

BOC Commissioners vote 2-1

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He underscored the importance of serving the majority of the county's registered voters and potential jurors, most of whom reside in the northern zip codes. Wenholtz also reassured that the move would not lead to job losses in Heppner, as existing circuit court services would remain in place. Additionally, the state has plans to create four new positions in Boardman, further mitigating concerns about economic impact on Heppner.

Wenholtz pointed to the growth trends in the northern part of the county, stating, "Growth happens. We talk about this being a 50-year project—the growth will continue to happen. At some point, 80% of the cases will become 90%. I feel that's what's best for the county as a whole." His argument centered around future-proofing the courthouse's location to serve the county's long-term needs.

Commissioner Drago, despite seconding the motion to select a county-owned property for the new courthouse, voiced his reservations, particularly regarding the longstanding opposition to relocating the facility to the fairgrounds. "I'm having a tough time here," Drago admitted, struggling with the decision between the fairgrounds in Heppner and Boardman. He emphasized the difficulty of weighing the emotional ties to Heppner against the practical considerations for Boardman.

The motion to decide on a county-owned property for the new Circuit Court building was introduced by Commissioner Wenholtz and seconded by Drago. However, with Drago's internal conflict still evident, the final decision remained unresolved as the commissioners continued to assess the potential benefits and drawbacks of each location.

Commissioner Sykes strongly maintained that Heppner, as the county seat, should be the selected location for the new courthouse. He emphasized the town's central role and expressed confidence in the ability to address any concerns that had surfaced throughout the debate. "I haven't changed my opinion; I think it should be located in Heppner. It's the county seat," Sykes asserted. "I think we can anticipate the problems that have come forward, and I believe we can take

care of them. For me, it's pretty simple—I haven't changed [my opinion on the location]."

Sykes' firm stance underscored the importance of preserving Heppner's role as the administrative heart of the county while addressing any logistical or security concerns that had been raised.

Commissioner Drago reiterated his internal conflict between making a decision based on emotion or logic. "I prefer it to stay here on an emotional level, but on a logical level, it needs to go to the north end," he explained. Drago expressed a personal preference for a different site than the county-owned property but acknowledged the benefits of the proposed location. "I'm not opposed to being there—things are growing around it, and it's definitely becoming less industrial. If it goes to the north end of the county, that would be potentially the best and most cost-effective site."

He also shared feedback he had received from the community: "I've reached out to people, and I've been reached out to. I keep getting very few people saying they don't want it in their community. I don't have anybody in Heppner saying we don't want it there, and I don't have anybody in Boardman saying we don't want it there either. I do have people in the north end saying they would be happy to have it there. It looks like the south end has a lot more interest in their courthouse staying here for personal reasons—and I love that. I want to see Heppner thrive. When I said that in the forum, that was why my preference was that it stays down here."

Following this discussion, the commissioners voted on the relocation of the Circuit Court building to Boardman. Commissioners Wenholtz and Drago voted in favor, while Commissioner Sykes opposed the decision, advocating for Heppner.

Petty's herd takes over Heppner dam



View of Petty's goats from the top of the dam near the spillway. - Photo by Chris Sykes



Solar power cell used to charge mobile electric fence. -Continued from PAGE ONE

Cross goats are particularly well-suited for this task, as they thrive on a wide range of vegetation, including grasses, shrubs, and even noxious weeds. Their ability to forage on otherwise unproductive land makes them a valuable resource for land management and fire prevention.

While Sage sometimes jokes about the nonstop demands of goat herding, it's clear he is passionate about his work. Whether at Heppner Dam or across the Northwest, his goats are an essential part of sustainable land management, contributing to healthier ecosystems and providing an adventurous lifestyle for his family.



Satellite court facility

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domestic relations, other family law matters, and other cases that arise from the South End of the County. Due to the technological advantages of Oregon eCourt, the paperless court file system, court staff from either end of the County can operationally support each other electronically and continue to hold hearings remotely (as they often are now). However, Judge Hill

has made it clear that for substantive proceedings, a Circuit Court Judge should be present for judicial business when scheduled at either location. Judge Hill also hopes that this, in conjunction with court case-load statistics, may be the catalyst to add a new Circuit Court Judge by 2027. The point of contact for this press release is Irma Solis, Trial Court Administrator, Irma.Solis@ojd.state.or.us.

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