



Heppner votes to sell land for two projects

Move opens the door for new library, day care

By Andrea Di Salvo

The Heppner City Council voted Monday night to move forward with two land deals, one for a proposed new library building and one for a new day care facility in Heppner.

The Oregon Trail Library District (OTLD) was given an option to purchase city-owned property at the corner of Chase and May streets. The plot is currently an empty gravel lot used for parking.

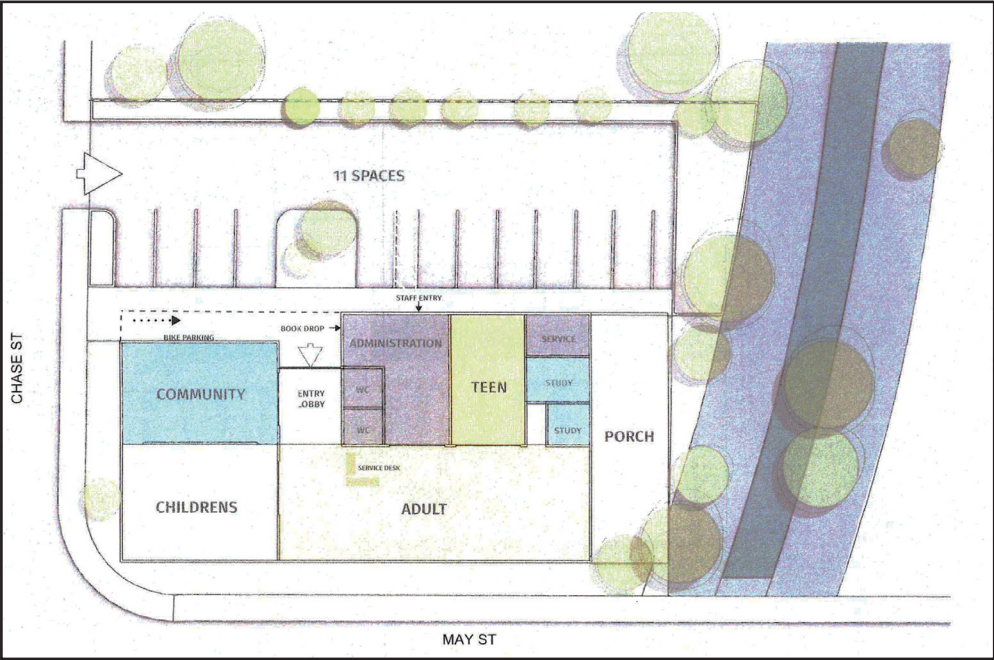
Meanwhile, the council agreed to sell Heppner Day Care (HDC) about half an acre of land that’s currently part of Hager Park, with certain contingencies.

OTLD Director Kathy Street had previously approached the board about using part of Heppner City Park for a new library building. However, pushback from both the city and the public put a stop to that idea.

Street was at the June 9 meeting to discuss options for a new library building on the corner lot beside Willow Creek. She presented two design options, one with a porch along the creek and one with a courtyard behind the entry lobby.

Street said she preferred the porch design, since the courtyard would break the line of site between the adult and children’s sections of the library. However, she said she would be in town to gather public input on Museum Day this Saturday, June 14.

Both versions of the design would have a community room that would be available for reservation after hours. The planned



Design option 1: porch scheme. - Contributed Image

building would have a gross area of 5,362 square feet compared to the existing library, which has only 1800 square feet. It would also have 11 off-street parking spaces.

Street said the process ahead of the library district was to acquire land, work on the final design and then work with a consultant to find funding and put the project out for bid—not a process that would finish any time soon.

“Probably not next year, or the year after,” she told the council.

Heppner Mayor Corey Sweeney asked if the land could be returned to the city if the construction fell through for any reason, and Street said the library board would likely agree to that.

After a brief discussion in executive session, the city council voted unanimously to give the OTLD a three-year option to buy the

plot for a new library, with the land remaining with the city if the library doesn’t use it in that time.

The choice to grant a portion of Hager Park to Heppner Day Care was a more difficult decision, with the city’s need for more childcare balanced against the loss of precious green space within the city.

HDC Board Chair Katie Murray told the board that the day care didn’t make the request lightly. The childcare facility started researching expansion nearly two years ago. Despite making headway with funding—more than \$1 million committed so far—HDC has stumbled over finding suitable property in Heppner.

“We have, for those two years, tried to find somewhere to put it,” said Murray. “We’ve worked really hard to not take any kind of existing city asset

away, and we understand that that field is a nice park, so we’re not coming to you without a lot of efforts to find a space that going to fit our needs and also the community needs.”

The day care board told the council that Morrow County is classified as a childcare “desert,” defined as a county in which fewer than 33 percent of the children have access to a childcare slot. That percentage drops to 14 percent when considering zero- to three-year-olds.

In fact, HDC board member Petra Payne said Heppner Day Care is the only nonprofit certified childcare center in South Morrow County.

“That comes with the licensing and some higher expectations and stipulations that we’re trying to meet, and we’d like to

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County cancels public hearing for CDA annexation into BFRD

The Morrow County Board of Commissioners has cancelled the public hearing scheduled for June 11 at 9 a.m. to discuss the Columbia Development Authority’s (CDA) application to annex portions of their property into the Boardman Fire Rescue District (BFRD).

The application was made under ORS 198.857, which outlines a property owner’s right to annex property into a fire district. The application requires a public hearing to be held within 20 to 50 days of receipt. This was the original intent of the public hearing on June 11.

Irrigon Rural Fire District (IRFD) has filed a legal challenge to this annexation. IRFD holds that annexation should follow ORS 478.702, which was adopted into law in 2023.

Unfortunately, this places the county in a position where two processes are provided for annexation in statute without a clear priority outlined for which would prevail.

Each of the three par-

ties—the CDA, BFRD and IRFD—have agreed to have a judge make a ruling on which statute takes precedent.

With that agreement made, and a judge since signing a temporary injunction, the board of commissioners cancelled the public hearing during their meeting on June 4. The BOC says it will wait for the determination from the courts or until July 31, as stipulated in the agreement between CDA, BFRD and IRFD.

“Morrow County appreciates the interest and passion on this issue,” the county said in a statement. “The board of commissioners is dedicated to preserving legal rights of property owners and is committed to following the law as outlined in ORS and the county code. The county looks forward to the legal resolution of this annexation dispute.”

For more information, please contact the Morrow County Administration Office at 541-676-2529 or email mjensen@morrow-countyor.gov.

New DMV scam on the rise

If you receive a text message or email from Oregon DMV telling you to ‘Pay Now,’ don’t click any links—it’s a scam



not pay by a certain date, you will face vehicle registration suspension, suspended driving privileges, service fees and damage to your credit score. The scam says to pay immediately before enforcement to avoid license suspension and further legal disputes.

“Oregon DMV will never ask you for personal information or payment through an unsolicited text, email or phone call,” said Crabb. “DMV transactions should only be completed online at dmv2u.oregon.gov or in person at a DMV office.”

Oregon DMV offers secure online services and sends text or email messages in some instances, but only for transactions that you start, and the messages never include links to confirm personal information or payment. We would only ask for proof of identity or payment through DMV2U or by requesting copies of your identity documents in person at a DMV office.

SALEM – If you receive a text message or email from Oregon DMV requesting payment or personal identifying information, do not respond or click any links. The best course of action is to ignore, delete and block the message.

“These messages are not from Oregon DMV,” said Oregon DMV Public Information Officer Chris Crabb. “These are fake messages designed to get you to click on a link and provide personal information or send money.”

In the latest scam, bad actors are claiming you have an outstanding traffic ticket or other violation. The text cites a phony Oregon State Administrative Code and claims if you do

Bowles said.

He added that writing policies was a small part of the process.

“To the office, following all that policy, procedures and reports throughout the three years, that’s a big part of the work,” said Bowles. “It’s more on my agency and my team, not me. So, a big part of the credit goes to them.”

“It’s one thing to have the rules. It’s another thing to follow them,” agreed Wenholtz, congratulating the MCSO on showing a high level of professionalism.

All three commissioners congratulated and thanked the sheriff and his team for the work that went into the accreditation

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Hard work pays off for MCSO with department accreditation

By Andrea Di Salvo

Morrow County Sheriff’s Office and the Morrow County 9-1-1 Communications Center have received professional accreditation from The Northwest Accreditation Alliance.

Northwest Accreditation Alliance Executive Director Scott Hayes presented the accreditations to MCSO at the Morrow County Board of Commissioners’ meeting June 4 in Heppner. This is the second accreditation the sheriff’s office and dispatch have received through the organization.

The Northwest Accreditation Alliance is an organization that provides professional standards for law enforcement and 9-1-1 communications agencies in Oregon and Alaska. It was formed as the Oregon Accreditation Alliance in April of 2001 and changed its name to Northwest Accreditation Alliance in January 2024.

Created under the direction and authority of the Oregon Association Chiefs of Police, the Oregon State Sheriff’s Association and the Association of Public Safety Communications Officials, the Alliance is designed to evaluate and improve law enforcement agencies’ overall performance. It does that by establishing and measuring professional standards of



L-R: Morrow County Board Chair David Sykes, MCSO Lt. Nathan Braun, Morrow County Undersheriff Brian Snyder, Morrow County Sheriff John Bowles, Sgt. Sarah Baker, Lt. Kristen Bowles, and Morrow County Commissioners Gus Peterson and Jeff Wenholtz, with Scott Hayes on the screen in the background. -Contributed photo

accountability, management and operations.

“Law enforcement is experiencing a changing society with the increased demands for police accountability and transparency,” said Hayes. “Our profession must face these challenges and work with our communities to address their concerns.

“Accreditation is one step toward building community trust in the legitimacy of our profession.”

To receive accreditation, MCSO had to adhere to 110 law enforcement standards, and the 9-1-1 communications center had to adhere to 56 standards.

“This is really a monumental step for any agency to be evaluated by an outside, independent organization and have its policies and procedures scrutinized,” said Hayes.

“This is quite an accomplishment for any law enforcement agency,” added Morrow County Sheriff John Bowles.

Bowles said MCSO first started the process in 2016.

“When we got into it... it’s a lot of work,” Bowles said.

The accreditation involved both having appropriate policies and procedures and proving the departments could follow them over time. Bowles said they received their initial accreditation in 2022.

“Now you’ve got to maintain it and get all the reporting and the requirements for that three years, so when the reaccreditation comes up, you have all this proof that you’ve been following these rules and regulations and policies for that three-year period,”

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