

Board of Commissioners story continued

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for a building of that size.

Jensen then raised concerns regarding the expense of connecting waste water to the city. It brought into question whether the county would be willing to cover the full cost of approximately \$235,000 associated with this endeavor.

Jensen brought up the possibility of relocating the fairgrounds, stating, "We do have interest by the Port to meet with the fairgrounds and the Rodeo about possibly moving the fairgrounds there. This is very preliminary but would be quite the change for the Mill site." Jensen's proposal would involve placing the fairgrounds on one side, while still allowing for industrial development along the west side where coil and the chicks currently reside.

While still in the early stages of discussion, Jensen believes that such a move could bring about positive collaboration and impact for the region, stating, "If we could work out with the Port and with the city of Heppner about possibly getting that infrastructure in place, there might be some good collaboration and impact for having facilities and development."

Commissioner Drago inquired about the anticipated cost and duration of the geotechnical and environmental testing. Eurl responded explaining that they couldn't determine the exact figures until the testing had commenced. The cost and timeline would heavily rely on their findings.

Taking the discussion further, Jensen proposed a solution to narrow down the potential sites by identifying two of the most suitable options. He suggested organizing a public meeting to gather valuable feedback from the community. However, Jensen expressed a personal recommendation to the board, stating that while the fairgrounds site could be a viable choice, it faced challenges concerning parking availability.

Jensen highlighted the Kinzua Mill site South. He expressed enthusiasm about its potential suitability, provided that no significant environmental impacts were discovered. However, he cautioned that it was imperative to obtain approval from a representative of the state within the next week. Jensen emphasized the importance of securing their endorsement before dedicating resources to extensive environmental testing, as it would be disheartening if the representative ultimately disapproved of the site.

According to Sykes, the chief justice of Oregon has already given his approval after a walk-through of the proposed site. Additionally, Jensen claims to have spoken with Representative Greg Smith, who is willing to advocate for additional funding if necessary. Before presenting to the state, Sykes wants to ensure the unknown cost is minimized.

Jensen suggests one option to improve parking at the fairgrounds site is to excavate on the other side of the creek. He states that the school has been contacted regarding the bus barn area, and they currently have no plans to relocate it but are willing to work with them.

Jensen proposes reaching out to the state for funding, utilizing the impact reports they have obtained. He suggests seeking feedback from Judge Hill or the Chief Justice, and subsequently presenting the findings to the commission. This could be done through either a public hearing or a special session allowing for

public input. Jensen also highlights the importance of confirming Representative Greg Smith's continued commitment to assisting in case additional funds are required.

Sykes expressed his desire to expedite the decision-making process regarding two potential sites. His primary concern was to address the public's dissatisfaction with the lack of community input thus far, as this frustration has been a driving force behind an ongoing recall campaign.

Sykes emphasized the importance of transparency and honesty, stating, "All I want to do is just tell the public, be honest with them, these are unknowns we don't know. That's all I want, you know it's shown that they want to be involved in this process and they are very, very upset about the way it was done, that they feel they haven't gotten enough input, we all know that, right to our faces, very angrily."

Recognizing the public's distress, Sykes stressed the significance of involving the community in the decision-making process. By addressing the uncertainties surrounding costs and unknown factors associated with a particular site, Sykes believed that seeking public input could help alleviate concerns and build a stronger consensus. "We all know what's going on with the recall and this is a big part of it. So, I think just going to have the public meeting and tell the people, these are the unknowns. We don't know what the site here is going to cost, what do you want?"

Commissioner Drago posed an important question regarding the selection process for potential sites. He inquired whether there would be multiple meetings or just one. Jensen responded, stating that the decision rests with the Commissioners. They could either have separate meetings for the north and south sides of the county, or alternatively, utilize online platforms such as Zoom. However, Drago expressed his preference for a comprehensive, open public meeting that allows input from residents across the entire county.

In agreement, Sykes emphasized the need to gather relevant information on the proposed sites in order to present it to the public for feedback. In light of this, it was decided that a public meeting will be held on the 15th. During this meeting, the Commissioners will present the necessary information, including costs and potential unknown costs, for the Kinzua Mill south site, the fairgrounds, and the Boardman site. This will provide an opportunity for community members to voice their opinions and preferences.

The forthcoming public meeting will take place in Irrigon in the afternoon on the 15th, followed by an evening meeting in Heppner. However, Jensen noted that the Irrigon meeting will primarily involve presentation and public hearing, while the Heppner meeting may include both public deliberations and a final decision.

The spotlight turned to a new solar energy project in Morrow County. Nathan Strotter and Tanner Gillespie, representatives from OneEnergy, an independent developer of grey-scale energy projects, took the floor to present their proposal for a 'Goal 3 exception' request. OneEnergy, based out of Washington, has a commendable track record of successfully installing solar energy systems across North America. Their ventures in Morrow County include the Tower Road

project, which was permitted in 2018, and the Harp Solar project, also given the green light the same year.

OneEnergy plans to install a new solar project approximately 17 miles southwest of Hermiston. This ambitious endeavor is projected to produce a staggering 260,000 megawatt hours of electricity per year, a quantity sufficient to power approximately 22,000 average homes.

According to Elaine Aldridge, legal counsel for OneEnergy, they received approval from the planning commission for a corresponding conditional use permit subject to the BOCs approval. OneEnergy is seeking the approval of the Board of Commissioners (BOC) to use 739 acres of arable land. They are requesting a Goal 3 exception as an amendment to the Agriculture Land Element of the Comprehensive Plan.

Aldridge the project exceeds the Goal 3 Acreage Threshold, with more than 12 acres of high-value agriculture land and over 20 acres of arable soil. However, the company plans to mitigate the impact on agriculture by transforming the area into an agricultural grazing space for farmers and animals.

To ensure the success of this undertaking, OneEnergy intends to provide appropriate grazing areas with a suitable mix of vegetation, implement effective water management practices, install secure fencing, and ensure adequate access for grazers and sheep. The company aims to remotely monitor the facility, minimizing the need for onsite maintenance. The lifespan of the project is estimated to be 35 years, with room for technological updates.

The timeline for the project includes development and permitting in 2023-2024, construction completion by the end of 2025, and the facility being operational by the beginning of 2026. OneEnergy is requesting a Goal 3 exception as an amendment to the Agriculture Land Element of the Comprehensive Plan.

During the public testimony, Cameron Krebs, a resident of Boardman, spoke in favor of the application, emphasizing the importance of maintaining an ecosystem through vegetation rather than leaving bare earth. Similarly, Tim Russ, another citizen, stressed the significance of preserving the land's condition or improving it when the solar plant reaches the end of its lifespan. The Board motioned to approve the application.

Jensen took this time to seek permission from the BOC to move forward with applying for technical study grants to address the nitrate issue.

Amidst the discussion, Commissioner Sykes raised a crucial question - which department would be responsible for overseeing this project? Jensen explained that the project falls under the purview of the community development department, with himself and Tamera Mabbott from the Planning Department serving as key players. However, there is no designated department solely dedicated to this endeavor.

Sykes emphasized the need for a structured approach, requesting specific details on the department's size, annual budget allocation, and task delegation. Jensen admitted that while there is a budget allotted for this department, there is no director overseeing its operations. Instead, he relies on collaboration with various department heads, particularly those from the public works department. Realizing the importance

of handling this issue appropriately, Sykes stressed the necessity of having a dedicated project manager. The BOC members, in agreement, passed a motion to authorize the Jensen to apply for the Oregon technical assistance grant for water and wastewater.

In a recent update provided by a representative from the public works department, exciting developments were unveiled for the local community. With plans in motion to improve the fairgrounds area, attention is being directed towards the other side of the creek. In an effort to tackle the parking woes, a significant project involving the extraction of approximately 20,000 cubic yards of earth is on the horizon. Multiple companies have been enlisted to undertake the analysis of the site, ensuring a thorough exploration of the possibilities.

Furthermore, the representative mentioned the involvement of Corey Sweeney, the weed management manager, in the upcoming solar project spearheaded by OneEnergy. As weed mitigation plans are being carefully devised, it is evident that efforts are being made to harmonize the growth of the solar endeavor with the surrounding natural environment. In addition to these commendable initiatives, the opening of the OHV Park is imminent, set to be available for public enjoyment before Mother's Day.

WCVEDG awards over \$260,000

Monday, May 13, 2024 - Willow Creek Valley Economic Development Group (WCVEDG) awarded over \$260,000 to community enhancement projects across Heppner, with a total project investment of over \$850,000. This grant awards funds to eligible projects from non-profits, municipalities, or special districts. Eligible projects include, but not limited to, recreational programs or projects that serve the public, cultural activities, public beautification projects, existing program enhancement, and capital improvements.

Projects this year include: Heppner playground equipment, food bank boxes, a pollinator garden, Youth Baseball backstop and batting cage, St. Patrick's Senior Center bingo equipment, city-wide cat spay and neuter clinic, Willow Creek Country Club equipment, new bathrooms and shop improvements at the Heppner Cemetery, the Heppner Chamber of Commerce artisan market project, and capital improvements to Willow Creek Assisted Living, Morrow County Health District, and the Odd Fellows.

To learn more about this grant and other grant programs administered by WCVEDG, visit heppner-chamber.com/grants, email wcvvedg@gmail.com, or call 503-504-8508.

Umatilla County BOC votes to take legal action against CDA

Reported by Terry Murray of Elkhorn Media Group

UMATILLA COUNTY - The Umatilla County Board of Commissioners has voted unanimously to take legal action against the Columbia Development Authority. CDA Chairman Kim Puzey refused a motion to rescind a 3-2 vote by the board that took economic development property from the county and the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation at last week's CDA board meeting.

The county has been a partner in taking local control of the Umatilla Chemical Weapons Depot land for more than 30 years and has invested in improving the land to use portions of it for economic development. The controversial vote would allow only the Port of Morrow and the Port of Umatilla to use land for that purpose.

Umatilla County Commissioner John Shafer is the county's representative on the CDA Board of Directors. Ideally, he doesn't want to battle it out in the courts even though he says he's confident the county will prevail. He said it's vital that the CDA remain five members strong if they hope to attract businesses that are right for all involved.

"Let's have a united front going forward," he said. "Let's show the developers that, as all families do, we had a disagreement, but we came together in the end."

Shafer said that as things stand now, the county will withdraw its financial support in bringing infrastructure to the land that used to house the depot. He talked about the history of the agreement, the financial investment the county has made over decades, and what the future could hold on the KUMA Coffee Hour Thursday.

Doherty Awarded by OCCA

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April 29th. Reflecting on his awe-inspiring journey, he expressed his excitement, confessing that he never imagined receiving such recognition.

Having completed his associate degree in business administration at BMCC last fall, he aims to obtain his bachelor's degree from Eastern Oregon University. Doherty plans to undertake a course load of 12 credits focused on policy politics and public administration, however, he still requires an additional 80 credits to reach his goal. June 12th marks the significant day of his graduation from BMCC, a major milestone in his educational journey.

When asked about his ability to manage both work

and school, Doherty shared his secret to success. He revealed that, after work, he dedicated several hours each day to completing his schoolwork, including many Saturdays, allowing him to strike a balance without missing out on too many events. Doherty's drive to make the most of his potential resonates with his desire to increase his earning potential - a goal he believes can only be achieved by continuously seeking opportunities for advancement.

As Chadd Doherty receives this well-deserved recognition for his academic achievements, community outreach, and exemplary leadership, the future seems bright for this accomplished individual.

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