



# the HEPPNER GAZETTE TIMES

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## Heppner raises fees, approves employee incentive

By Andrea Di Salvo

Money was top-of-mind for the Heppner City Council at its May 12 meeting as the council voted to approve increases in fees and utilities and create an employee longevity incentive, along with raising the stipend for the Heppner Fire Chief and assistant fire chief.

The city will implement a 3.2 percent utility fee increase effective July 1 of this year. The base rate for water usage for city water (0-2499 gallons) will increase from \$30.27 to \$31.24. Usage increments will see a similar increase of between one and two dollars—\$40.63 for 2500-4249 gallons, \$50.02 for 4250-6134 gallons and \$59.52 for 6135-7500 gallons.

Sewer rates will rise from \$46.78 to \$48.28. The average water and sewer bill with water usage less than 7500 gallons will range from \$83.49 to \$113.18. Usage over 7500 gallons will be billed an extra \$1.14 per 100 gallons.

For several years, the city has implemented small yearly increases to avoid the consumer sticker shock of five- or 10-year increases. Like everything else, the cost to provide utility services continues to go

up—the increase reflects the average 2024-2025 inflation rate of 3.2 percent.

Heppner City Manager John Doherty and Heppner Public Works Director Chad Doherty recommended the rate increase based on Consumer Price Index (CPI) calculation tool provided by the Oregon Association of Water Utilities (OAWU). The rates are based on those from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, which began tracking the CPI for water and sewage maintenance in 1952.

Along with the utility rate increase came an increase in permit and application fees. John Doherty said that the cost of everything involved in those things had gone up with recent inflation. Such costs include administration, mailing and public notification costs, among others. He also suggested higher fees might urge applicants to take the process more seriously and attend planning commission meetings.

Conditional use permit applications, variance permit applications, special land use permits (flood hazard development) and minor land partitions will all carry a \$300 fee. Noise

permits will cost \$20.

The new fees took effect immediately.

Perhaps the most interesting financial discussion was the city's new attempt to improve employee retention through an employee longevity incentive.

John Doherty pointed out that some employee classifications don't have the opportunity for wage increases except for cost-of-living adjustments.

Doherty said he looked at the incentive as something that would recognize service, boost morale and help with retaining employees.

The incentive, which is for hourly, non-exempt employees, will be in addition to each employee's hourly wage and will be calculated at 10 cents an hour times the number of years' service.

For instance, an employee who has worked for the city one to two years will receive an extra 10 cents an hour. An employee who has stayed with the city 12 years will earn an extra \$1.20 per hour in addition to their base wage.

The incentive won't exceed 40 hours a week and will be for straight time only—for instance, it won't be subject to overtime calculations.

The new incentive is designed to recognize the dedication of long-term employees and encourage valuable staff to stay working for the City of Heppner.

John Doherty said the incentive would cost the city roughly \$7,200 the first year. After that, it would be an additional \$1,320 per year if all the current employees stay with the city.

The personnel committee discussed the idea before passing recommending it to the council. The council unanimously passed a resolution adopting the change to the personnel policy manual. It takes effect with work hours beginning July 1 or after.

In other business, the council approved a three-year extension to a contract the city has with Willow Creek Park District to provide maintenance for the park district's facilities. In return, the park district will pay the city \$9,250 per quarter for a total of \$37,000 yearly.

The council also approved the purchase of a utility box for the city's 2018 Ram pickup for \$13,702.

The next meeting of the Heppner City Council will take place June 9 at 7 p.m. at Heppner City Hall.

## The Heppner Gazette will be closed Monday, May 26th for Memorial Day

Please send in all your stories and ads by Friday, May 23rd. Thank you.

## Catch up on the May Day celebration pictures page 8.



Lexington May Day parade entry. -Photo By Andrea Di Salvo

## MCHD issues statement on departure agreements

Morrow County Health District has issued the following statement regarding recent departure agreements:

"There has been public discussion about the departure agreements involving two of the district's chief administrative leadership employees. As the agreements state, it was understood and required by the departing employees that these agreements be made public without the need for public demand or request. It is important to understand that the leadership positions they held are executive in nature and, for that reason, departure agreements like this involve negotiation of

a comprehensive severance package.

"The length of severance reflected in those agreements are considered standard in the industry and take into account the extensive contributions and accomplishments those employees made while working for the district. These details are also included in the agreements. Finally, a release of all potential claims is also standard in any severance agreement. There is nothing unique about the terms in these agreements. They are in keeping with industry standards and the district's past practices."

## 2025 East-West Shrine Game selections celebrated at Heppner Masonic Lodge



Heppner players take a minute to pose with their coach Greg Grant. (L-R) Mason Orem, Greg Grant and Nick Wenberg. -Contributed Photo.



Jesus Arellano from Stanfield (L) and Coach, Ruben Harris pose for a photo after dinner. -Contributed Photo



A special Shrine game cake was made to celebrate the day. -Photo by Merlin Hughes



Cody High in his customary Shiner Fezz hat speaks to the players and families. -Contributed Photo

On Sunday evening, May 18, 2025, the Heppner Masonic Lodge #69 in Heppner, Oregon, hosted the annual Shrine player dinner, a gathering to celebrate the high school football players selected for the 2025 East-West Shrine All-Star Football Game. Set for July 26 in Baker City, the game marks the 74th year of a tradition that combines athletic excellence with support for Shriners Children's Hospital. The Shrine dinner brought together players, families, coaches, and local Shriner members for a steak dinner, a presentation, and

straightforward talk about the hospital's mission.

Heppner's Nick Wenberg secured a spot as a player for the all-star football game, with Mason Orem also from Heppner selected as an alternate, while Stanfield's Jesus Arellano also earned a place on the roster. Their coaches, Greg Grant of Heppner and Ruben Harris of Stanfield spoke, praising their players' character, discipline, respect, and dedication to community above their athletic achievements. Each player took the opportunity to stand and speak, ex-

pressing gratitude to their families, coaches, and the Shriners for the honor and opportunity to participate in the game. It was mentioned that Grant, who recently retired as Heppner's coach, sent more players to the Shrine game during his career than any other coach in the nation.

The dinner paused for a presentation on Shriners Children's Hospital in Portland, founded in 1924 as the Shriners Hospital for Children. Born during the polio epidemic, it was

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## Columbia River Health welcomes Good Shepherd investment in Boardman

Boardman, OR—Columbia River Health has issued a statement saying it is excited that Good Shepherd Health Care System has officially purchased land in Boardman.

"For many years Columbia River Health has collaborated and partnered with Good Shepherd Health Care System to better serve patient needs," CRH said in a press release. "With the addition of this new property, the organizations are poised to strengthen that collaboration and meet the demands of a growing population."

Sheila Corpus, CEO of Columbia River Health, stated, "We view this as a wonderful opportunity to work more closely with

Good Shepherd. They have always been dedicated to helping us meet the needs of our patients. Having them as 'neighbors' will be a game changer not only for our patients but for the entire community."

As future plans for the newly acquired land unfold, Columbia River Health says it looks forward to supporting and complementing these efforts—ensuring that local families continue to have expanded access to quality care, close to home.

Columbia River Health is a nonprofit, federally qualified health center serving Morrow County and beyond with primary care, dental, behavioral health and preventive services.



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