

Heppner council meeting March 10

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about,” he said, admitting, “If we reach the point where we create too much havoc at the park area, then that’s not going to work.”

Street showed a “bare bones” footprint of the building and pointed out that off-street parking took up a chunk of space that would be freed up if the parking weren’t required.

Kuhn said the city park is attractive because the library provides wi-fi to the park area, and they would like to build a stage or performance area as part of the new building.

“But it does take up park space, and ultimately that’s going to be a council decision,” said Kuhn. “We’re just in concept right now, but we need to know what the city thinks.”

Barring that, he suggested the city’s lot at Chase and May streets. That lot is in the flood plain, unlike the park, and would require about 11 spaces of off-street parking.

“Those are probably the most buildable areas to keep the library downtown, to keep it accessible to the public,” said Kuhn.

Heppner City Councilor Ian Murray said his biggest concern is the trees.

“I think they are the oldest trees in town,” he said.

“And two of them are right in the center of where the building would be,” added Heppner City Manager John Doherty. “It’s hard to replace the trees.”

Heppner Mayor Corey Sweeney said he thought it would be a good topic for the next economic development meeting, where they could “hash out” details and bring something back to the council.

Also at the March 10 meeting, the council voted unanimously to move forward with a contract with Granite Construction for chip sealing and center striping city streets, pending the end of the award protest period.

On Feb. 28, the Heppner City Council held a special meeting to open sealed bids for a chip-seal project covering 35,000 square yards of city streets, excluding center line striping. Six bids were received: High Desert Aggregate and Paving, \$204,500; CR Contracting, \$383,750; Granite Construction, \$181,749; Sierra Sante Fe Corporation, \$199,977.77; Harney Rock and Paving, \$196,150; and Doolittle Construction, \$216,650.

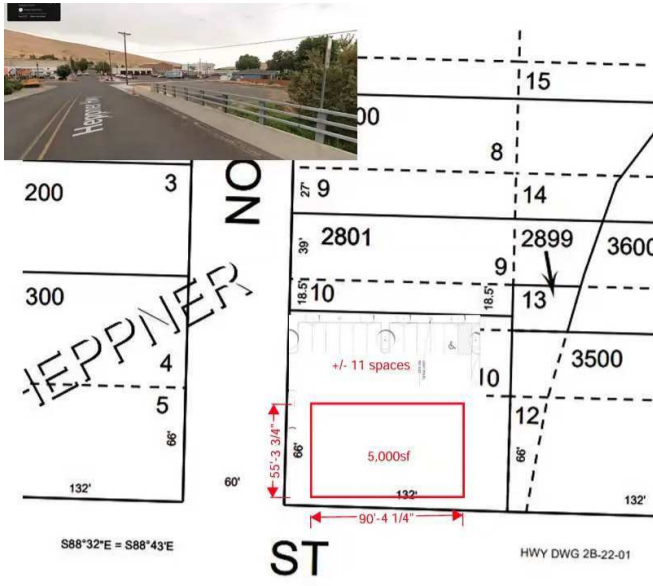
The council voted unanimously to issue a notice of intent to award to Granite Construction for \$193,999, including center line striping. John Doherty told the council at the March 10 meeting that the protest period for the award was still open but that he didn’t expect any issues.

The council also approved up to \$20,000 for chip rock purchase for the work, since that would be cheaper than purchasing rock through the contractor. Doherty said he was still waiting on a bid from one supplier.

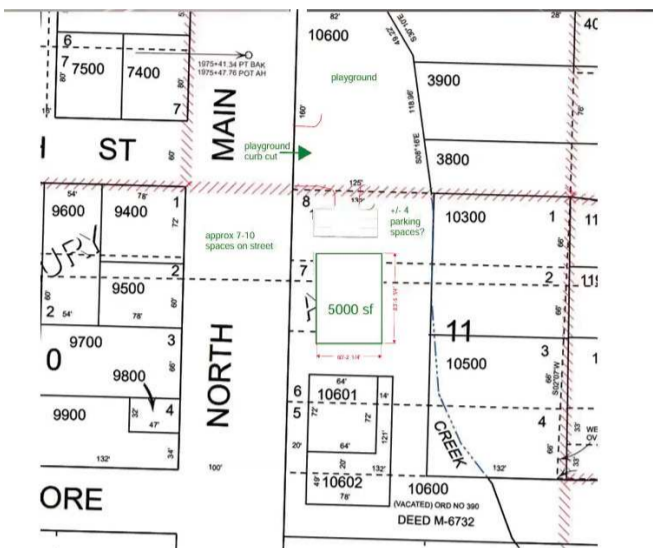
He also said the combined costs of contract and rock are still below budget on the project.

The council also approved additions to the city’s Water System Master Plan (WSMP) high priority list, bumping the estimate for high priority items from \$10,233,000 to \$10,906,000.

“Just because it’s on the high priority list doesn’t mean we have to spend it,”



A possible footprint of a new library building on the city’s lot at Chase and May. -Contributed



A possible footprint of a new library building at Heppner City Park. -Contributed



OTLD Director Kathy Street. -Contributed

said Doherty, “but it does increase (the estimate) by \$673,000.”

The projected estimates are in 2027 dollars adjusted for inflation.

During a special Heppner City Council meeting Feb. 28, the council authorized Dane Maben of engineering firm Anderson Perry and Associates to submit the city’s WSMP to Oregon Health Authority Drinking Water Services for review pending minor corrections.

The council also gave approval for Maben, Heppner Public Works Director Chad Doherty and John Doherty to schedule a one-stop meeting through Business Oregon to explore funding sources. Maben will produce a PowerPoint summary of the master plan, after which funding agencies will present their options.

In other business, the council approved the purchase of a new Kohler mower from Inland Turf of La Grande for \$18,250.

Also at the special meeting on Feb. 28, the Heppner City Council discussed the distribution of Columbia River Enterprise Zone (CREZ) funds amounting to \$539,484. The council approved the following distributions: \$50,000 to the city park project, \$50,000 to the fire reserve, \$100,000 to the sewer reserve, \$100,000 to the street reserve, \$200,000 to the water reserve, and \$39,484 to the fleet reserve.

In other business:

Heppner Fire Chief Steve Rhea reported he plans to step down as fire chief at the end of this year. He said he would like to retain a spot, possibly as fire marshal, to continue his smoke detector project, grant writing and other miscellaneous work for the department.

Rhea reported that February started slowly, with only eight calls for the month—two lift assists, one secure landing zone, one controlled burn inside

city limits, one non-injury motor vehicle accident, two flood assessments on upper Hinton Creek and one flood abatement on Fairview Way. There have been 28 calls so far in 2025, along with 28 fire chief calls.

Rhea also reported that he submitted the response packet to the Oregon State Fire Marshal for the department’s California deployment. Heppner Fire Department also hosted a two-day Firefighter 1 academy for four departments.

Morrow County Sheriff’s Office Lt. Nathan Braun reported that the Heppner deputy on day shift served 140 hours, while weekend/night shift served 139. Other miscellaneous deputies served 113 hours, for a total of 393 hours.

There were 12 dog complaints, 49 traffic stops with 28 warnings and one citation in February. Total number of incidents for the month was 133.

Braun also said the department has hired a new deputy, who started training this week.

Chad Doherty reported that, among other duties, the public works department responded to a hit fire hydrant on Sperry St., responded to several frozen meters, and completed the Oregon Water Resources 75 percent grant for new meters at wells two and three. The grant was approved and sent to Salem for processing.

Public works also painted the shamrock, responded to snow on multiple days, cleaned streets, started repairing and painting the Heppner sign at Heritage Plaza and responded to flooding on Fairview Way.

In his city manager’s report, John Doherty reported a busy month including communication with businesses, government entities and residents regarding the new courthouse. He also researched the feasibility of a future new library at Heppner City Park, worked on the chip seal project, communicated with legislators on pertinent legislation, received ongoing feral cat complaints, conducted preliminary work on the fiscal year 2026 budget and attended numerous meetings among other duties.

The next regular meeting of the Heppner City Council is scheduled for April 14 at 7 p.m.

County authorizes recycling haulers for new program

State law aims to make recycling easier, more accessible

By Andrea Di Salvo

The Morrow County Board of Commissioners approved two local recycling haulers as authorized service providers March 5 as part of a statewide effort to modernize recycling in Oregon. Commissioners voted 2-0 to authorize Miller and Sons in South Morrow and Waste Management/Sanitary Disposal in North Morrow.

The move was in response to the Plastic Pollution and Recycling Modernization Act, which aims to update Oregon’s recycling system.

“The state is basically going to get ahold of all our producers of plastic,” said Sandra Pointer, formerly the Morrow County Public Works Administrative Manager and now the county’s risk and procurement manager. “There’s going to be some funds available for counties and entities to receive funding for receiving this recyclable material.”

The law (Senate Bill 582) was passed during the Oregon Legislature’s 2021 session. The new law became effective Jan. 1, 2022, and recycling program changes will start in July of this year.

The goal is to make recycling easier for the public to use, expand access to recycling services, upgrade the facilities that sort recyclables, and create environmental benefits. Some higher-population areas like Boardman and Hermiston will receive curbside recycling service. More rural areas will still see an upgrade in recycling availability.

The bill also requires manufacturers of paper and plastic packaging products to help pay for recycling programs.

Pointer said the downside will likely be a higher cost of goods as producers pass on the cost. However, she said she felt the change was basically positive.

“Right now, we don’t have the funds to haul it,” she said. “We do want to collect it and get it disposed of properly.”

“I know we’re rural. I know it’s hard to get this stuff out, but I like to see this coming in,” added Pointer.

Pointer told the commissioners that there is a certain amount of funding each county or region can receive. In addition, local haulers can receive their own producer responsibility organization (PRO) funding.

Local governments can choose to receive PRO compensation directly and distribute it to service providers or other eligible entities, or they can authorize these entities to receive funding directly from the PRO.

Morrow County opted to authorize Miller and Sons and Waste Management to receive the PRO funds directly. This could help haulers a lot as costs rise; Pointer said recycling containers, for instance, are now around \$15,000 each.

“This gives authorization for them to get access to funding for them to get recycling bins, maybe trucks, maybe extra people,” she said.

The county also remains eligible for its own funding to upgrade recycling systems.

The two commissioners present also revisited

Morrow County’s stance on artificial intelligence (AI) when they discussed a draft policy regarding the use of AI in county government.

Morrow County BOC Chair David Sykes said he wasn’t looking for approval of a policy at the March 5 meeting, but he wanted the board and staff to discuss what AI is going to be used for in the county. He said he personally has been using AI like ChatGPT for two years.

“I find it really useful in business,” he said.

Sykes said he thought it could make the county workforce more efficient, and that he suspected there might already be employees using it. He said he wanted to discuss what AI applications are out there and what other counties are doing with AI.

“It’s not going away,” Sykes added. “There will be more and more.”

He said his hope was that commissioners could sit down with staff and discuss how AI could be used and then write a policy to reflect that.

“We don’t want to break any laws or go against any HR rules,” Sykes added.

Morrow County Human Resources Director Lindsay Grogan said she also wasn’t ready for the policy to be approved and thought a team would be beneficial.

“More people are going to be using it,” agreed Grogan. “I think our role is just making sure we’re using it responsibly, legally and ethically for the county.”

Grogan had presented a draft policy at the meeting, and Morrow County Commissioner Gus Peterson said he thought the draft was a good way to start.

“It seems like we’re in a good spot to start with,” he said.

By consensus, the board agreed that Sykes, Grogan and Morrow County Administrator Matt Jensen should form the team to work on the policy.

Also at the meeting, the BOC approved several full-time equivalent and reclassification requests for the coming fiscal year. Grogan said the personnel review committee had received nine requests and

narrowed them down to four recommendations.

The approved requests included a weed control applicator, janitor, human resource assistant and district attorney legal assistant.

The total cost for the county is \$504,885, which includes a previous out-of-cycle approval of \$138,385 for the risk & procurement manager.

The BOC also ratified the 2024-2028 collective bargaining agreement with Morrow County general employees, Local 2479-002.

“This process did take nearly 10 months, and it had extensive discussions,” said Grogan. “but I think in the end we aligned priorities and were able to come to a mutual agreement.”

Morrow County Public Works Director Eric Imes reported the road crew dedicated numerous days to plowing and sanding roads in February. Additional tasks included removing and burning weeds along shoulders and ditches, pothole patching, replacing road signs, and repairing culverts and cattle guards.

The blade operators also began blading gravel roads to improve road conditions. Meanwhile, staff approved several permits for work in the right-of-way, approaches and utilities, including for the Boardman-to-Heminway (B2H) transmission line project.

During public comment at the meeting, North Morrow resident Sue Oliver said she was concerned about the local government’s failure to do its “most basic functions.” Specifically, she said she was concerned about recent events at the Columbia Development Authority.

“I am horrified by what’s happening on that board,” she said, adding that she only saw one out of five board members advocating for the public at the last meeting. “My representative, the Morrow County Representative, sat there in utter silence the whole meeting.”

“We elect you to represent us,” she added.

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