

# Board of Commissioners April 17th session

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or not it leads to moving the border, there's no other organization out there right now that's talking about it."

He then asked the commissioners to reach out to the Oregon senate president or speaker of the house and ask them to start some discussions.

"Our representatives, legislative-wise, in Eastern Oregon are not listened to," McCarter said. "They're run right over the top by everything that's coming out of Western Oregon."

"We're trying to get a voice, because we don't have that representation that we need," he added.

He mentioned that Harney County is the largest county in Oregon, larger than five U.S. states, but only has four law enforcement officers. Meanwhile, he said, Measure 114 is targeting gun ownership and threatening citizens' ability to defend themselves.

He also pointed out that the legislature is trying to redefine hobby farms and is targeting the water rights of small farms and shutting them down.

"We're being steam-rolled, and somehow we need to get our voice out there," he said.

### HB 4002

The BOC also heard the effects of the passage, and now the repeal, of Oregon Measure 110.

The measure, voted into law in 2022, had decriminalized possession of small amounts of illegal drugs. However, the undesirable consequences of the measure moved the state to repeal the measure recently, re-criminalizing drug possession.

Part of that repeal was House Bill 4002, which grants counties funds for deflection programs for persons suspected or cited for unlawful possession of controlled substances.

"It's better than Measure 110," said Morrow County Commissioner Roy Drago. "It's not perfect."

The bill focuses on diverting or deflecting individuals from the criminal justice system, Morrow County District Attorney Justin Nelson said. He compared it to the diversion available to individuals who are found guilty of drunk driving but have no prior record.

Diversion would send a person into a treatment program through the district attorney's office. Deflection would bypass the DA's office, probably leaving it in the hands of officers to make an on-site determination on whether an offender should receive deflection.

Both Nelson and Drago said they preferred the idea of diversion because it gave the county better tools to ensure that individuals follow through with treatment.

Nelson told the commissioners that Morrow County is eligible for \$150,000 but must submit an application to receive funds. However, the initial application is due next month, leaving little time to work out the details of such a deflection plan, or even who would administer it.

"Most grants, you say, 'Hey, here's our process we want to go through, here's our plan,'" said Nelson. "This one, it's like, we are interested, here's the money, now go start planning on it and once you get that done, we'll give you the rest of the money."

One of the questions was who would serve as the fiscal agent for the grant. Nelson asked the commissioners to consider making

the county the fiscal agent, while Morrow County Finance Director Kevin Ince asked if there was a reason the county needs to be the fiscal agent, rather than an organization like Community Counseling Solutions (CCS).

Nelson replied that, while CCS would likely receive part of the funding, it wasn't certain they would receive all of it.

Drago said he supported the bill but did not have a preference on how the fiscal responsibility was designated.

"But right now we probably are the best situated to take this first step," he added. "And if we don't, we don't get our foot in the door, then we'll lose out on that."

Morrow County Commissioner Jeff Wenholtz said he was cognizant of the extra workload it would place on county staff, especially during budget season, but also thought it would be bad to miss out on the funding.

Morrow County BOC Board Chair David Sykes said it came down to whether the present and future benefit offset the impact and load on county staff.

"Sometimes your immediate benefit as compared to your future benefit, you have to take a hit," said Sykes.

The commissioners voted unanimously to have Morrow County to act as fiscal agent for the grant, contingent on staff review and approval.

### Other Business

Regarding the budget, Morrow County Administrator Matthew Jensen told the commissioners that the county budget committee has been finalized, but the budget committee meeting has been pushed back to May 9-10 to accommodate changes to the budget.

"This will just give a little more time to nail it down," he said, adding that the reason for the extension was the change in the county's auditors, which required adjustments to previous years. That, he said, impacted this year's budget outlines and "dominoed."

"We just want to make sure what we take to the budget committee is authoritative and accurate," Jensen said.

He also told the BOC that the county has made offers to candidates for both the assistant county administrator and the finance manager positions. The new assistant administrator currently works for the City of Pasco and is expected to start May 15.

"Both of those positions will help expedite, streamline some things and make sure we have adequate stewardship over the items that the county's supposed to be taking care of," he said.

Jensen also said he, Morrow County Public Works Director Eric Imes and Morrow County Planning Director Tamra Mabbott had met about road access permits. He said there are some challenges, because what comes before the county in each situation is a little bit different.

"We just want to be consistent on how we're handling that," he said.

He also said staff would like to commission some photographs of county landscapes from a regional photographer, as the county is "bereft" of good photographs in its public spaces.

"Just a neat thing to fill some of the blank walls and celebrate some of the heritage of different aspects of our county," he said.

Staff had met the photographer during the St. Patrick's Celebration in Heppner.

"She's got a good eye," Jensen said.

### In other business:

The board of commissioners approved a Memorandum of Understanding with USDA Department of Forestry and other "Blue Mountain governments" to establish cooperating agency relationships for the purpose of preparing the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Revised Land and Resource Management Plans for the Malheur, Umatilla, and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests.

The board named Jensen as the county administrative contact and Drago as the county program contact.

"Umatilla Forest is a big part of Morrow County. We have the head office here, we have a lot of forest land here," said Sykes. "It's a big part of our county. I feel good to have this status settled and have us involved in the process."

The Board of commissioners approved a contract with the City of Heppner for law enforcement services by Morrow County Sheriff's Office.

MCSO Undersheriff Brian Snyder told the commissioners they had moved to a two-year contract, July 2024 through June 2026. The total contract amount for two deputies will be \$230,826.42 each fiscal year, plus a standard cost of living adjustment the second year. The city will make quarterly payments.

The city will also purchase a patrol vehicle in the second contract year at an estimated cost of \$44,000.

The board also approved the appointment of Joselyn Piper of Heppner to the Morrow County Fair Board. "We're really happy to have Joselyn on. She's come to the meetings and looks like will be a great fit," said Morrow County Fair Secretary Sue Gibbs.

Piper's appointment will leave two remaining vacancies on the fair board. One of the three vacancies was from an expired term, while two members resigned citing family situations and lack of time.

### Department Reports

In her department report, Gibbs said she has spent the year so far trying to get a head start on sponsorships and that results have been "outstanding." She said she has five gate sponsors so far, bringing the sponsorship amount to around \$22,000 so far this year.

"And we just received another one yesterday," she added. "So I'm really excited about that."

Gibbs said her goal is to finish the fair premium book by the first week in May and get it out by the first week in June, hoping to get it into the schools.

This year's fair theme will be "Admiration for Generations." The winner of the fair theme contest was a fifth-grade student from Ione.

Gibbs said she has had several superintendent meetings and was just awarded a grant from the arts coalition.

"My superintendents for open classes are really excited. We're going to be using that money, \$5500, to bring in professional artists to encourage and do displays at fair," she said.

She said they hope to bring in two professional artists to do presentations and free classes for the public.

She is also looking for funding and bids for new doors on the sheep barn.

Morrow County Public Transit/The Loop Director Benjamin Tucker reported that The Loop had operated its new transit service 15 days in April. He said he had not heard from all drivers, but those he had spoken with already reported more than 100 rides.

"Word is getting out there, and people are starting to use it," he said.

Demand response gave 857 rides during the first quarter of 2024. Those rides covered 43,938 miles.

Tucker said his hope is that the fixed routes will gain popularity and that people currently using demand response will switch to fixed route. That will free up resources to serve more demand response riders who can't be served now due to limited availability.

"We're pretty much right there at the max as far as what we can do for demand response," he said.

Morrow County Justice of the Peace Glen Diehl lamented previously reporting that driving speeds seemed to be going down.

"I should have kept my mouth shut," he quipped. "It was right after that we received a speeding ticket for 150 miles."

He also said that he had attended a judges' training and found that what Morrow County is experiencing is happening statewide.

"For some reason, people still aren't getting it, and they're going some of these outrageous speeds," said Diehl.

A minimum fine for exceeding 100 mph is \$1,150 and an automatic suspension of 30, 60 or 90 days at the judge's discretion.

"And that was a reaction from the state saying, 'Everything's getting out of hand, and going those speeds, the chances of surviving an accident are greatly diminished,'" said Diehl, adding that the blow-out from such an accident also increased the chance of involving more vehicles.

He also said he had found getting people to show up for court has become a widespread problem since COVID.

"Some people honestly forget. Others, they just don't care," he said.

On a positive note, he said the court has assisted 12 people in getting their licenses and insurance this year so far.


"To me, that's a win-win for the entire county," Diehl said.

# WCCC Ladies play day results

There were 12 players in the ladies game play at the Willow Creek Country Club on April 23<sup>rd</sup>. The weather was cool but sunny. The results are as follows; Low Gross of the field was (A) Karen Thompson and (C) Betty Carter. The Low net of the field was (A) Coral Mithcell and (C) Nancy Arnson. Least putts was Kris Linder. Longest drive was (B) Loa Heidman, and (C) Nancy Arnson. Upcoming game is April 30<sup>th</sup> with tee-time at 10am.

**UPCOMING EVENTS FOR MAY AND JUNE**  
 May 2nd Ladies Night Dinner  
 May 9th Youth Night Dinner and Raffle Items  
 June Glen Ward Memorial Fishing Derby  
 June 14th Flag Day Service  
 June 16th Father's Day Picnic

**Lodge Meetings**  
 1st thru 4th Thursday of the month at 8pm.  
 Except June, July & August the 1st and 3rd Thursday of the month.

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