

Greater Idaho asks for support from incoming Trump administration



The Greater Idaho movement, which has been slowly gaining ground since 2020, is now seeking support from Trump. -Contributed photo

LaPine, OR—Leaders of the Greater Idaho movement are asking President Trump and his incoming administration to get involved in supporting border talks between Idaho and Oregon.

In a letter released last Wednesday, Citizens for Greater Idaho praised the former and future President as a “practical problem-solver” whose support could bring a “peaceful resolution to Oregon’s long-standing east-west divide... and cement (Trump’s) legacy as a peacemaker and transformational president.”

“It’s become clear to the people of eastern Oregon that our own state government is not going to listen to us and enact what we’ve voted for, which is moving the border,” said Matt McCaw, Executive Director of the movement. “But we believe that President Trump, whom the people here overwhelmingly voted for, can help us achieve the self-determination we have a right to by bringing attention and support to our cause.”

President of the movement, Mike McCarter, agreed.

“For the last four years we’ve been going directly to the people to hear what they want. They’ve made clear they want to start border discussions,” said McCarter. “We’ve also reached out to the Oregon Legisla-

ture and Governor Kotek but gotten no response. Oregon state government hasn’t been willing to listen to eastern Oregonians, but we believe the President will.”

The Greater Idaho movement began putting votes to counties in 2020 and seeks to move the Oregon/Idaho border westward so that the traditionally conservative eastern counties would join the state of Idaho, which the movement says better matches eastern Oregonian values. So far, 13 counties have passed their measures, including a Morrow County vote to further discussion on the topic.

The group believes that moving the border would create a win-win situation for both Oregon and Idaho by better matching voters to state governance and would lower political tension across the state.

State lines can be moved through a process called an interstate compact. The change would require the approval of both states’ legislatures, as well as the U.S. Congress.

In 2023, the Idaho house passed a Memorial resolution inviting the state of Oregon to begin border talks, and the Governor of Idaho has publicly supported border talks, as well.

A copy of the Dec. 4 letter to Trump can be found at <https://greateridaho.org/view/104>.

County officials grapple with unexpected costs for Boardman Circuit Court Site

-Continued from PAGE ONE footage.

When the BOC was considering putting the court building at the highly-contested site near the Morrow County Fairgrounds, the estimated square footage was around 24,000.

Design plans for the Boardman location have increased to 28,500 square feet, partly due to the site change and partly due to added functional space.

Aside from the circuit court and accompanying requirements—such as office space for public defenders and a Sally port and holding area for prisoners—the building is also planned to include offices for the Morrow County District Attorney, the juvenile department and a new and larger Justice Court space to replace the Justice Court in Irrigon.

Stewart said the design team had met with the Oregon Dept. of Justice and other occupants of the building, and the 28,500 square feet was “optimal” for users to have all the spaces for their departments to fully function within the building.

Additionally, to fit on the two-acre lot on Columbia and Olsen roads, the building will need to be at least two stories. That added the requirement of an elevator, which would not have been needed at the fairground site.

Jensen said, though, that not all the growth was tied to the new site. For instance, space for public defenders was a new addition by the state.

“It’s something the state’s asking for and is a new initiative that they’re that they’re implementing that will be required over the next five years,” said Jensen. “And we figure, if they’re going to require it, we might as well incorporate that into the into the space planning.”

Stewart agreed and added that the Justice Court courtroom grew from a half courtroom to a full courtroom. The design also added an intake office and fingerprinting for the sheriff’s office to fully function, as well as a grand jury room for the district attorney.

Another variable was exactly what was taken

into account by the budget estimate. Morrow County Commissioner Jeff Wenzholz pointed out that the original estimate of \$800 per square foot only included construction costs, while the \$50 million included so-called “soft” costs such as interior work, furniture and various fees.

The design team said they estimated that total cost at \$34 million for the circuit court itself, with the other \$16 million being the other offices and spaces in the building.

Still, Morrow County Board Chair David Sykes wasn’t happy with the figure.

“So basically, the county is doing \$16 million dollars’ worth of office space for itself,” he said. “I mean, if it was just a standalone circuit court building, they pay half, we paid half, 17 million apiece.”

Carl and Earl Eastman, also of Alliance, said the price tag was “as big as it’s going to get. They said they build in contingency, and that the number usually whittle down over time.

“I know these numbers are conservative,” put in Jensen, “but they’re high.”

Jensen added that the county could bring down the cost by stripping away the Justice Court and other offices, but that would still leave the county splitting a \$34 million bill with the state.

“We have the 12.5 (million). We’ve had an additional 1.5,” he said. “But we would have to be going back to Judge Hill and saying, ‘Your site is 17 million, and unless we can curtail the court side of things, we need to bring in some money to do the project.’”

If the current design stays on track, Stewart said they could have a contractor hired and a better cost estimate by March 7. Realistically, she said, construction would begin about a year from now, with the building open by February of 2027.

Sykes, though, resisted the idea of moving forward with the current estimate.

“I think we need to go back to ground zero and start looking at everything we’ve added on, all the uses of county offices and who we had in there,” he said. “I mean, it’s going to be tough for me to walk out and tell

somebody, ‘Well, it’s not 25, it’s 50.’”

Wenzholz said he thought it was important to note that \$25 million was never a set amount.

“The complete cost never was 25,” he pointed out.

“That’s what we put out,” he said. “When you put it out, that’s what it is.”

Jensen said the easiest way to bring the cost down would be to pull out the county offices, but the circuit court was still a significant cost.

“Those are statutorily required space requirements. It’s going to feel palatial compared to what they have over here, but it is what’s set in Oregon statutes,” said Jensen. “And so we did not have much design latitude with that, unfortunately.”

Stewart said the advertisement had already gone out for a general contractor. Sykes questioned whether the BOC had any say going forward.

“Did we approve a certain cost for this building, or we just said, ‘Go for it.’?” he asked. “Is that how it works?”

The design team responded that the presentation had been purely information, and the BOC could change course at any time, just as it had when it moved the site from Heppner to Boardman.

“So if you come back and ask us to do something different than what we’ve shared with you—because today is just an update—we would certainly change gears and do something different,” said Carl. “As a team, we assumed there was going to be sticker shock and that you guys behind the scenes might having your own discussions.”

“If we don’t do anything, you’re moving for-

ward with a \$50 million project,” stated Sykes. “If the price doubled, you’re not asking us to approve anything. You’re going to move forward with schematic design now irregardless of the doubling price.”

“I think we ought to do a little more deep dive into what we’re doing here,” he added, “take a fresh look at where we’re spending our money.”

Carl reiterated that this was the first time the design team had gotten to this point in the process.

“This is the first time, even though we’ve been working together for a year, first time we’ve been able to get to this spot, put a total project cost in front of you guys. You know, it was a start, stop, start, stop,” Carl said. “This is a spot where you can say, okay, hold on.

“We didn’t prepare what-if scenarios because we just need to give you guys an update. Here’s where we’re at,” he added.

Sykes responded that the commissioners have a responsibility to the public.

“I just hope everyone realizes or is sensitive to the fact that we interface with the public. Nobody else does,” he said. “Our reputation, our, you know, truthfulness or whatever you want to say is on the line.

“If I’d have known that from the beginning, I would have told people, it could be 50 million.”

Wenzholz said he would like to see the staff come back with different cost scenarios, but that the BOC needed to act sooner rather than later.

“We kicked this game down the road,” said Wenzholz. “We’ve all seen how the price of building materials goes up.

“The cost is just going to escalate,” he added.

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