



the HEPPNER GAZETTE TIMES

50¢



VOL. 144 NO. 34 8 Pages Wednesday, August 28, 2024 Morrow County, Heppner, Oregon

Kinzua Circuit Court site hits \$1.5 million ground fill roadblock and looming contamination worries

Judge Hill advocates for Boardman annex in official letter

By Annalynn Black

The August 21st BOC meeting kicked off with Tamra Mabbott, the MC Planning Director, discussing the importance of updating the Natural Hazard Mitigation plan every five years. Failure to do so would render the county ineligible for natural disaster funds. Mabbott noted that once the board approves the plan, a notice will be sent to the cities, giving them the option to adopt it as stand-alone entities. However, during the discussion, some concerns were raised by the commissioners.

Wenholz voiced his confusion regarding the mention of renewable energy in relation to hazard mitigation in Morrow County. One sentence of the plan stated that the county is dedicated to sustainability through harnessing wind and solar energy to create a cleaner community. Wenholz questioned the relevance of this statement and compared it to the section on data centers, which described their existence in areas with chronic droughts, sounding somewhat negative in his opinion. "One is really rosy, and one is kind of downbeat when reading this," Wenholz remarked.

Commissioner Sykes supported Wenholz's observation, agreeing that some of the adjectives used in the plan, such as "the government offers extremely valuable tax breaks," seemed subjective and questionable, "that's the best subjective call I've heard" Sykes said.

Wenholz further raised concerns about the claim that data centers use excessive amounts of water that could otherwise be used for

farming. According to him, this statement is incorrect, as the water used to cool down servers is repurposed for irrigation purposes. "It's not factually correct, besides one is really rosy, and one is really downbeat," he stated. Commissioner Drago expressed agreement with Wenholz's point.

In response to the issues raised by the commissioners, the board requested Mabbott to reword the problematic sections in the plan. They agreed to review the revisions in the next meeting.

County Administrator Matt Jensen delivered an update on the ASA advisory. Jensen explains that this committee will play a significant role in advising on various matters on a quarterly basis. Additionally, they will act as the frontline reviewers when it comes to addressing any jurisdictional conflicts or issues within the ASA, making them crucial for efficient functioning.

Jensen revealed that the committee has been entrusted by the OHA (Oregon Health Authority) to review response times of the ambulance service. While the current shortest response time stands at 20 minutes, the OHA believes that this duration should be reduced. Jensen further emphasized that the newly formed committee will effectively address this concern.

The committee's structure involves the participation of two specific representatives from the county. Robin Kennedy, the Morrow County director of Public Health, has been appointed as the chair. However, it is worth noting

that a representative from the MC Health District is yet to be designated.

Alongside these representatives, several other members have been selected to bring diverse perspectives to the committee. From Boardman Fire, George A, Paul Martin, the director of EMS services at PMH, will serve as designees from Pioneer Memorial Hospital. The committee also includes Judy Gabriele as the designee from Good Shepherd Hospital.

The remaining members comprise representatives from different fire districts, ensuring that first responders with firsthand knowledge of the field participate in important discussions. Thomas Roberts from Irrigon Rural Fire Protection District, Tamra Beardsley from Boardman Fire Rescue District, Eric Chick from Heppner Rural Fire District, Adam McCabe from Ione Rural Fire Protection District, and Josie Miles from the Lexington Volunteer Fire Department.

The motion was passed by the board to approve the committee picks.

Moving onto an update from Project Manager Doug Carl on the Kinzua Mill site, a potential site for the new Circuit Court Building. Doug revealed that there is a substantial amount of ground that needs to be filled, estimated to be 16 thousand cubic yards, costing an additional 1.5 million, according to Doug. He mentioned that there are suspicions of potential soil leeching, and borings are proposed to verify this data. Doug further emphasized that if the soil is contaminated, it will require storing

elsewhere, incurring additional expenses.

Commissioner Drago expressed his concerns by stating that he is "highly concerned with continuing" with the current site. Commissioner Wenholz echoed this sentiment, adding that the site has already created complications, and moving forward, these issues may intensify. "It's not gonna get better; it's gonna get worse at best," Drago emphasized.

Jensen received a letter from Judge Hill, which presented an alternative proposal for a court annex building. County Administrator Matt Jensen elucidated the letter's contents, explaining that Judge Hill recommends a court annex in Boardman. According to Judge Hill, this location would cover 80% of civil and 90% of criminal cases in the north end of the county. Jensen made it clear that Judge Hill is not demanding the circuit court to be located in Boardman. The administrator also assured that the letter would be made available on the county's website for public view.

District Attorney Justin Nelson shared his thoughts saying that the letter sent by the county council regarding the statute requirements was commendable. He appreciated that the letter supported the notion that the courts should be in Heppner, despite a previous conversation that seemed to suggest otherwise.

Nelson also brought up an important consideration regarding the expansion of the courthouse. He stated that he was unsure about the extent of services they were

-Continued to PAGE SIX

Ambulance service agreement finalized



Morrow County Administrator Mathew Jensen (L), and Morrow County Commissioner David Sykes (R) signing the new Ambulance Service Area plan. -Photo from the Morrow County Website.

Morrow County announced that all three ambulance provider agreements under the new Ambulance Service Plan have been finalized. Contracts with Morrow County Health District were signed on August 23, 2024, to provide ambulance services in the Southern area starting September 6, and in the Northeast (Irrigon) area starting September 20. The Northern Area (Boardman)

was previously awarded to Boardman Fire Rescue District, which has been the full-time provider in that area since July 17, 2024. Each agreement has a five-year term.

Board of Commissioner Chair David Sykes acknowledged the lengthy process leading to the finalization of these agreements and expressed appreciation

-Continued to PAGE SIX

Father Condon Memorial Golf Tournament



The attendants and players at the 'Father Condon Memorial Gold Tournament'. -Photo from Kay Proctor

Participants in the annual Father Condon Memorial Golf Tournament enjoyed nice weather and a huge breakfast buffet this past Saturday while raising scholarship funds for

local students. Organized by Mark McElligott and originated by Jim Swanson, the scramble begins with a whiskey toast and a prayer for Father Condon, and

-Continued to PAGE THREE

Heppner Daycare calls on community to find location for new facility

Heppner, OR- The Heppner Daycare Expansion Subcommittee is appealing to the local community for assistance in identifying and securing a suitable location for a new and expanded childcare center. After more than a year of diligent searching, the Subcommittee is now calling on residents, landowners, and stakeholders to help meet the critical need for enhanced childcare services in the area.

The planned facility will significantly expand care options for infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and children requiring after-school care. The current daycare facility, located on Gale Street in Heppner, is no longer adequate to meet the increasing demand, particularly for infant and toddler care. The lack of available slots has become a pressing issue for many families in the community, driving the urgency of the Subcommittee's search for a new location.

Board Chair Katie Murray highlighted the

importance of acting swiftly, given the financial and temporal constraints tied to the project. "We have time constraints on spending the grant funds we have already secured, and deadlines for additional essential funding for this project. If we do not acquire property, we look at potentially delaying this project several years," Murray stated. "This is a crucial juncture for us. We are in an excellent position right now to have the childcare facility this community deserves, but we need to take this critical next step to make it happen. It truly takes a village, and we are asking ours to come together to accomplish this."

The urgency stems from the need to secure a property that can accommodate the necessary expansion while adhering to the specific requirements set forth by the grants and funding bodies. The new facility is envisioned to provide a minimum footprint of approximately 0.3 acres. The Subcommittee is flexible in negotiating with

potential landowners and is committed to finding a solution that benefits both the seller and the community at large.

Beyond simply expanding the physical space, the new facility is expected to play a transformative role in the community by enhancing the quality of early childhood education and care. Heppner Day Care has established itself as a family-focused, high-quality licensed, and certified center, dedicated to nurturing the social-emotional and physical growth of children. This foundation is seen as vital for fostering future academic success and building strong self-esteem in the community's youngest members.

The expanded daycare center will not only provide more slots for infants and toddlers but will also introduce new programs aimed at enriching the lives of preschoolers and offering much-needed after-school care for working parents. The Subcommittee believes that the new facility will

serve as a cornerstone for the community's future, helping to meet the evolving needs of Heppner families.

Murray also emphasized the broader impact of the project, noting that the expanded daycare center would support the economic growth of Heppner by enabling more parents to participate in the workforce. The availability of

-Continued to PAGE SIX

Flowers on Main Street



Flowers hung up outside of the local Bank of Eastern Oregon (L), and hung up outside of the local food pod (R). -Photos by Cindi Doherty.



During the spring and summer months, the Heppner public works department puts up beautiful flowers around town. The flowers line both sides of Main St., creating a vibrant and colorful display for residents and visitors to enjoy. These yearly flower

arrangements add charm and a touch of natural beauty to the town, enhancing the overall aesthetic appeal of Heppner. Whether you're strolling through town or driving along Main St., you can't help but notice and appreciate the vibrant blooms that adorn the streets.

START THE YEAR OFF ROAD SALES EVENT

\$2,000 OFF
UP TO SELECT POLARIS XPEDITION MODELS

OR

FINANCING AS LOW AS 0.99% APR FOR 36 MOS

POLARIS

Morrow County Grain Growers...

CALL
541-989-8221
ext 204
for more information

WARNING: Polaris® off-road vehicles can be hazardous to operate and are not intended for on-road use. Driver must be at least 16 years old with a valid driver's license to operate. Passengers, if permitted, must be at least 12 years old. All riders should always wear helmets, eye protection, and protective clothing. Always use seat belts and roll-over protection (if equipped). Never engage in stunt driving, and avoid excessive speeds and sharp turns. Riding and alcohol/drugs don't mix. All riders should take a safety training course. Call 800-542-3761 for additional information. Check local laws before riding on trails. ©2022 Polaris Inc.

POLARIS | OFF ROAD