



Morrow County Circuit Court to be in Boardman, Commissioners vote 2-1

By Annalynn Black

At the September 4th Board of Commissioners meeting, a 2-1 vote in favor of constructing the new Circuit Court facility in Boardman brought a close to a nearly year-long debate over the courthouse’s location. The decision follows months of public outcry and failed attempts to secure alternative sites due to high construction costs and environmental concerns.

Initially, the site near the Morrow County Fairgrounds was proposed for the facility. However, public pushback led officials to explore other options, including the former Kinzua mill site. The Kinzua location was considered seriously, but ultimately rejected because of the high cost of construction and environmental complications tied to the site.

John Doherty, Heppner City Manager, representing the City of Heppner, strongly advocated for constructing the new courthouse in Heppner, with support from another local resident. Both emphasized the importance of maintaining the courthouse in the county seat, highlighting the historical

and administrative significance of Heppner.

County Administrator Mathew Jensen presented several potential site options for the courthouse, including the Fairgrounds site in Heppner. He also outlined multiple locations in Boardman, such as county-owned land on Columbia Ave. and Olsen Rd., property near Boardman City Hall on Main Street, an available lot on Front Street, a five-acre plot on Miller Rd., and a few acres off Laurel Ln. These options demonstrated the county’s effort to weigh the needs of both Heppner and Boardman, while considering construction costs and the broader community impact.

Commissioner Drago acknowledged that he was the pivotal swing vote in determining the location of the new courthouse between Heppner and Boardman. “I guess I’m the swing vote,” Drago remarked during the discussion. He addressed letters that claimed he had promised to keep the courthouse in Heppner, clarifying, “I never promised to keep the courthouse in Heppner. I said it was my preference that it go here. And I

still believe that Boardman doesn’t have a lot to gain from a courthouse in Boardman, but I think Heppner has a lot more to gain from the courthouse staying in its current location.”

Drago expressed that this decision was especially challenging for him, as it was driven by both emotional and logical factors. “I would say it’s an emotional decision, and I usually make most of my decisions logically with the numbers, the growth in the north end, the history going forward. This is a 50-year project—it’s not a two-year project. It’s going to be there for 50 years of service. And in 50 years, I see there being faster growth in the north end compared to the south end, just because of demographics. So I’m torn. I’m working somewhere between the emotion and the logic—and I’m struggling.”

Drago expressed his desire to move forward without further debate on the courthouse location but acknowledged past concerns raised about building it at the fairgrounds, particularly its proximity to schools. He referenced strong community oppo-

sition due to safety fears, quoting, “Somebody’s gonna come out and shoot at our kids.” Reflecting on the past criticisms, Drago noted, “There were lots of anti-comments about it being at the fairgrounds, and now it doesn’t seem to be as big of a deal, but I still take those to heart.”

While Drago personally did not view the proximity to schools as a security issue, he understood the concerns voiced by the public. “I don’t see an issue with it personally—it’s not a lot closer to the school than what we’ve got right now. I don’t see security as a personal concern, but I do understand the concern of the citizens,” he added.

As the discussion progressed, Commissioner Sykes urged the board to focus on the key decision between Heppner and Boardman to finalize the courthouse’s location. He stressed the need for a conclusive choice to move forward.

Commissioner Wenzholz strongly advocated for relocating the facility to Boardman, citing that “80% of the cases are up there.”

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MCHD resumes ambulance service in South Morrow



EMTs from the Morrow County Health District standing in front of the MCHD Ambulances. - Photo by MCHD

Last week, the Morrow County Health District (MCHD) resumed ambulance service in South Morrow County after a lengthy and challenging negotiation process that led to a new am-

bulance service agreement. MCHD extended its thanks to their dedicated EMS staff for their hard work and commitment throughout the process.

Heppner city council seeks clarity on court location decision

Invites BOC to public workshop Sept. 19th

Heppner, OR – In the September 9th meeting the Heppner City Council decided to send a letter inviting all three Morrow County commissioners to a public workshop on Sep-

tember 19th at the Gillam & Bisbee building. The council hopes to get some clarity on the commission’s decision to place the Circuit Court in Boardman rather than Heppner.

Satellite court facility location to be placed in Boardman

Sixth Judicial District Morrow & Umatilla County Circuit Courts- The 6th Judicial District, Morrow and Umatilla Counties is pleased to announce that with the vote of the Morrow County Board of Commissioners, the planned new Court Facility will be placed as a satellite facility in Boardman. The historic Morrow County Courthouse will remain in operation to service the South End and all of Morrow County. Statistically, the North End of Morrow County has presented the Circuit Court with over 80% of its civil caseload and over 90% of its criminal caseload. The new facility will provide full court services to the North End and all of Morrow County giving the citizens of Morrow County the ability to tend to court matters in the North and South End. As the court facility plan develops, the Court hopes to see occupation by January of 2027. For the construction, Morrow County Board of Commissioners Chair David Sykes and Presiding Judge Daniel J. Hill, with the support of the Oregon Judicial Department Branch and Chief Justice Meagan Flynn, presented to the Oregon legislature a request for construction funds. Initial funding of \$12,750,000 was secured, with a newly submitted request for an ad-

ditional \$2,500,000 for the State share in the development of the court. Overall, outside of County only occupied offices, State Court facilities generally qualify for a 50% state match (of space allocated for court operations), and this money approximates half the cost of the allowed State cost for the Circuit Court facility. Chief Justice Flynn’s support was instrumental in securing the funding and then the support of another court facility leaving the historic Morrow County Courthouse in place to continue performing the function of providing justice and dispute resolution into the future without reduction of the court’s assigned staffing. The Boardman Court Facility, to be the Morrow County Circuit Court at Boardman, will receive additional staffing of up to 4 new staff positions, and have an updated technologically advanced courtroom, jury assembly space, ADA access, Sheriff’s support offices and holding cells, and is expected to handle trial jury cases and secure transport for criminal cases. The historic Heppner Court is anticipated to handle an approximate percentage of cases arising from the South End of the County, including non-jury criminal, non-jury civil and

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Goats on the go: Petty’s herd takes over Heppner dam



Petty’s goats getting ready to scale the dam and get something to eat. - Photo by Chris Sykes



Sage Petty owner of Petty Family Goats. - Photo by Chris Sykes

By Chris Sykes

The goats are back at Heppner Dam! Sage Petty and his wife, Hayden, from Pomeroy, Washington, have been running Petty Family Goats for eight years. Their herd of 450 goats grazes not only at Heppner Dam but also across Washington, Idaho, and Oregon, with significant time spent on the Snake River dams. These goats are a key part of land management, controlling overgrowth and invasive plants.

Sage loves the adven-

ture that comes with managing the goats, but he jokes about wanting to “turn them off” sometimes, as the job requires round-the-clock care. Goats are known for eating almost anything, including noxious weeds like water hemlock and yellow star thistle, plants that would harm other animals. Thanks to their ruminant digestive system, goats can process tough, fibrous plants efficiently. Their system is composed of four compartments—the rumen, reticulum, omasum, and abomasum—that allow them to break down and absorb nutrients from plants that are difficult for other animals to digest.

The herd consists mainly of Savannah Spanish Cross goats, a hybrid breed known for its toughness and suitability for meat production. Savannah goats, originally from South Africa, are valued for their ability to thrive in hot, dry climates, while Spanish goats, brought to the Americas by early settlers, are prized for their hardiness



Petty’s goats eating the grass and weeds on the face of the spillway. - Photo by Chris Sykes

and resistance to parasites. The crossbreed combines these traits, resulting in goats that are adaptable, low-maintenance, and excellent foragers. They are highly effective at clearing land and managing vegetation, helping to reduce fire risks by consuming dry brush and weeds.

Sage lives with the goats in a trailer, moving with them as they graze. He uses a portable electric fence with a solar battery to contain the herd. When near lakes, rivers, or dams, Sage enjoys fishing with his son, who often helps tend to the goats. However, the goats struggle in cold weather, so during the winter months, Sage hands them off to Peruvian goat herders.

Peruvian herders, working under the H-2A visa program, play a vital role in U.S. livestock operations. Many come from a long tradition of herding in the Andes and are highly skilled in managing animals in rugged, remote areas. In the Western U.S., including Oregon, these herders

manage large flocks, protect them from predators, and ensure their health, often working in isolation for extended periods. Their experience makes them particularly valuable for keeping livestock healthy during challenging winter conditions.

In the warmer months, Sage’s goats continue their important work of clearing brush and overgrown vegetation. Savannah Spanish

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