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eliciting laughter from the attendees.

Following Patty, Doris

Brosnan, another concerned citizen, inquired about the involvement of the Port of Morrow in supporting the financial aspects of a proposed industrial mill site. "Was the port approached about helping with the expense of the industrial site, were they asked if they should contribute? And can we do anything about it at this point? Can we change anything?" Brosnan asked.

Sweeney responded to Brosnan's inquiry, shedding light on the support from the port. "To answer your first question, they were very supportive of it being here in Heppner, they were very supportive of it being at the mill site, they offered up a half a million dollars in infrastructure, the city offered one million dollars, and we do believe that that monetary value would have gone up, with the port that would have been the site."

He added, addressing the possibility of any changes, "As far as your second question be addressed, we'll have to see."

Long-time rodeo committee member and director Terry Gentry voiced her concerns regarding the location of a new annex. Gentry, who has been actively involved in the discussions surrounding the project, expressed her frustration with the shifting plans.

"I've been in on a lot of these meetings, and I've listened to a lot of stuff and I've done research and I've had meetings with everyone in here probably to try to make sure that I could understand this process that we're moving through," Gentry stated. Her role on the rodeo committee led her to advocate for what she saw as the most convenient and cost-effective site for the fairgrounds parking area. Despite prior assurances, she told the council that the final decision to locate the annex in Boardman blindsided her.

“We were told at the meetings that these things happen, but I personally couldn’t figure out a way to stop it from doing that,” Gentry continued. She questioned if there were any possibilities to reevaluate or overturn the decision, sensing a lack of community involvement in the decision-making process. Gentry emphasized the potential implications of the decision, fearing that it may shift the focus of development away from Heppner. “All the money is gonna go up there... it’s not really an annex,” she observed.

“From my standpoint, I have done everything, now let me tell you a little story about the parkin-” Sykes stated, “-We were working with you, and we had a public and private landowner, and we go ‘maybe they’ll be interested in selling this land’ one of the opponents of having it out there called that land owner and said ‘don’t you deal with those people or we’re gonna let you have it.’ And they’re a club, and the way they work is slander on Facebook, that’s what they do. I have many people around town tell me they want this there but ‘I don’t want those people yelling at me’.”

Sykes also revealed that he had been the target of multiple ethics complaints due to his involvement with the project. "I had three ethics complaints filed against me, well two and one threat, cause I was on the city planning commission and

it was gonna come to the planning commission, and I had someone tell me ‘we will file an ethics complaint against you if you vote in favor of that.’ There was no conflict cause I had no monetary gain.”

Gentry inquired if any measures could be taken, perhaps even at a personal level, to ensure the project remains in Heppner.

Local Brandi Sweeney began her remarks by acknowledging the extensive involvement of community leaders, including herself and her husband, in the discussions leading up to the decision. Despite feeling well-informed overall, Sweeney expressed particular issues stemming from a Board of Commissioners (BOC) meeting where the critical vote was taken.

Sweeney recounted, "I've been to many meetings and heard lots of conversations and I feel very informed. I think my only issue with even the process, which I understand has been very wearing on a lot of people, myself and my husband included, is that I'd like to see an end to it." She highlighted confusion around the decision, specifically the lack of communication that led many, including herself, to believe the project would be located at either the mill site or the fairgrounds.

“At the last BOC meeting, that I did listen to, where the decision was made, was that I was shocked it was feasible to have it at the mill site,” said Sweeney. She assumed plans were progressing towards utilizing the fairgrounds and began considering logistics with local schools and parking. “I saw Judge Hill’s last-ditch effort. I listened to the work session,” Sweeney continued. She noted that although there was always an opportunity for public comment, she felt blindsided when the vote was cast without clear communication.

Sweeney highlighted a significant gap in outreach, mentioning, “In all

the things I've read and all meetings I've listened to, I had never once seen a letter from anyone from Boardman. I have not heard comment from Boardman about wanting it there or needing it there."

Expressing her sentiments towards Commissioner Drago, Sweeney pointed out the ambiguity in the level of public interest from Boardman, saying, "Mr. Commissioner Drago said he has talked to people and they kinda didn't care either direction—none of those people ever spoke, ever, that I'm aware of, no one submitted a letter, and you did have several. So, I feel like that's where the blind sidedness comes from for me."

Sweeney concluded with a call for greater transparency and public engagement in future decisions, emphasizing the importance of involving the community more proactively before decisions are made. Though her feedback was critical, she affirmed her appreciation for the work carried out by Commissioner Sykes.

County Administrator Matt Jensen explained the challenges the commission has faced in pushing the project forward. He stated, "you are correct, I think I speak for the entire commission, we were set to build at the fairgrounds twice now, and through outside forces, suddenly options came open and it was like 'okay you gotta look at this.' This is not entirely a county decision, its inferred that there is funding from the states, and we've twice had outside forces and public comments kind of come back and impact that and so you're correct there has been changes to the course and it isn't just been the whimsy's of the board of commissioners."

Commissioner Sykes also weighed in, recounting his recent experiences with public engagement. “I wanna parallel what he said with what’s going on, on September 14th, 2023.

I wrote a letter and I published it on the newspaper, and I put it on Facebook, and it said ‘this place is ready to be built, its tee’d up its ready to ready to go,’ and I look back on Facebook and there were close to 70 comments and every one of them was negative. And many of them were personal attacks—from Jeanie and Tim Collins we received a petition with 81 signatures of registered voters in Morrow County, I went back and looked at it today, there’s a lot of prominent people from this community signed that petition. We held two town halls and Corey and John were the only ones that ever came and said ‘we want this here’ there was 100% of the people, some of them in this room, who said ‘we do not want that built there.’ That all we heard day and night, was we don’t want that built there. We spent a bunch of money trying to work the mill site. If you read that environmental statement, it will make your eyes hurt. That’s why I have always been on this site.”

Local Greg Grant took the floor to inquire about potential properties for development. He asked, "I would like to know if anybody at the mill site looked into the north side of the road, the same side fish and game is on, it wouldn't be flood zoned, there's lots of room there to do it. Why not?" Council member Sweeney responded, explaining that the site had previously been considered but was ruled out due to numerous "brown sites." This prompted Grant to probe further about the term "brown sites," to which Sweeney explained that area was a dumping site and there is still a hole that hasn't gotten covered yet, "quite frankly, don't wanna touch that area."

Grant inquiring if the property owner had been approached. Both Doherty and Sweeney confirmed outreach efforts had been made. Sweeney added, "We

have worked very hard just to get it to stay here," underscoring the ongoing efforts to secure suitable sites within the locality.

Local Sharon Harrison suggested the organization of another meeting featuring additional commissioners and Judge Hill. Sweeney assured her that a follow-up session could be arranged, reaffirming the council's dedication: "Cause Heppner, we're not done fighting for this, the city council, we will go as far as we can to get it to stay here, because we are still committed 100%," Sweeney stated.

Local Molly Rhea addressed Commissioner Sykes, stating, "The courthouse is 120 years old, how many times in the 120 years has updated needs been brought to the county's attention to have it fixed and has been put off now to the point where it's dilapidated and we can't use it?"

Sykes revealed the extent of the courthouse's issues, explaining, "There is so much wrong with that the state won't even kick in funding for it." However, when Rhea pressed for details about the frequency of the building's inclusion in the capital improvements plan, Sykes redirected the focus. "It's not that the building is deteriorating, it's that there's no security, you can't hold meetings. The deterioration part is just part of it. The security there is unacceptable to the state. You can have all the upgrades you want, or maintenance and that building would still not be usable according to the state," Sykes elaborated.

Further insights were provided by County Administrator Matt Jensen, although council member Sweeney interjected with his opinion, doubting the building's security had ever been satisfactory.

According to Jensen, the building in question has undergone several studies to evaluate its inclusion in

major improvements. He highlighted the urgency for seismic retrofitting to ensure stability in the event of an earthquake. Jensen clarified that the necessity doesn't stem from the building being dilapidated, but rather due to enhanced building standards. "There is definitely deferred maintenance that has not been done that we are looking to do and quite frankly in whatever scenario, the court moving and relocating, whether it's in Heppner or this annex situation, we're discussing a plan to kind of restore it to a degree," Jensen remarked. He added that any proposed plans would need to be approved by the commission and included in the county's capital improvement plan, something the county has lacked focus on for years.

Commissioner Sykes chimed in, emphasizing the significance of the capital improvement plan. "There's a lot of money coming into this county and felt this is the time to do a lot of these things. We're not writing that off or anything, but we're gonna do it right," Sykes stated.

Next to Speak from the public was Tom, last name inaudible, "I'm very disappointed that Jeff Wenholz is not here tonight," Tom stated. "Drago Jr. I think avoided the meeting in my opinion. I don't think that Commissioner Wenholz has any integrity, that's my personal opinion." Tom also brought up procedural issues regarding how decisions may be reconsidered under Robert's Rules of Order, a set of rules for conducting meetings and making decisions as a group, which he believes the Board of Commissioners (BOC) operates under. According to Tom, "It's my understanding that under Roberts Rules of Orders only a person that has voted in the affirmative of the decision can re-bring up consideration of that decision."

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