

Courthouse update

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can we just say, look, the number is going to skyrocket and we need to plan for it appropriately?" he asked.

The team reiterated that estimates would be refined at each design phase and emphasized that current figures were conservative and included contingencies.

"There is a risk," said Bouten Construction Project Manager Patrick Bestebreuer, "but we're trying to mitigate that risk as much as possible."

Alliance's Doug Carl added that he had been involved in many projects, and the numbers in the schematic design phase were always the highest because of built-in contingencies, with costs expected to get lower throughout the process.

"We certainly share your concerns. You guys were very clear at the last meeting where we presented some costs. We realized there was some shock factor there," said Carl. "You gave us marching orders. So we've been working really hard to hold to that and obviously present options that either get us to that number or even below it right now."

He also added that, if it came down to the worst-case cost scenario, the county was not required to move forward with construction.

One major cost-saving proposal involved removing or shelling the justice court suite—an option supported by the justice of the peace—to bring the project back within budget.

"If either of those were taken, we would see a path back to our budget," said Bestebreuer.

Those options would keep the justice court in the current historic courthouse, at least for the time being. Shelling would preserve future expansion opportunities, especially given site limitations.

"This makes the most sense, I think; \$2.5 million for the justice court is a tremendous expense when we have what works adequately," put in Morrow County Justice of the Peace Glen Diehl. "Everybody else moves out, adjust some

things for the justice court to still function in our historic court."

BOC Chair David Sykes agreed that removing the justice court from the project was the best option. However, the design team asked for permission to move forward with shelling out the space, at least for now, since that would be the only space available for any future expansion.

When it came to cutting costs, Morrow County District Attorney Justin Nelson also expressed concerns over the roughly 1,000 square feet designated for public defense attorneys, saying the state mandate might not align with local needs.

Nelson noted that the county does not employ full-time public defenders; instead, it contracts with Blue Mountain Defenders, whose attorneys work out of Hermiston and typically only visit the courthouse one day per week.

"I was kind of surprised," said Nelson. "All they've ever asked for is a single drop-in office to meet with clients. This space has three offices, a workstation, and a bathroom. It won't be used except on court days."

The additional space, Nelson argued, represents an unnecessary expense and reflects broader concerns about state-mandated requirements that may not be tailored to Morrow County's operations.

Morrow County Administrator Matt Jensen said the public defense allocation was based on minimum space standards required by the Oregon Public Defense Commission (OPDC). In fact, the current suite design is slightly under the 1,000-square-foot requirement, and discussions with OPDC are ongoing to explore potential adjustments.

The board agreed to move forward with current design plans and the shell of the justice court space but committed to revisiting the issue during the next project milestone in July, when cost estimates are reviewed.

Bouten hopes to have the gross maximum price set by the end of the year and to break ground by early 2026.

Spiritually Speaking

Father Thankachan Joseph



With Christ we are Heros & Without Jesus we are Zeros!

In this week's Gospel, the disciples were frightened and disappointed and disheartened at the death of their leader, Jesus. Led by Peter, they turn to the fishing in a small boat from which they were called to be fishers of men. They toil the whole night but couldn't catch anything and, disappointed, they return to the shore and encounter the risen Christ, whom they don't recognize at first.

At the Lord's command, they lower the nets and bring in a huge catch—one hundred and fifty-three large fish. The number has significance, for early Christian writers said that the number implies that the Lord wants to include all people in His Church. St. Jerome (who was arguably the greatest Scripture scholar in the early Church) noted that zoologists of that time identified 153 species of fish. The number 153 indicates that the Lord wants us to bring people of every nation, language and ethnic group.

Jesus means His Church to be "Catholic," meaning universal, for everyone. Jesus has something for every human being. He alone can satisfy the deepest longing of each person. The Church by its nature is Catholic. You will find Christians in almost every nation of the world. Still, we have a long way to go in bringing all people to Christ. We might even feel frustrated that so many fish are slipping out of the net!

We have a lot to learn from today's Gospel. They worked all night, caught nothing, but kept at it even though they did not see results. When they were bone tired, ready to call it a night—Jesus tells them to put out the nets. Like the apostles, we must do our required tasks, but also be ready for surprises, the Lord's unexpected presence. He can open possibilities—and even though we might feel exhausted and discouraged, that might be the moment of the greatest opportunity. Often as a priest I have seen the greatest results from something I did not plan or expect. Shakespeare said, "There is a tide in the affairs of men, Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune; Omitted, all the voyage of their life, Is bound in shallows and in miseries."

That also applies to our faith. There is a moment to let down the nets, to bring in a harvest of souls. To recognize that moment requires daily prayer, being attentive to the Lord's voice. Often people will tell me their concerns about their children or grandchildren who have fallen from the practice of the faith. I encourage them to spend time in prayer, especially before the Blessed Sacrament. Maybe they are not the ones to speak of this to a child or grandchild. Maybe the Lord will send someone else or touch their hearts in a more direct way. Our main task is to listen to the Lord and be prepared to speak or act when He tells us. To quote again from Shakespeare: "the readiness is all." We must be ready to hear the Lord's voice and act.

There is something more: we also must keep the boat and the nets in good repair. I remember my fishing experience with Jim Swanson and his son-in-law Matt in the Columbia River. I spent about a half day with them just fishing for fun. I also fished with a family in Kerala, India, for whom fishing was their only livelihood. They looked for the best times to cast their nets and spent time tending their nets, making sure there were no places where legal-sized fish could escape. And of course, they were constantly checking their boat to make sure everything was in order.

You and I must do the same. We must keep our faith communities in good repair. Not just the buildings and grounds, of course, but our programs and people. We must pray for vocations in the priesthood and be good examples by taking seminarians and pastoral ministers regularly to Holy celebrations. We must keep our boats and nets in working condition. To bring souls to Jesus, we must spend time—daily—praying and fasting and talking to them about the need of good shepherds. In that way keep the boat and nets in good repair. The readiness is all.

We are grieving over the sudden demise of Pope Francis and looking forward to the new leader who will be elected soon to guide the church forward in this 21st century.

Intro to Bible class starts next week

Hopeful Saints Ministry will begin a discussion class as an introduction to the Bible starting Tuesday, May 6, at 6 p.m. and continuing at the same time each week.

This informal gathering, led by Pastor Joann Dickson, is open to anyone who would like to know how the Bible relates to life today and to those who want to deepen their con-

nection with the scriptures.

"The Greatest Story" will be the book guiding the study, written for participants 12 years old and up. Participants are welcome to attend all classes, or just some.

Hopeful Saints Church meets at the corner of Gale and Church Streets. Enter at the ramp on Gale St. Need more info? Call the office: 541-676-9970.

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For Sale

\$415,000

This 0.77-acre property offers everything for animal enthusiasts, with a livestock pasture, year-round creek, two chicken houses, a barn with a lean-to, and a deer-proof garden with a greenhouse for year-round produce. A 10x12 storage room.

The 5-bedroom, 2.5-bath home, including a master suite, features modern updates like new flooring, hardy plank siding and new windows.

Energy-efficient ductless heating and cooling. Outside, rock retaining walls, a tool shed, and a partially finished basement add function and flexibility. Located within city limits, it's a short walk to Main Street

Perfect for animal care, gardening, and quiet living, this move-in-ready property is a rare find.
580 S MAIN ST Heppner. MLS#: 629913772

Price Reduction

\$220,000

Discover a timeless treasure with this beautifully preserved Craftsman-style home, featuring 1,174 sq ft on the main level and an additional 1,008 sq ft in basement, perfect for storage or extra space to customize. This 2-bedroom, 1-bath gem combines classic charm with modern comforts, including a newer furnace, forced air heat, and a freshly painted exterior. Located in a prime spot near the school and within walking distance to downtown Heppner, this home provides both convenience and a sense of community. Experience small-town living with easy access to downtown. Don't miss the chance to make this spacious, character-filled home your own!
240 N COURT ST Heppner MLS#:24652848

MS Walk held Saturday



Heppner MS Walk Organizer Barb Orwick addresses participants at Hager Park on Saturday, April 26, at the beginning of the MS Walk. Merilee McDowell of Heppner first started the Heppner event in 1997 and ran it for 20 years, but Orwick has set about reviving the walk in recent years. -Photo by Phillip Pacheco

ICABO to host candidates forum

The Ione Community Agri-Business Organization (ICABO) will host a public candidates forum on Wednesday, May 1, at 7 p.m. at the Ione Legion Hall. Candidates running for positions with the Port of Morrow, Morrow Coun-

ty Health District, Ione School District, Ione Library Board, and other local special districts have been invited to attend and share their vision for the future of the county ahead of the May 20 special district election.

BUCKNUM'S TAVERN
146 N Main Street
Heppner
541-676-5274

Lunch & Dinner Menu

4/24 - 4/30

Thursday - Chicken Strip, bacon, ranch sandwich with jojos
Friday - meatball sub with salad
Saturday - Turkey & bacon salad with garlic bread
Sunday - Closed
Monday - pulled pork nachos
Tuesday - vegetable lo mein with egg roll
Tuesday Night 6-9pm \$2 hard shell tacos
Wednesday - Grilled ham and Swiss on rye with mac n cheese

Seniors Matter April/May Menu

April 28 - Stuffed Baked Potato Bar and Dessert

May 6 - Baked Pasta, Garden salad, Garlic bread and dessert

May 13 - Hot Turkey Sandwich, Mashed potatoes, Pea salad, Dessert

May 20 - Taco Bravo Bar, Spanish Rice and Dessert

May 27 - BBQ Beef Sandwich, Jojo potatoes, Coleslaw and Dessert

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