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BOC discuss ASA Plan, Circuit Court building, and solar projects

By Annalynn Black

During the May 1st meeting of the Morrow County Board of Commissioners, public comments were first on the agenda. Jodi Ferguson, a resident of Morrow County, took the opportunity to present a series of requests and suggestions to the board.

Ferguson started by highlighting the ongoing issue with the ambulance service in the area. She urged the board to ensure that the providers who bid for the service have second out crews readily available, capable of arriving at the scene within 15 minutes. According to Ferguson, the current response time of over 30 minutes is simply unacceptable. Furthermore, she emphasized the importance of the providers utilizing the appropriate resources within the county. Ferguson advocated for quick responders to be paged out when medical personnel are needed on the scene, as these responders operate independently from the local fire departments who may not always include medical personnel in their ranks.

Shifting her attention to a different matter, Ferguson urged the board to think “outside the box” when considering the location of the Circuit Court building. She encouraged them to explore the possibility of collaboration with other entities rather than solely focusing on the cost of the old mill site. Ferguson referenced information shared by representatives, suggesting that the Port of Morrow has funds available for infrastructure investments. She further mentioned that a board member of the Port of Morrow expressed the Port’s desire to invest in the project during a candidates’ forum held in

Heppner. Ferguson drew attention to Commissioner Drago Jr.’s desire to keep the courthouse in Heppner, but argued that the north end of the county, which boasts the Port of Morrow, jobs, and new housing, presents an opportunity to revitalize the south end of the county. She concluded her statement by urging the commissioners to champion this project to ensure prosperity and growth for the entire county. Following Ferguson’s comments, no other members of the public stepped forward to address the board.

County Administrator Matt Jensen took the floor to deliver a comprehensive presentation outlining the requirements for this crucial decision.

Jensen began by listing the key criteria to be considered during the selection process, enlightening the attendees with a slide show. The requirements outlined were as follows:

1st) the selected provider must demonstrate the ability to deliver a high level of pre-hospital emergency medical care. 2nd) The provider must showcase sufficient call volume and financial stability to ensure the long-term sustainability of the service. 3rd) The chosen provider must guarantee quality care for all individuals living in or passing through the service area. 4th) The potential service provider must adhere to all regulations set forth by the Oregon Health Authority, Oregon Medical Board, and Oregon Department of Motor Vehicles. 5th) The proposal submitted by the ambulance service provider must include specific details such as the number and type of ambulances, along with the medical equipment they will carry. Additionally, the proposal

should outline the vehicle storage arrangements, communication capabilities, dispatching abilities, and the number of personnel. 6th) Any selected provider must diligently adhere to all policies, procedures, and guidelines outlined in the Morrow County ASA Plan and the enacting ordinance.

Next was the Specific guidelines, Matt Jensen mentions that since there are three service areas, we need a provider that can service all those areas; 1st Prospective Providers must submit a proposal for individual ambulance service areas (ASA). 2nd Prospective Providers may submit individual proposal for multiple ASAs. 3rd The Selection Committee and Board of Commissioners may communicate with Perspective Providers for clarification and to discuss service options. The date of issuance is set for May 6th. Jensen also mentioned that notices will be published in newspapers across not only this county but also adjoining counties.

One significant date to note is May 20th, which is when written questions will be allowed. After that, the proposal deadline has been set for two weeks later on June 3rd at 2pm. Following the submission deadline, the board will review the proposals and determine which ones will move forward. The selection committee, consisting of representatives from all five cities within the county, will meet from June 5th and June 12th to discuss the proposals. Jensen, who initially suggested the formation of this committee, informed the board that four out of the five cities have already appointed their representatives.

Brenda Proffit, a council member from Board-

man, will represent that city, while Mayor Michelle Patton will represent Irri-gon. Heppner will be represented by local medical professional Emily Jack, and Jerry Reitmann, a local business owner, will represent Lone. Jensen stated that they are still awaiting Lexington’s decision, as they are expected to select their representative after the Lexington May Council meeting. Additionally, the county representatives on the committee will be Matt Jensen himself as County Administrator and Bob Blackmore as legal counsel. Two EMS professionals from adjoining counties are also being considered for the committee, pending confirmation.

Commissioner Sykes inquired about the structure of the committee meetings and whether they would be held publicly or privately. In response, Jensen expressed a preference for private meetings, without live streaming on platforms such as Zoom. The Commissioners motioned to approve the ASA plan scheduling.

Commissioner Sykes kickstarted the Circuit court building project conversation by turning to Jensen and requested a brief summary of how the board arrived at the present state of affairs regarding the Circuit Court building.

Jensen began by explaining that over the past year, the prevailing assumption was that the county courthouse needed to be situated within the city boundaries of Heppner, in accordance with the Oregon Revised Statutes (ORS) and other state standards. Thus, the team had narrowed down several potential sites to ultimately select the fairgrounds

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Chadd Doherty awarded by OCCA



Heppner Public Works Director Chadd Doherty. -Photo Contributed

Chadd Doherty, a student from Blue Mountain Community College (BMCC) and the Heppner Public Works Director, has been recognized and awarded by the Oregon Community College Association for his outstanding achievements in academics,

community service, and leadership. This prestigious accolade was bestowed upon him after being nominated by his advisor at BMCC, Dr. Velda Arnaud.

Doherty’s commitment to excellence and passion for education has paved his path to success. As a member of the Phi Theta Kappa honors society, he has consistently demonstrated his dedication to scholarship and has become a true role model for his peers. Alongside 54 other exceptional students from across the state, Doherty was also selected for the coveted 2024 All Oregon Academic team.

Accepting this honor, Doherty was given the opportunity to speak at the recognition luncheons held in Salem at the Chemeketa Community College on

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Heppner 8th grade T&F finishes season



Pictured is (L-R) Avia Botefuhr, Sam Lamb, Lizzie Ginn, and Olsen Anderson. -Photo by Erin Anderson

The eighth-grade track and field team from Heppner Jr High recently com-

peted in their final middle school meet in Milton-Free-water.

Controlled hunt deadline May 15

SALEM, Ore.— Hunters should apply for their controlled and premium hunts as soon as possible and before the deadline of Wednesday, May 15, 2024, at 11:59 p.m.

An application is required for most deer and elk hunts in eastern Oregon and for all pronghorn, bighorn sheep and Rocky Mountain goat hunts.

As of Monday, April 29, about 131,986 applications for fall hunts have been sold, compared to 129,866 last year at the same time. ODFW anticipates receiving more than 500,000 controlled hunt applications,

The easiest way to apply is online at ODFW

’s licensing system but applications are also sold at license sale agents during store hours.

Applications are \$8 per hunt series (buck deer, antlerless deer, elk, pronghorn, bighorn sheep, and Rocky Mountain goat), and an annual hunting license is also required.

New this year, hunters will be able to see their party’s total points after applying for a controlled hunt. A new feature in ODFW’s licensing system allows each party member to see other members’ points and the group total for the party’s application. That way, everyone in the party can have confidence in the odds of drawing a tag.

Morrow County’s support for county rights recognized in landmark Oregon Supreme Court decision

Morrow County was a friend of the court in defense of county autonomy

By Chris Sykes

In a significant decision, the Oregon Supreme Court recently ruled in the case of “Umatilla County v. Dept. of Energy,” with Morrow County acting as a “friend of the court.” The case involved the interpretation of Oregon Revised Statutes (ORS) in relation to the approval process for a proposed energy facility. Specifically, the court had to determine whether the Energy Facility Siting Council (referred to as the council) had the authority to issue a site certificate for a facility that did not meet all local land use requirements but aligned with statewide planning goals.

The case was ignited by a dispute over the approval of a site certificate for the construction of a wind energy facility in Umatilla County, Oregon. Despite the proposed facility not adhering to a local siting criterion mandating a two-mile setback between each turbine and a rural residence,

the Energy Facility Siting Council granted the certificate to Nolin Hills Wind, LLC. Dissatisfied with the council’s decision, Umatilla County sought a judicial review, contending that Nolin Hills should have been compelled to abide by the two-mile setback rule. According to Morrow County, they joined in the appeal to protect local land use rights and were neither in support nor against Umatilla County’s 2-mile setback.

Umatilla County argued that local land use criteria must be strictly followed and that any facility not meeting these criteria should be denied a site certificate. The county cited ORS 215.283(2)(g) and ORS 215.190 to support its stance, emphasizing that these statutes required local approval for facilities on high-value farmland and prohibited construction from violating local regulations.

However, the Supreme Court disagreed

with the county’s interpretation. The court highlighted ORS 469.504(7), which states that local governments must amend their plans and regulations to align with the council’s decisions if a site certificate is issued, suggesting that the council’s decisions can override local discrepancies in certain scenarios.

The court further analyzed the legislative history and intent behind these statutes, concluding that the legislature intended for the council to have the ultimate authority in siting decisions, especially when balancing local criteria with broader statewide planning goals. The court affirmed that ORS 469.504(1)(b)(B) applies even if a facility does not meet all local criteria, as long as it complies with statewide planning goals.

Ultimately, the court upheld the council’s decision to issue a site certificate for the proposed facility, concluding that the facility met the nec-

essary statewide planning goals, and thus, the local government’s comprehensive plans would need to be amended accordingly to accommodate the facility.

This outcome challenges the traditional role of local governments in strictly controlling land use within their jurisdictions. Typically, local en-

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