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Circuit court presence in Heppner may be in doubt

By Andrea Di Salvo

South Morrow residents want the new circuit court building to stay in Heppner, according to consensus at a recent public hearing held by the Heppner City Council. However, citizens seemed to overwhelmingly prefer a site by the old Kinzua mill rather than the proposed site by the Morrow County fairgrounds.

The Heppner City Council has been consistent in its desire to see the circuit court building stay in the Heppner zip code, if not in the city limits. Heppner Mayor Corey Sweeney opened the March 11 hearing with some somber words for the members of the public in attendance.

“Boardman and Irrigon have a lot of potential, and they’re going to flourish and do well in the future. Heppner cannot afford to lose anything, including our courthouse,” Sweeney said. “And the circuit courthouse is the county seat. That’s what keeps our Heppner identity. This is what we want, what we fight for.”

Sweeney admitted that the fairgrounds site—a source of a lot of conten-



Possible location for the new Circuit Court building, looking towards the Heppner. - Photo by Annalynn Balck



Aerial Google view of the north side of the old mill site - Contributed Image

tion in Morrow County recently—was not a popular choice. However, after a letter from District 6 Presiding Judge Daniel Hill opened the door to sites outside of the city limits, Sweeney told residents they need to unify or risk losing the courthouse altogether.

He also said a long-standing vision, which predates the current council, is for Heppner to get its own circuit court judge and

for Gilliam and Wheeler counties to redistrict with Heppner.

Sweeney also addressed the possible parking solution that the county failed to reach for the proposed fairgrounds site. He said it was his opinion the deal had been very close but that the landowner had been “influenced” not to sell.

While there has been much support for the mill site, Sweeney said the

council is worried that the site will fall through, opening up options beyond Heppner. Of special concern is the lack of infrastructure such as water and sewer at the mill site.

“We want to keep it in Heppner no matter what, at all costs,” said Sweeney.

With that in mind, Sweeney said he wanted to see a collaborative effort among the city, fair and rodeo and other entities to get behind a Heppner site and make it happen.

“Saying, ‘This is where we’re willing to go. This is what we’ll be willing to support 100 percent,’” he said. “And get behind it instead of what a lot of people have been seeing on social media as back and forth and a lot of disinformation.”

Sweeney and Heppner Manager John Doherty both pointed to examples of county seats that had lost their courthouse and, with it, their identity.

Members of the public in attendance ranged from rodeo board members to business owners, as well as concerned citizens. After a lengthy discussion, the crowd present reached the

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Mustang Softball team gets new shades



Take me out to the ball game, watch the Heppner High School Mustang Softball team running to the field in style wearing their new Blue Shades donated by Stanley and Pam Cutsforth. Team Leapold, go, go Mustangs!

Catching up on the St. Patrick’s Parade Game Winners



Plank race winners, team ‘The Lucky Bastards.’ Lane Bailey, Shane Lazinka, Brandon Seitz, and Wacy Coil. - Contributed Photo



Bed race winners, team ‘Who’s your Patty.’ - Contributed Photo

Unveiling the Roadmap: Interim Ambulance Service and Transition Strategy

During the March 20th BOC meeting a Timeline of ASA interim service was presented.

March 4th: Boardman Fire and Rescue Department (BFRD) assumed coverage of North ASA.

March 7th: BFRD leased an AMR ambulance and delivered it for \$500 per month. The lease agreement is between the county and Boardman Fire.

March 12th: Morrow County Health District (MCHD) ceased providing ambulance service to the remaining areas. BFRD took over coverage, with Irrigon being covered by MCGC during the day and dispatched from Boardman at night. Heppner coverage was based at the RV location at the County Fairgrounds.

March 15th: The Oregon Health Authority (OHA) released the approved final copy of the ASA plan. Minor updates were suggested, and legal counsel is preparing a polished document for publication.

March 16th: BFRD provided full coverage during the St. Patrick’s Day Festival in Heppner, including the bull riding event. They had two ambulances staffed for this purpose.

March 22nd: BFRD moved into a coverage base in Irrigon, providing 24/7 coverage, seven days a week.

Jensen reiterated the reason for providing an interim service. The Morrow County Health District had discontinued its services. Jensen mentioned that both the Irrigon Fire District and the Heppner Fire District were fully supportive



The EMS base of operations is located in an RV at the Morrow County Fair Grounds. - Photo by Annalynn Black

of MCHD. However, they were unwilling to share facilities for the interim services. Consequently, the county did not have access to equivalent housing options as MCHD, resulting in the inability to provide 24/7 coverage in Irrigon. On the other hand, Heppner was adequately covered as their base of operations was set up in an RV at the Morrow County Fair Grounds. According to Jensen, this arrangement was well received by the public.

Jensen mentioned that the need for EMTs to have a place to sleep and shower has prompted them to search for options for full-time ambulance services in Irrigon. They were previously trying to secure an RV spot but that plan fell through. However, the BFRD has managed to secure a two-bedroom house in Irrigon on a month-to-month basis. This arrangement started on Friday, March 22nd, ensuring 24/7 coverage. As a result, response time is expected to decrease significantly, with single-digit minutes instead of extended drive times. Starting from Friday, full coverage will be in effect in Irrigon, Boardman, and Heppner. The ambulance will be fully staffed, and an additional ambulance will be available if necessary.

The County’s proposed schedule of the

ASA:

- March 25th: Posting of notification of ordinance

- March 27th: Publishing of notification of ordinance in the Heppner Gazette

- April 3rd: Public hearing and first reading of ordinance

- April 17th: Second reading of ordinance

- After April 17th: Commission has the option to adopt

- July 16th: 90 day effective date for ordinance. The 90 day effective date may be modified if it’s determined to be an emergency.

Commissioner Sykes emphasized that the county’s adherence to Oregon law requires them to follow a specific process for ambulance service proposals. They are not implementing this process arbitrarily and are committed to initiating it promptly. Commissioner Drago echoed Jensen’s recommendation, stating that April 18th is a feasible date to commence accepting proposals. Jensen further clarified that a notification period of two to three weeks would be observed, and invitations would be extended to established providers. Jensen also mentioned consulting with the county’s legal counsel regarding this matter.

The initial providers:

The new ASA plan outlines the selection of

initial providers. According to the ordinance, the application process will involve giving notice to potential providers. Once the applications are received, the Board may appoint an advisory committee to evaluate and recommend providers for each ASA. The Board may also have discussions with both applicants and advisors to explore service options. Once fully informed, the Board will appoint the initial providers. In the case of a single applicant, the Board may independently consider their application, whereas if there are multiple applicants, the Board may opt for an advisory committee.

According to the county, there may be 3 ASA and there are certain things that need to be considered:

1. Show the level of service that will be provided for pre-hospital emergency medical care.

2. Show that the call volume and financial ability of the provider will be sufficient to provide finan-

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Family. As Grand Marshals of the parade, the Currin Family had the privilege of their very own float. It was a heartwarming sight, as the whole family embraced the opportunity to showcase their unity.



Road Bowling Winners team ‘Team never Quit.’ (L-R) Danielle Ludwig, Brent Eckman, Wyatt Hedman, and Jared Hedman - Contributed Photo

The St. Patrick’s Parade, held annually in Heppner, was a resounding success this year, with participants embracing the Irish theme and engaging in various games and competitions. Among the plethora of floats and entrants, a few winners stood out, showcasing their creativity, skills, and enthusiasm.

In the category of Irish-themed floats, the Morrow County Health District emerged victorious, capturing the hearts of onlookers with their vibrant display. The float was tastefully adorned with a rainbow made entirely of balloons.

For the best non-themed float, the esteemed honor went to the Currin

In the category of best vehicles, the Blue Mountain A’s reigned supreme. Their impressive line-up of vehicles left a lasting impression on the parade-goers. The Blue Mountain A’s exemplified the perfect blend of classic charm and St. Patrick’s Day spirit.

When it came to individual floats, the Pendleton MainStreet Cowboys deservedly claimed the top spot. Their float was a visual delight, showcasing individuality and creative expression.

Beyond the floats, the St. Patrick’s Parade also featured an array of exciting games and competitions, providing an opportunity for participants to showcase their skills and test their luck. In the highly anticipated Welly Toss, individuals and teams gave it their all to achieve the greatest distance. Jennifer Wilson displayed exceptional skill, tossing her welly an impressive 55 feet. Kevin Murray surpassed all expectations

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