

# Possible recall of county commissioners

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(R-L) Commissioner David Sykes and County Administrator Matt Jensen and Jerry Gentry. - Photo By Andrea Di Salvo



Dianne Killkeny



Community member



Tim Collins



Johnathan Tallman

Heppner rancher Bob Mahoney recounted how MCHD ambulances had been there for him and his family for several decades.

"It was there for (my wife). It was there for my son when he got run over by a tractor," he said.

Jonathan Tallman of Boardman said the county residents are not being heard, and implied there is an agenda behind the new ASA plan.

"What we see at the federal and state levels is now coming down to the local level," he said. "It is truly sad."

## Transparency

The most contentious part of the meeting came during the discussion of the county's transparency, or perceived lack of it. Dick said residents had issues with the county's lack of transparency, not only regarding the ASA plan, but also when it came to the proposed site of the new circuit court building and the county administrator's salary.

Dick said elected officials need the public's trust, but lose that trust when they don't deal honestly, which he said he felt was the case with the Morrow County Board of Commissioners. He also accused the commissioners of only working "two days a month."

"You're giving us information that isn't true," he said.

That accusation instigated a brief shouting match between Dick and Sykes.

"He doesn't know what he's talking about," shot back Sykes, pointing at Dick and calling his alle-

gations "ludicrous."

"We are going to listen to the people. It's not a done deal until we sign off on it," he added.

Tallman said that former county commissioners Jim Doherty and Melissa Lindsay both stuck their necks out over issues like the ASA and lost their jobs.

"We need these questions answered, and we're not getting them answered," Tallman said.

Jensen himself addressed the issue of his wage, supplying a figure and telling those present that the Board of Commissioners had the county conduct a salary study in 2023.

"Yes, I'm expensive," Jensen said, but added, "Emily Roberts makes over me."

Jensen and Murray both addressed transparency in the development of the ASA.

Jensen expressed concerns about the conflict of interest inherent in having a provider choose their successor, emphasizing the need to restore transparent operations for ambulance services.

"This is big and complex. It's hard to boil down to sound bytes," Jensen said. "We have negotiated in good faith."

"The health district dropped its lawsuit in good faith," responded Murray, referring to a lawsuit the health district had filed against the county last year and later dropped. "We don't believe they are acting in good faith."

Roberta Lutchter, recently retired executive secretary for the board of commissioners, defended

the commissioners' workload.

"Just because you attend public meetings doesn't mean that's the only day they work," she told the crowd.

"There was no transparency, there was no public input," Tim Collins of Heppner said, addressing the circuit court building.

Collins, who lives on property adjoining the proposed site of the new courthouse, has been outspoken in his opposition, even joining with former commissioner Lindsay in filing an ethics complaint against the current commissioners. The Oregon Government Ethics Commissions voted not to pursue an investigation.

"I don't feel that's very transparent, to already have a decision when you bring it to the public," Collins said. "Why can't we open this back up and let the people have a say?"

Kelly Doherty of Boardman, Port of Morrow commissioner and wife of former commissioner Jim Doherty, noted that traditions are important, and she felt the new courthouse threatened traditions like the fair and rodeo.

"Heppner relies on traditions," she said. "We don't want change."

Heppner man Jerry Gentry took the mic to apparently disagree. He cited times the county had made changes in the past, including creating parking and camping spots for those working the rodeo.

"I'm all for change and always have been," said Gentry. "It was great to work with Morrow County back then. I hope that doesn't change."

Heppner Mayor Corey Sweeney also spoke up in defense of the county's decision.

"Myself and the city council did everything we could to keep it here," Sweeney said of the new circuit court building. "The city thinks we accomplished that goal. I'm sorry not everybody is happy."

however, argues the need for a diversified economy, as well as pointing to long-term tax benefits.

"They look at us like fish," Dick said of Amazon. "The money is what's causing the problems here in Heppner."

He also referred to economic agreements between Amazon and county entities like the Columbia River Enterprise Zone and Port of Morrow as a "cartel."

"It's going to be the Chicago mafia on steroids if we don't cut this out," said Dick.

"He picks out Amazon, but who else is getting tax breaks?" Sykes responded, noting that solar, wind and agricultural enterprises in the county all get tax abatements. He also reminded the audience of the job losses and economic downturns caused by the closing of the Heppner sawmill and Boardman's coal-fired power plant.

"We have to have a diversified economy," said Sykes.

One Heppner man spoke up and said he agreed the economy needs to be diversified, but that the tax breaks are too much.

"The commissioners have a job to represent the common person," he said.

Tallman also said he believed the economic dealings with Amazon are corrupt. Tallman's Boardman farm became subject to eminent domain due to a new Amazon data center.

"This is all corrupt. I have the dots to connect," he said. "That's the way that they play, and no one will stand up for you."

When it came to the issue of ongoing nitrate contamination in North Morrow wells, Boardman man Ray Akers warned the crowd that the problem would also affect those in the south end of the county.

"It's affecting the whole county whether you know it or not," he said. He also stated that the Port of Morrow is still putting too much wastewater on the ground and said the county should "disband the Port of Morrow, not the health district."

Jensen said the nitrate problem was being addressed but that it required long-term solutions.

"It would be nice if I could take a special magic wand and make it go away," he said. "It's been around 30 years. It's not going to disappear overnight."

A second forum was held in Lexington Monday night, with a third planned for tonight, Jan. 31, at the Oregon Trail Library branch in Irrigon at 6 p.m. The Boardman meeting will be at the Garfield Grange Hall on Feb. 5 at 6 p.m. As of press time, the group had not yet posted information about a meeting in Ione.

# Local Taco Truck owners make CNN



(L-R) Elia and Amado Juarez, owner of Tacos Hometown in Heppner. - Contributed Photo

Amado and Elia Juarez, residents of Ione, Oregon, and owners of Tacos Hometown food truck since 2013, were recently highlighted on CNN news for their authentic Mexican cuisine. Their taco truck has been serving up Mexican favorites to a largely American clientele for over a decade.

According to a Pew Research Center report, Morrow County, has one of the highest concentrations of Mexican eateries in the US, highlighting the widespread popularity of Mexican food throughout the country. The article is posted on CNN's website and on their Facebook page.

# BEO Bancorp 2023 earnings report

Heppner, Oregon, (January 24, 2024) BEO Bancorp (OTCBB:BEOP) and its subsidiary, Bank of Eastern Oregon, announced consolidated year end 2023 earnings of \$14,208,000; Total assets were \$860.6 million; net loans were \$521.9 million, while deposits ended the year at \$776.4 million.

"Shareholder equity increased 28.2% over the past year, with Return on Average Equity at 24.91%

and Return on Average Assets of 1.62%. Earnings per share were \$11.75 and we paid our highest dividend ever at \$1.15 per share," said President and CEO, Jeff Bailey.

According to Chief Financial Officer, Mark Lemmon. "Book value per share increased 25.9% year over year ending at \$52.24. We also paid down \$3.0 million in subordinated debt in 2023, while still growing capital."

## ORDER EARLY FOR VALENTINE'S DAY!

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# Heppner Jr/Sr High School Honor Roll

The following students made Honor Roll for fall semester 2023.

Mikalie Duncan 7<sup>th</sup> grade, 4.0 GPA. Paige Miller 7<sup>th</sup> grade 4.0 GPA. Tenley Rosenbalm 7<sup>th</sup> grade 4.0 GPA. Savanna Greenup 7<sup>th</sup> grade 3.88 GPA. Brodie Ogden 7<sup>th</sup> grade 3.88 GPA. Austin Quilter 7<sup>th</sup> grade 3.77 GPA. Abigail Roley 7<sup>th</sup> grade 3.77 GPA. Emma Patterson 3.55 GPA. Jaxson Wight 3.55 GPA.

8<sup>th</sup> graders: Kathryn Anderson 4.00 GPA. Elizabeth Ginn 4.00 GPA. Isabel Payne 4.00 GPA. Mary Ashbeck 3.77 GPA. Gage Heideman 3.77 GPA. Darby Spivey 3.77 GPA. Ashlee Knutz 3.66 GPA. Samantha

Lamb 3.66 GPA. Mason Haugen 3.55 GPA. Eva Worden 3.55 GPA.

9<sup>th</sup> Graders: Healy Hisler 4.00 GPA. Claire Lindsay 4.00 GPA. Hailey McDaniel 4.00 GPA. Isabelle Ogden 4.00 GPA. Maya Payne 4.00 GPA. Natalie Piper 4.00 GPA. Caylan Proudfoot 4.00 GPA. Olivia Ogden 3.87 GPA. Brooklyn Hendricks 3.75 GPA. Lita Nelson 3.71 GPA. Kooper Miller 3.62 GPA. Maisyn Waller 3.62 GPA. Jules Archer 3.50 GPA. Aree Lathrop 3.50 GPA. McKenzie Maben 3.50 GPA.

10<sup>th</sup> Graders: Elizabeth Finch 4.00 GPA. Owen Guerra 4.00 GPA. Lilyanna

Nichols 4.00 GPA. Rylee Palmer 4.00 GPA. Delilah Saucedo 4.00 GPA. Loren Trujillo 4.00 GPA. Caleb George 3.85 GPA. Journey Cavan-Harris 3.75 GPA. Landon McMahon 3.50 GPA.

11<sup>th</sup> Graders: Hallee Hisler 4.00 GPA, John Lindsay 4.00 GPA. Mason Orem 4.00 GPA, Katie Spivey 4.00 GPA. Hayden Mc-

Mahon 3.83 GPA. Jackson Coiner 3.80 GPA. Kadie Henrichs 3.50 GPA.

12 Graders: Thoman Bales 4.00 GPA. Morgan Cutsforth 4.00 GPA. Caden George 4.00 GPA. Piper Kelton 4.00 GPA. Irellynn Kollman 4.00 GPA. Cameron Proudfoot 4.00 GPA. Dailen Schultz 3.85. Landon Mitchell 3.85 GPA. Adriana Worden 3.80 GPA.

## WWW.HEPPNER.NET

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## Heppner Elks Lodge #358

*Mark Your Calendar for the upcoming events!*

**February 8th 6:00pm Ladies Night**  
Taco Bar prepared by Regi Lazinka

**February 11th 1:00pm - Super Bowl Party**  
Bring your favorite snack/finger food to share

**February 17th - 127th Elks Annual**  
Hosted by ER Corey Sweeney and wife Brandi - Ladies Tea 2:00 pm,  
Lodge 4:00pm dinner at 6:00pm

**March 16th - St Patricks Celebration**  
Corn Beef and Cabbage  
Dinner at 5:00 pm

**HEPPNER ELKS 358**

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