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Heppner's Parade of Lights brings Christmas magic to main street



Dazzling parade floats lit up Heppner's Main Street during the Parade of Lights. - Contributed Photos

Heppner's Parade of Lights lit up Main Street last Thursday, delighting attendees with a spectacular display of holiday spirit and creativity. The event, hosted

by the Heppner Chamber of Commerce, was a big success, drawing families, businesses, and visitors from near and far to celebrate the Christmas season.

This year's parade featured a dazzling array of floats, glowing costumes, and twinkling decorations, turning the heart of Heppner into a winter wonderland.

The community's enthusiasm and participation made the evening unforgettable, with smiles and laughter echoing along the streets.

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Commissioners approve \$35 million budget estimate for circuit court

2-0 vote moves forward with justice court housed in planned Boardman annex

By Andrea Di Salvo
The Morrow County Board of Commissioners voted 2-0 last week to continue with a pared-down version of the Morrow County Circuit Court Annex planned for Boardman, though still with an estimated \$35 million price tag. BOC Chair David Sykes was not present for the vote due to a medical incident during the meeting. The family reports he is doing well after a scheduled surgery and is recovering at home.

and all "unedited" requests for space.

Jensen said the design team had met several times over the past two weeks to try to create a more realistic design and cost estimate.

"Part of those meetings have included reaching out to the primary stakeholders to identify space issues, getting it down a little bit tighter and bringing about a more fiscally feasible approach to the project," Jensen said.

The team had gotten the price tag down to around \$35, Jensen said. That still included space for the Morrow County Justice Court to be relocated from Irrigon and housed with the circuit court. Whether the justice court was kept included with the project was one of the questions in front of the BOC that day.

Kelly Stewart from DLR Group was again on hand to explain the process. She said the design team, which also includes county staff and Alliance Management and Construction Solutions, had completed a numeric program, which was basically a list of spaces and square footage for the building.

"It's driven by the interviews with the building users, stakeholders, and also the OJD (Oregon Justice Dept.) criteria for the building," Stewart said. "That list produced the 28,500 square feet that we presented Dec. 3.

"It was kind of unedited and it represented all of the space needs that were communicated from the users all under one roof—for the

circuit court and all their needs, the district attorney, all of their needs, the public defender, all of their needs, and the justice court with all of their needs," Stewart added.

It was those pieces, she said, that were used to come up with the \$50 million cost estimate.

"So what we still have yet to do, what we're doing right now, is setting a total project goal, which we didn't have before," Stewart said. "So, we now have 35 million to try to work against as the goal for the total project budget."

Stewart said the next steps will be to make adjustments to both the scope and budget as needed to reconcile the space and cost goals. After confirming they're still on schedule, she said, the team will move forward with schematic design.

"Where we actually do start to design a building, and more graphics that look like a building start to take shape, and more things that can actually lend themselves to a truer cost estimate," she said.

Stewart said the contractor would ultimately provide the hard costs for the project, but the county hasn't yet selected a contractor. So far, the cost per square foot for the new building is estimated at roughly \$1,200 to \$1,300.

"In that hard cost number there's really healthy contingency for a lot of unknowns this early in the phase. So, escalation, risks," she said.

The design group also

took the hard cost estimate, she said, and added the industry standard of 30 percent for so-called "soft costs." Soft costs include design and engineering fees, management fees, pre-construction services, site surveys, and more.

Jensen said the \$35 million target was a number he had asked the design team to work toward, not a number that had come from the BOC. Stewart said it was good to have that goal to work toward.

"So, with now having the 35 million total project goal to work against, we were able to estimate how much of that building scope that we had in our pre-design report would need to be reduced to be able to meet that budget goal," Stewart said. "So, our next step is considering how to reduce the scope."

In part, that means reducing the building square footage from 28,500 to

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Early G-T deadline for New Year

This year, New Year's Day falls on a Wednesday. Since Wednesday is our normal publication day, the Heppner Gazette-Times will alter its schedule and publish on Tuesday, December 31.

If you'd like to submit an advertisement or story for either issue, please ensure it is sent in by 5 p.m. on Friday, December 27.

Lexington moves forward with joint transportation plan

Grant shared with county is still a step in the right direction

By Andrea Di Salvo

The Lexington Town Council voted to move forward with a joint TGM grant opportunity with Morrow County at its regular meeting Dec. 10. The opportunity is a diminished version of what the town has been seeking, but councilors say it's still a step in the right direction.

The state's Transportation Growth Management (TGM) Plan is a joint program between the Department of Land Conservation and Development (DCLD) and ODOT for planning purposes for transportation and public safety. Imes said the town has been applying for the grant for the last

three years but has come up short on the list.

Lexington Town Councilor Katie Imes said she thought Lexington was denied the grant in this funding round, as well, but it turned out the town was "partially denied."

She said she had received an invitation to meet with the Morrow County Planning Department regarding the TGM grant the county received for its Transportation System Plan (TSP) update.

She said it turned out the TGM was proposing that Lexington would "fold into" the county's award.

"They're going to add

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Reward offered for wolf killed in Morrow County



The gray wolf is protected west of Hwy. 395 in Oregon under the Endangered Species Act. -Photo by Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is offering a \$10,000 reward for information about the illegal killing of a gray wolf in Morrow County.

The wolf, a radio-collared male known as OR 159, was found dead Nov. 8 on private property about 20 miles south of Heppner.

The reward was announced Dec. 20 for any information leading to an arrest, a criminal conviction, or a civil penalty assessment against whoever is responsible for killing a federally-protected gray wolf. The gray wolf is protected under the Endangered Species Act.

Fish and Wildlife lists southern Morrow County

as a wolf use area. The department estimates there are around 133 gray wolves in Eastern Oregon as of their 2024 counts.

Eight wolves were illegally killed in 2023 in Oregon, the second highest number since 2000, according to their data. Of those, one was shot and the rest were poisoned.

Oregon State Police are assisting U.S. Fish and Wildlife with the investigation. Anyone with information should call 503-682-6131 or OSP dispatch at 800-452-7888. Callers can also dial *677 or email TIP@osp.oregon.gov. Tipsters may remain anonymous.



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