

Lexington council discusses CREZ funds, water system progress, and work sessions

During its April 8 meeting, the Lexington Town Council held a wide-ranging discussion on upcoming budget priorities, water system upgrades, and how to better structure council work.

Mayor Shiela Miller opened discussion about the town's recent allocation of CREZ (Columbia River Enterprise Zone) funds, stating her belief that some of the money should be directed to the fire department. Lexington's fire department did not receive a separate allocation because it does not have its own board apart from the city council.

Councilor Katie Imes noted that, historically, CREZ funds had gone into the water reserve fund for infrastructure improvements and suggested the fire department could consider forming a separate board. Miller pushed back on that idea.

"The board manages the money and the assets. Which is what we do," she said. "We manage the money and the assets. We need to think about, some of this money should go to the fire department."

Councilor Will Lemmon said the allocation of funds should be a topic for the budget committee, not the regular council meeting.

Miller also reported progress on the income survey needed for grant applications related to the town's water system upgrades. After taking over the survey effort herself, she said she has already completed more than half the required responses.

"It will take longer than expected," she said, "but they missed entire streets, including Main Street," referring to the company originally hired for the project.

"I wish we could get our money back from them," Lemmon added.

Senior engineer Brad Baird of Anderson Perry & Associates provided an update on the town's water project, noting they had spent time earlier that day reviewing lines and system components. He said the full design should be finished by summer or early fall.

"To be well ready if you get any funding for both the well and the rest of the project," Baird said. "I mean, the well design is done and approved. It's ready to go. It'd be great if we could drill the well, but I'd hate for you to spend more than

you would have to out of your nest egg."

The town is actively pursuing grants to fund the new well and related improvements, with the income survey being a key part of that process.

Maintenance Director Larry Hess reported that he has sprayed approximately 250 gallons of weed control around town so far this spring and is scheduled to take his sprayer certification test. He also plans to borrow a mini excavator from Morrow County Public Works in June to clear the Blackhorse drainage canal.

Hess said he had researched a potential roadway vacation after a resident inquiry. Miller also raised concern about overgrowth of hemlock along the creek, saying, "We've got to do something. It's going to be horrendously out of control."

Town Recorder Autumn Crumpton told the council she has been reviewing and cleaning up the town's budget in preparation for the first budget committee meeting on May 5. She confirmed the 2024 financial report was submitted on time.

"So technically we are all caught up on our financial stuff," said Crumpton.

Mayor Miller proposed adding work sessions to the council's schedule to allow the council to discuss complex issues in more depth.

"Some of the things that we vote on up here and do, you know, it makes this meeting very long and we sometimes don't feel like we can give our opinion on everything," said Miller. "And I think that a work session beforehand on some things would really be nice."

Councilor Imes supported the idea and suggested a session focused on comparing budgeted versus actual expenditures. She also stressed the need for a clear agenda at each work session.

"I know how easy it is to get off on a tangent and end up a mile down the road from where you really want to be," Imes said. "Here's the discussion topic. What outcome do we want from that discussion?"

The first work session is scheduled for Tuesday, April 30 at 6 p.m. The first budget committee meeting is May 5, and the next regular council meeting will be May 13 at 6 p.m.

Port of Morrow to review water treatment options

BOARDMAN, OR—The Port of Morrow is looking at alternative secondary water treatment options since it will no longer be applying industrial wastewater to farmland during winter months.

"We made decisions about secondary water treatment when our DEQ permits allowed us to continue to apply water during the winter season until 2026," explained Port of Morrow Executive Director Lisa Mittelsdorf. "When the Port decided to end winter application a year early, it accelerated construction of lagoons large enough to store water during the winter season."

"Since we no longer will apply water during the winter season, we can focus secondary treatment on the water that is used for land application for

crops," Mittelsdorf said. "There are other options that can achieve an optimal balance of nitrate levels that is beneficial to our farming partners and meets the requirements of our permit."

The Port processes wastewater from local food processors for reuse as irrigation for five farms near the Port's Boardman site. Nitrates in wastewater supply nutrients to crops and allow the farmers to reduce the use of chemical fertilizers.

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