: Yes - 140, No - 75
Heppner: Yes - 516, No - 163

With a total of 1284 yes's and 945 no's and 7,136 registered voters in Morrow County with 31.29% voter turnout.

Heppner, Lexington and Ione respond to house fire in Hardman



Firefighters examining the lower roof, and windows into the house while putting out the Martin house fire. - Contributed Photo

On November 9th, around 12:35 pm, the Heppner Fire Department received a dispatch regarding a structure fire at the residence of Sam and Angie Martin in Hardman, OR. At around 12:54 pm, the department arrived at the scene and successfully extinguished the fire. However, unfortunately, the fire had already consumed the home office, guest room, half of the living room, and part of the kitchen. Thankfully, there were no reported injuries. In their efforts to combat the fire, the Heppner Fire Department received aid from neighboring fire departments in Ione and Lexington. The two departments used a shared apparatus and contributed additional firefighters to help control the situation. Fire Chief Steve Rhea stated that the exact cause of the fire is still under investigation.

Wyden, Merkley Announce Nearly \$3.8 Million in fed funds to Ione

Morrow County city to receive USDA resources for sewer system

U.S. Senators Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley have announced that the city of Ione in Eastern Oregon will receive nearly \$3.8 million in federal funds to construct a sewer system. This investment aims to address the infrastructure needs of rural communities in Oregon and support economic growth.

Senator Wyden emphasized the importance of providing rural communities, like Ione, with the necessary infrastructure to thrive. He recognized that modernizing outdated infrastructure is vital for enhancing the quality of life in rural areas. Upgrading the sewer system in Ione will help preserve property values, support the local school, and enable the community to grow.

Senator Merkley highlighted the risks associated with outdated sewer infrastructure, emphasizing that it can hinder growth and development opportunities for communities. The federal investment, provided by USDA Rural Development, comprises a grant of \$1.98 million and a loan of \$1.81 million. This financial support will enable Ione to establish a community-wide wastewater collection and

disposal system, replacing the current individual septic tank setup.

Ione currently lacks a comprehensive sewer system, which limits the town's potential for growth. By implementing this project, Ione hopes to stabilize its housing market, provide a permanent solution for the local school, and create opportunities for the construction of new homes. Additionally, the development of a centralized sewer system will be beneficial for families who work in nearby Boardman, where thousands of jobs are available.

Jerry Rietmann, Volunteer Director of Development for the City of Ione, expressed his excitement about the positive impact this investment will have on the community. By expanding housing options and supporting local infrastructure, the city of Ione aims to enhance the overall well-being of its residents.

This federal investment in Ione's sewer system is an example of the government's commitment to improving infrastructure in rural areas, supporting economic growth, and enhancing the quality of life for residents.

Joint operation leads to arrests in Irrigon

According to a press release from the Morrow County Sheriff's office, on Wednesday, November 1st, Morrow County Sheriff's Office (MCSO), in collaboration with Umatilla County Sheriff's Office (UCSO), led a joint operation to locate a suspect on South First Street in Irrigon. Mr. Dylan Ostrom was a suspect in several crimes in Umatilla County and he also had an outstanding warrant.

MCSO Detectives, Deputies, and P&P Deputies located Mr. Ostrom at the residence. He attempted to run but was apprehended and taken into custody without further incident. Also arrested from the residence was Mr. Michael Norman, who had two outstanding warrants out of Umatilla County.

Information gathered as a result of the arrests on Wednesday led to a search warrant being served on Friday, November 3rd at the same location. The search warrant led to the recovery of stolen items located at the residence. Also arrested were Ms. Michelene Cody and Mr. Christopher Nelsen both of whom had outstanding warrants.

Ostrom, Dylan Michael, 27, Transient was arrested by MCSO on Morrow County P&P Detainer - Parole Violation for Strangulation, Assault IV, and interfering with Police. He was lodged in the Umatilla County Jail with no bail.

Norman, Michael Don, 40, Transient was arrested by MCSO on Umatilla County Community Correction warrants of Fail to Appear on Fail to Report as

a Sex Offender and Parole Violation - Theft III. He was lodged in the Umatilla County Jail with a bail of \$55,000.

Cody, Michelene Ann, 45, Transient was arrested by MCSO on Umatilla County Community Corrections warrant for Contempt of Court. She was lodged in the Umatilla County Jail with a bail of \$5,000.

Nelsen, Christopher Scott, 45, Transient was issued citations on Umatilla County Community Corrections warrants for Fail to Appear and driving while suspended.

MCSO stated that they are very happy to have a good working relationship with our law enforcement partners in neighboring jurisdictions. We know that criminals do not stop at the county line and we work closely with agencies in Morrow County, neighboring Counties, and the state of Washington to apprehend offenders and prevent crime.

Murray sworn in at Heppner city council



On Monday night, at the Heppner City Council meeting, Ian Murray was sworn into the Heppner City Council by Mayor Corey Sweeney. -Contributed Photo

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