

Circuit court in doubt

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consensus that the mill site, owned by the Port of Morrow, was by far the preferred site.

However, with the alternative of losing the circuit court laid before them, they also agreed that they could get behind the fairgrounds site if issues like rodeo parking were worked out.

Sweeney's caution to the Heppner crowd may have been timely, as Morrow County Administrator Matthew Jensen told the Morrow County Board of Commissioners March 20 that the county continues to broaden its search for a circuit court site.

The BOC and county staff had been making plans based on the idea that the circuit court building had to be inside the Heppner city limits. A letter from Judge Hill earlier this month changed that.

Hill's letter was prompted by outreach from concerned citizens who were not in favor of the proposed site due to its impact on the rodeo, neighboring houses, and the nearby elementary school.

"So that suddenly took our soapbox that I'd been working on for the last six months of, 'It has to be in the city limits of Heppner,' right out from underneath me," said Jensen.

Jensen said the preferred site is still the fairgrounds, with the Port of Morrow ground outside of Heppner being the best alternate because of the issues at the fairgrounds.

The biggest challenge with the mill site is infrastructure. Potable water is not readily available, Jensen said, and there is a lack of sewer. He said developing a public-grade well system would be anywhere from \$500,000 to \$1 million additional cost.

Jensen also said that, while they could build a septic system, that would constrain further development. The POM is in discussion with the City of Heppner regarding expanding its sewer system, but that alternative comes with its own costs, since the nearest sewer connection would be near the Willow Creek Country Club golf course.

"We're trying to quantify what those costs are and how that would impact the project," Jensen said.

Building at the mill site would likely occur north of

Hwy. 74. Some land south of Hwy. 74 could possibly be used, since work is in progress to remove it from the flood plain, but Jensen pointed out that the level plain would be more valuable for industrial or commercial development.

Meanwhile, the courthouse would most likely be built into the hillside on the north side, which he said would be a cost saver for the county.

Jensen said the county had its first meeting with the design crew and Port of Morrow March 19. Another was scheduled for March 21, to include the City of Heppner.

While he said the county is focusing at this time on the old Kinzua mill site outside of Heppner, Jensen also said staff is reviewing several other sites to fulfill due diligence.

The county is vetting at least four locations in addition to the fairgrounds. Because of the infrastructure problems inherent in the mill site, Jensen said the county is looking at two other sites in South Morrow, as well as a two-acre site in Boardman.

"It's not my preference. I think there's historic and political value in having the courthouse down near the county seat, but I have two acres, county-owned, on a main street in Boardman, and I need to be able to show that," said Jensen. "If nothing else, we can show what the investment is in the South County with this courthouse."

Jensen said the design team is working on a report on all the sites, but the need for vetting by civic engineering means the report probably won't be ready until May.

Some have questioned why the existing courthouse can't be renovated, but Jensen said the state funds are for new construction and cannot be used to upgrade or remodel existing facilities.

He did say that the county is early enough in the design process that the only costs that have been sunk into the fairgrounds site have been geotechnical and land surveys and a title search. The total for those is \$10,000 to \$12,000. Those are still good if the fairgrounds site is used.

"But it's spent money and, if we move that, that would be a lost cost for this project," he said.

St. Patrick's Winners

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with an astounding 104 feet. In the team category, 'the Murrays' emerged victorious, displaying remarkable coordination and strength, achieving an extraordinary distance of 310 feet. 'The Hass' team with 280ft and in third place 'The Cunninghams' team with 259ft.

The Road Bowling competition witnessed fierce competition as eight teams and 30 participants battled for supremacy on the challenging course. In the end, it was 'Team Never Quit' that triumphed. Comprising members Danielle Ludwig, Brent Eckman, Wyatt Hedman, and Jared Hedman, their unwavering determination and skill paved the way for victory.

An exciting plank race also captivated the audience, with participants pushing themselves to the limits of speed and agility. 'The Lucky Bastards', comprised of Lane Bailey, Shane Lazinka, Brandon Seitz, and Wacy Coil, emerged as the victors, crossing the finish line with unmatched determination. 'The Mur-

rays' and the 'Missionaries Jason' secured second and third place.

Finally, the much-anticipated bed races entertained the crowd, with teams competing fiercely for the top honors. 'Who's Your Patty' claimed the coveted first place, leaving the spectators in awe of their speed and teamwork. 'The Local Ladies' team secured an admirable second place.

The St. Patrick's Parade Game Winners truly embodied the spirit of this festive event. Through their creativity, skill, and unwavering determination, they delighted the crowd and left a memorable mark on the parade. These winners, along with all the enthusiastic participants, showcased the rich Irish heritage and collective joy of the celebration, making the St. Patrick's Parade a resounding success.

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