

New FEMA requirement creates even more hassles for floodplain development

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Creek is not a habitat for salmon or steelhead.
“As far as I can see, Heppner, Lexington and Lone, the cities on Willow Creek, are the only cities in that entire map area that are supposed to go along with this FEMA/NFIP/PICM plan that aren’t on a stream that’s affected by salmon/steelhead habitat,” said Doherty.

“How can we perform a habitat assessment when there are no species listed?” he asked. “How do we show ESA (Endangered Species Act) compliance without endangered species present?”

He also said he questioned how FEMA calculated space usage.

“They couldn’t explain it,” he said. “We’re basically getting a lot of stuff from FEMA where, ‘You guys have to do this,’ but we’re not getting a lot of guidance.”

Doherty said he recommended the permit-by-permit option, but that would mean a lot of work in habitat assessment for each permit.

“I think we’d have to take a hard look at fee structure,” he said. “It involves looking at permeable services, total cubic feet of surfaces developed, anything removed, all of the vegetation.”

“If you cut down a 15-inch tree, you’ve got to plant three saplings, and they’ve got to be native to the watershed,” he added. “It’s going to cause a lot of headaches.”

Heppner council member Adam Doherty said he had experience with FEMA requirements for archaeological surveys. He said the wait time for an archaeologist to come and do a site survey could be as much as two years.

“My only concern is, they slap something like that on you and say you have to hire a third party, and then your permit to build something is delayed by 12-18 months, and we’re deterring a lot of potential improvements or construction,” Adam Doherty said.

John Doherty said FEMA had not mentioned an archaeologist but that there were numerous com-

plicated calculations involved in the process.

Heppner City Attorney Bill Kuhn suggested contacting county’s congressmen and asking them to look into it.

“This is a lot of work for us to protect...nothing,” Kuhn said.

Doherty said the habitat assessment would be difficult but that the other requirements would still be a “nightmare.”

“It’s a nightmare for cities that have planning departments,” John Doherty said. “It’s been a nightmare for me.”

Heppner Mayor Corey Sweeney suggested the city move forward with the permit-by-permit option.

“As we get more information, we’ll address these issues,” said Sweeney.

John Doherty said the best-case scenario was that FEMA would remove the Willow Creek communities from the requirement.

“But I wouldn’t expect it,” he said.

Also at the Nov. 12 meeting, the city council approved a contract with engineering firm Anderson Perry as the engineer of record for the City of Heppner.

Doherty said the contract was pretty “boiler plate” and comparable to Anderson Perry’s contracts with other cities where they are the engineer of record. However, the Heppner contract is more specific about responsibilities and provisions.

Doherty said he also contacted other municipalities about the fee schedule, and it is the same across the board.

The city council will hold a work session with engineering firm Anderson Perry regarding the water system master plan on Nov. 26 at 6 p.m.

In other engineering news, Doherty said he had hoped to begin work on the Gilmore Street project in spring of next year. Anderson Perry had advised against it, though, saying it is too late in the year to create a design for the Gilmore Street project and get it out to bid in time to begin work in the spring of 2025.

If work begins later in the year, it might end up

being delayed over next winter. The city now hopes to have the engineering firm begin the design and plans to begin work in 2026.

Regarding the recent election, Doherty reported that there were 80 write-in votes for the empty councilor position, Position #3. Morrow County Clerk Bobbi Childers told him that Nov. 26 would be the earliest she could provide a final count.

At the same time, if a qualified individual received a majority of votes and was interested, that person would have to be appointed to the council as duly elected.

The council also reviewed the minutes from the Oct. 23 Economic Development Committee meeting. The notes showed good news regarding funding for a new childcare facility in Heppner.

However, Heppner council member Ian Murray gave a less optimistic update about finding a suitable site for the facility, saying the previously selected site wasn’t turning out as well as expected.

“I’m worried that there’s going to be a momentum issue with this, if there’s just denials everywhere,” Murray said. “I’m not as hopeful as I was before, and I would hate to see these opportunities missed.”

The childcare facility would need about half an acre of ground. Murray said the group might be coming to the city council for options. They have about \$2 million in grants lined up if they can find the property.

As part of his report, John Doherty told the council that the recycling station on Riverside is an ongoing issue, with people leaving recyclables like cardboard outside the bins when they’re full. Leaving items outside the bins is a littering offense.

The station is on city property but is a county service and is maintained by Miller & Sons.

Doherty said he thought it was partly a scheduling issue with picking up the bins but that the county is also looking into finding out who the most

common offenders are. Sweeney said the recycling center might be more of a hassle than it was worth.

“And everybody’s always littering all the time because there’s always trash there,” said Sweeney.

Doherty said that he hoped finding the offenders and putting a stop to it would fix the problem. Sweeney responded that he thought either the service should be discontinued or emptied more often, since having people throw away recyclables defeated the point of the recycling station.

In other business, the Heppner City Council:

-Learned from Heppner Fire Chief Steve Rhea that in October the fire department had conducted 12 EMS lift assists, secured the landing one four times, responded to one motor vehicle accident with injuries and two without injuries, Heppner Rural Fire Protection District responded to an out-of-control burn near Lexington and a controlled burn not called in, for a total of 44 chief calls for the month and 178 call to date.

-Received a report from Morrow County Sheriff’s Office of 22 traffic stops, two with citations and 20 with warnings, one theft, one trespass, five suspicious activity, five juvenile complaints, two driving complaints, three domestic disturbances, three dog complaints, six other animal complaints, one assault and 15 citizen assists. Of the 410.75 hours logged in Heppner, MCSO deputies spent 291 hours on patrol, 45.5 hours on traffic, and 35.25 hours on investigations and follow-up. The city contracts for 320 hours per month.

-Heard from Heppner Public Works Director Chad Doherty that his department replaced three water meters, finished the lead and copper inventory with no lead lines found, investigated a water leak, tested hydrants around town, did nine septic dumps and 20 bio-solids loads, fixed a stop sign, painted over graffiti and helped winterize the Heppner pool among other responsibilities and meet-

ings.
-Learned from Barb Orwick of the Neighborhood Center that the Neighborhood Center’s annual food drive was a success. The Giving Tree will be available at Heppner Market Fresh starting Dec. 2. Eligible families can also be “adopted” for

Christmas. Gifts are due Dec. 18. Kid shopping day will be Sunday, Dec. 15. Lots of volunteer opportunities are also available during the holidays.

The next Heppner City Council meeting will be Dec. 9 at 7 p.m. at Heppner City Hall.



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Heppner band prepares to boost Mustangs in semifinal clash

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in all the songs they’ve played and the new music that seems to come every week. “The band’s energy is contagious,” said Mustang Principal, Ryan Gerry. They’re an essential part of this team’s success.” “We are so proud of how the band has come together this season,” said Brooke Baker, who has been leading the band with enthusiasm and precision. “Their energy and dedication to the team and the school are truly inspiring. It’s been an honor to watch them play a role in this exciting journey

for the Mustangs.” As the Mustangs look to advance further into the playoffs, the Heppner High School Band continues to stand by them, ready to keep the energy high and the spirits

even higher. The band’s commitment to excellence and school spirit remains unwavering as they play a vital role in creating an unforgettable atmosphere for the Heppner community.

The Mustangs will take on St. Paul at the semi-final football game on Saturday, November 23rd at Caldera High School in Bend at 2pm.

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