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CREZ II settles remaining disbursement amid continuing tensions

By Andrea Di Salvo

After more than one contentious meeting, the Columbia River Enterprise Zone (CREZ) II Board has finally agreed on a disbursement plan for the remaining \$900,000 from its 2023 funds.

The June 3 meeting was the third at which the board tackled the disbursement of the funds, which had been earmarked to fund public safety.

The CREZ II funds will be distributed with \$300,000 going to Boardman Police Department, \$300,000 to Boardman Fire Rescue District, \$100,000 to Morrow County Health District, \$100,000 to the Morrow County Sheriff's Office, and \$100,000 to Irigoin Rural Fire Protection District.

The CREZ II board is made up of two members each from three sponsoring entities—the Port of Morrow, City of Boardman, and Morrow County. At least

one board member from each sponsor must vote yes for a motion to pass.

When it came to the \$900,000, the continuing tension between City of Boardman representatives Paul Keefer and Karen Pettigrew and Port of Morrow commissioners John Murray and Kelly Doherty was again obvious.

The main source of contention seemed to be whether the bulk of the funds should go to the Boardman area, which the Boardman city councilors stated was more impacted by CREZ II growth, or whether it should be distributed more evenly across the county, which the Port commissioners preferred.

Two motions in the June 3 meeting failed with four yes votes but two no votes from either Boardman or the Port. A third attempt finally passed when Doherty hesitantly agreed to the proposal by Pettigrew. Murray was the

sole dissenter in the final decision.

A Difference in Philosophy

After the vote, CREZ II Board Chair Keefer said he felt the board needed to take a serious look at how it will distribute funds in the future. If the board disburses the 2024 funds at the end of the year, which has been the usual practice, the same six board members will be sitting at the table.

Even in the discussion of a guiding philosophy, though, the tensions were obvious.

“With the board that we have right now, we have some serious disagreements on how the pots of money should be spent,” Keefer said.

“Would you have an overall philosophy on how the money should be spent to frame the discussion?” asked Morrow County Board of Commissioners Chair David Sykes.

Keefer replied that

there is no language in the CREZ II agreement that restricts how the board distributes the money and suggested that the best way might be a three-way split among the city, county, and Port. From there, he said, the entities could distribute the funds as they see fit.

“And guess what? We don't have the bickering and the struggles we have right now,” he added.

“If we nickel and dime this pot of money to everybody, there's not enough money to even get anything done,” added Keefer. “The three entities here need the money. We are the ones being impacted by not having the money.”

Doherty said that, if each of the entities were looking out for their own interests, the Port would be asking for the largest share. However, she said that wasn't the case, as they looked around and saw

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Mustangs host Basketball camp



The coaches with the 2nd through 8th graders with their shirts and balls. - Contributed Photo

The Heppner Mustang Basketball teams hosted a basketball skills camp for local future Mustangs. The camp was held on three days last week and over 70 area youth attended. The camp was divided into three sections, 2nd through 5th grade, 6th grade through 8th, and a high school division. The camp was led by the head of Heppner Boys' Basketball Jeremy Rosenbalm. He ran the campers through drills and showed them skills that they could

work on to become better basketball players. Other coaches who assisted were Rob Wilson, Kacey Lathrop, Stephanie Sweeney, Jeromy Wilson, and Ken Grieb. Several Mustang team players also helped with the youth part of the camp. Each of the campers received a Mustang Basketball T-shirt and basketball after the camp. The Heppner Booster Club assisted in putting this fabulous learning event on.

Commissioners approves new water management system for Heppner

By Annalynn Black

In continuing the Morrow County Board of Commissioners' June 5th meeting next on the agenda was a discussion led by Lindsey Grogan, the Human Resource Manager for Morrow County, regarding the implementation of a non-discrimination policy that includes services for non-English speaking individuals. Grogan emphasized the importance of

formalizing such a policy to ensure grant compliance and promote inclusivity within Morrow County. The motion to adopt a non-discrimination policy procedure was passed unanimously.

Next, Tamra Mabott, the MC Planning Director, raised concerns about traffic impact analysis and the need for a traffic engineer

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Heppner council approves \$9.36 million budget

Heppner will contribute to courthouse infrastructure if mill site is chosen

By Andrea Di Salvo

The Heppner City Council unanimously approved a budget of more than nine million dollars for the 2024-25 fiscal year at its meeting June 10 in Heppner. The council also voted to put skin in the game to the tune of a million dollars if the county selects the mill site west of town as the site for the new Morrow County Circuit Court building.

The \$9,363,466 budget had already been approved and passed on by the Heppner budget committee at its May 14 meeting. The unusually high budget is due to several million dollars' worth of capital projects.

The council held a public hearing prior to adopting the budget but received no public input.

The city also imposed the permanent tax rate of \$10.6209 per \$1,000. Both actions were adopted through Resolution 1075-24.

Also at the meeting, the city council voted to contribute one million dollars to the Morrow County Circuit Court project if the county selects the site at the old Kinzua mill.

Heppner City Manager John Doherty said city representatives had met with the county and Port of Morrow (POM) in May, and those entities had asked whether the city would contribute funds toward the infrastructure costs at the mill site if it were chosen for the circuit court building.

The city had agreed by consensus to contribute but had not named a figure or put it to a vote.

Meanwhile, the Morrow County Board of Commissioners has narrowed

its choices to either the fairgrounds site or mill site in Heppner and has decided to move forward with a geotechnical survey of the mill site.

“They roughly know what they're looking at for some infrastructure costs,” Doherty said. “The geotech is going to tell them if there's any issues with soil depth and also soil quality.”

The county will make its final site decision after receiving the geotech results. The POM has gone on record saying it will donate land and contribute \$500,000 in-kind on construction.

Heppner Councilor Cody High said he thought the mill site was a great location and that losing the courthouse in South Morrow would be a huge blow to the community. He moved that the City of Heppner contribute up to one million dollars toward the project in the 2024-25 budget.

“I believe in this project,” he said.

Other councilors said they didn't mind contributing that much but were unsure where the money would come from. Suggestions included using the city's anticipated \$600,000 in CREZ funds, taking the money from the city's investments or even taking out a loan.

John Doherty questioned whether the city could get a loan when there was no return on investment, but High disagreed.

“Having the courthouse in Heppner has a huge return for this community,” he said. “We shouldn't look at how many dollars we can bring in. We should look at what we can do for the people of this community.”

Heppner Councilor

Ralph Klock agreed, saying there would also be a return in the form of future development.

John Doherty didn't disagree but reiterated that it would be difficult for the city to find grants or other funding for a project outside the city limits.

“We're looking at a well up here for city redundancy,” said Doherty. “We can't use housing growth as a reason for that to qualify for grants, to qualify for loans. We have to use it as water security, water redundancy.”

Doherty also pointed out that the city has upcoming capital improvement projects totaling around \$26 million, including water and sewer projects, which the city will have to take on debt to accomplish.

“I was concerned with trying to contribute a higher amount than what our possible credit funds would be,” he explained.

“I think we're tapped out,” added Heppner Councilor Sharon Inskeep. “We've got some huge bills coming. I just don't see how we could afford any more.”

High said he just wanted to let the county know that Heppner has “skin in the game.”

“My hope is really that they're going to say, ‘Why are we trying to bankrupt this small city of Heppner while they're trying to do all these other things when we have a huge reserve of cash,’” he said.

Heppner Councilor Adam Doherty agreed that the city had to commit but questioned the “up to” wording in High's motion.

The council eventually voted 6-1 to commit one million dollars toward the courthouse infrastructure if the county selects the mill

site. Inskeep was the sole no vote.

Also at the meeting, the council reviewed bids for the Chase St. property. The 1400 and 1500 lots on Chase St. had been listed for sale together. The minimum bid was \$24,000, and the city requested a development plan for the property for the next year.

The city council received only one bid. The bid from Willow Creek Economic Development Group was for \$25,000. The council accepted the bid unanimously.

Other Business

In other business, Heppner Public Works Director Chad Doherty reported extensive work on water, sewer, streets, parks and other areas during May.

He also reported that he spent several days working on the Oregon Lead and Copper Rule Revisions. The survey of lead and copper is required by the state to identify all lead and copper lines on drinking water systems.

Doherty said he was confident there are no lead lines on the city's water sys-

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Doherty graduates from BMCC



Chad Doherty with Mom Cindi Doherty (left) and his wife Alicia Woodbury Doherty (right). -Photo by Cindi Doherty

Chad Doherty, the Heppner Public Works Director, graduated from Blue Mountain Community College on Friday the 14th in Pendleton, Oregon. He graduated

with an associate Business Degree and plans to attend Eastern Oregon University to obtain his bachelor's degree.



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