

**Board of Commissioners Meeting
September 4, 2024
Bartholomew Building
Heppner, Oregon 97836**

Present In-Person Chair David Sykes, Commissioner Jeff Wenholz, Commissioner Roy Drago Jr., Matthew Jensen, Valerie Ballard, Gregory V. Goebel, Justin N. Nelson, Ben Tucker, Kevin Ince, Eric Imes; Non-Staff: John Doherty, Tess Ann Rehak, Judge Daniel Hill, Irma Solis, Kevin Payne, Kip Krebs, Doug Earl

Call to Order and Pledge of Allegiance 9:00 a.m.

Public Comment

John Doherty representing Willow Creek Valley Economic Development Group (WCVEDG), and City of Heppner read a letter from WCVEDG in support of constructing the Circuit Courthouse in Heppner at the proposed Fairgrounds location.

Terri Gentry of Heppner spoke in support of constructing the Circuit Courthouse in Heppner at the proposed Fairgrounds location.

Open Agenda No Items

Consent Agenda

a) Minutes: August 21, 2024

b) Community Counseling Solutions Contract for Mental Health and Addiction Services

Commissioner Drago noted an error in item a, Minutes: August 21, 2024, which said Commissioner Drago motioned to approve the Consent Agenda and Commissioner Drago seconded the motion.

Commissioner Wenholz motioned to approve item b on the agenda. Commissioner Drago seconded. Vote: Unanimous approval

Commissioner Drago motioned to approve the minutes from August 21, 2024 with the correction requested. Commissioner Wenholz seconded. Vote: Unanimous approval.

Business Items

Request for Funding from Lower Willow Creek Groundwater Recharge Project

Kevin Payne, District Manager, Soil & Water Conservation District; Kip Krebs, landowner

In 2022, the Board approved partial funding for a feasibility study for a water recharge project on Rhea Creek concerning irrigated land in Morrow and Gilliam Counties. Now the study is complete, and funding is needed for a full feasibility study for state funding for the project. \$39,000 is requested from County to reach \$50,000 which will be matched by Oregon Water Resource Department (OWRD).

In recent years, archival information was discovered of 5,640 acre-foot of water storage rights of Willow Creek. Water rights users can pull from where Willow Creek and Rhea Creek meet and can be pulled and stored up to the Columbia River amounting to over 1.8 billion gallons of water. Willow Creek water users typically run out of water around the first two weeks of July each year and the creek goes from 2,000 gallons per minute down to 400 gallons per minute

with parts of the creek drying completely in the summer. The increase in water availability would extend crop yields, allow for higher value crops, and increase revenue.

The study will assess the feasibility of developing an aquifer recharge project in the Lower Willow Creek Basin to improve water supply and irrigation. A similar storage technique is used on Butter Creek with about 30% of water loss but most of the water loss leaches into the aquifer. As water is pumped down for storage, it generates electricity helping to recoup costs.

Commissioner Wenholz motioned to fund \$20,000 on the condition landowners match \$19,000. Commissioner Drago seconded. Vote: Unanimous approval

Consideration for Circuit Court Site Location

Matthew Jensen, County Administrator

At the last meeting the vote was 2-1 to explore the feasibility of building the Boardman Annex. The proposed location is on two parcels of County owned land, next to a potato processing plant and adjacent to the SAGE Center. The fiscal impact estimate is an additional \$630,000.

Commissioner Wenholz motioned to site the Circuit Court Annex on County owned property in Boardman at Olson Road and Columbia Avenue. Commissioner Drago seconded the motion in order to discuss.

Commissioner Wenholz said County must provide good customer service, and with 80% of cases originating from the North end, courts should be available nearby. This location would also allow for the possibility of four additional jobs.

Vote: 2 ayes, 1 opposed. Motion carried.

Consideration for County Logo Design

Matthew Jensen, County Administrator

Morrow County uses the County Seal in place of an official logo. The seal is very detailed which can be distorted when used for projects and the idea of a less detailed logo was presented. Chair Sykes said with the courthouse decision having been made, it's best to leave the seal and logo alone. Commissioner Wenholz agreed and saw no reason to change.

Statewide Transportation Improvement Fund Discretionary Grant Application

Ben Tucker, Transit Manager

Statewide Transportation Improvement Fund (STIF) Discretionary Grants are a competitive source of funding for public transportation providers outside of the regular STIF funds received by Morrow County Public Transportation. STIF funds helped fund public transit between Heppner and Boardman and the Boardman route. The route currently runs six days a week and takes 45 minutes to complete in Boardman. The goal for the new grant is to expand service availability to seven days a week and decrease the time needed to complete the Boardman route with multiple buses.

The application requests a 10% match instead of the standard 20%. The county match can be pulled from the regular STIF money received.

Commissioner Wenholz motioned to submit the STIF Discretionary grant application for the 2025-27 funding cycle. Commissioner Drago seconded. Vote: Unanimous approval.

STIF Boardman-The Dalles

Ben Tucker, Transit Manager

As the state wishes to increase public transit, connecting citizens statewide. The proposed project would connect Morrow County's The Loop with Columbia Area Transit in the Dalles, which provides transportation between The Dalles and Portland. The request includes purchasing additional vehicles and would bring new jobs to County. This will be a daily fixed route with four trips a day, seven days a week. The additional The Loop service will be free of charge with small charges to connect to other services.

Commissioner Wenholz motioned to submit the STIF Discretionary application for Boardman-The Dalles connector for the 2025-27 funding cycle. Commissioner Drago seconded. Vote: Unanimous approval

2024-25 Transportation of Veterans in Highly Rural Areas Grant Agreement

Ben Tucker, Transit Manager

Oregon Department of Veterans Affairs submits for the Transportation of Veterans in Highly Rural Areas grant on behalf of rural counties every year, and Morrow County has been a subgrantee for several years in the amount of \$45,000. The Highly Rural Transportation program provides free transportation for veterans to and from medical appointments. The money is a zero match, reimbursement grant and goes toward driver salaries, fuel, insurance, and advertising.

Commissioner Wenholz motioned to approve the 2024-25 Transportation of Veterans in Rural Areas Grant Agreement. Commissioner Drago seconded. Vote: Unanimous approval.

Business Oregon Water/Wastewater Fund Award Letter

Matthew Jensen, County Administrator

Morrow County has been awarded two \$20,000 technical grants from Business Oregon to study potential water and wastewater systems in the West Glen area. Funding will be used to perform a feasibility study to provide solutions to mitigate nitrates found in residential well water. The County will issue a Request for Proposals (RFP) for the feasibility study and will conduct public outreach for community engagement.

Break: 10:36 – 10:50 AM

Department Reports

The Clerk's Report was postponed

The Public Works Report was presented by Eric Imes

Correspondence None

Commissioner Reports

Brief reports on Commissioner activity were provided

Executive Session

ORS 192.660(2)(i), to review and evaluate the employment-related performance of the chief executive officer of any public body, a public officer, employee or staff member who does not request an open hearing.

Chair Sykes then read the following:

Representatives of the news media and designated staff shall be allowed to attend the executive session. All other members of the audience are asked to leave the room. Representatives of the news media are specifically directed not to report on or otherwise disclose any of the deliberations or anything said about these subjects during the executive session, except to state the general subject of the session as previously announced. No decision may be made in executive session. At the end of the executive session, we will return to open session and welcome the audience back into the room.

Return to Regular Session

11:47 a.m.

No action was taken after the executive session. County Counsel, Justin Nelson added a second basis for the executive session under ORS 192.660(2)(f) which allows the Commission to meet in executive session to consider information or records that are exempt by law from public inspection.

Adjourn

11:49 a.m.