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Linn County completes Wheelhouse purchase

ALBANY — On Monday, Linn County finalized the purchase of the almost 25,000-square-foot Wheelhouse office complex at 421 Water Ave. NE in downtown Albany, Administrative Officer Darrin Lane told Commissioners Roger Nyquist, Sherrie Sprenger and Will Tucker Tuesday morning.

The final price was about \$6.25 million which comes from the American Rescue Plan Act. The previous owner was Ohanamula LLC, whose principals are Dave and Janet Johnson of Corvallis.

Board Chairman Nyquist said the purchase will help solve several space issues for the county.

He said that in recent years the county has looked at other buildings for two key reasons: the need for more space for the District Attorney's Office and for increased Courthouse security, especially for space rented for the state's Circuit Court offices and courtrooms on the third floor.

He added that the county extensively researched the possibility of building a new Justice Center or a courts/District Attorney's addition on the current Courthouse. Estimated cost was about \$30 million.

Nyquist said the purchase is another example of the county's commitment to "value" purchases, that meet county needs without adding a property tax burden. He said the last two bonds Linn County put before local residents paid for the Linn County Fair & Expo Center in Albany (1993) and the Edward C. Allworth Veterans Home in Lebanon (2010). Both are paid off.

In prior meetings, officials said the Wheelhouse purchase price is about one-fifth the cost of a Courthouse addition and well below what a new stand-alone building of its size would be.

Lane said he has been working with General Services Director Russ Williams researching space needs of each department or office. That information will be provided to the commissioners soon. There are numerous possibilities and combinations that could evolve.

After some remodeling, the county will be able to move some departments/offices into the Wheelhouse, but some areas of the building are leased and Lane said some leases don't run out for four years.

The county will receive rental payments from those businesses.

The Wheelhouse also has 84 parking spaces. The building opened in 2010 and has housed a number of different businesses.

In other business, the commissioners:

- Heard from people who are concerned with last week's board decision to require a 1-mile setback for any new large Confined Animal Feeding Operation (CAFO). The Planning Commission had approved a three-quarter mile setback, but the Commissioners enlarged that to 1-mile. Although the current issue is about a proposed large-scale chicken CAFO in the Scio area, the approved land use change would include all confined animal operations including beef, dairy, sheep etc. Dave Dillon of the advocacy group Food Northwest, said he didn't believe the county did enough outreach to bring more agricultural groups to the table, but the commissioners said this process has been talked about in public meetings for about two years and the agenda for meetings is widely publicized. Commissioner Sprenger said she did not receive a single email opposing the county's plan. All three commissioners said Linn County has a long history of supporting agriculture and that will continue, although on this issue, it appears the ag community itself is divided.

- Were informed by Fair & Expo Center Director Kris Barnes that November was very busy and December is the same. He said the Christmas Storybook Land had a big year, with almost 36,000 visitors who donated more than 25,000 food items to FISH of Albany. The Town & Country



Christmas Bazaar had a record 256 vendors (23 new ones) and a record 8,000 visitors. The event is so popular he is considering opening a second building for next year's event.

- Discussed the possibility of the county filing a formal complaint with federal agencies about the turbidity levels in the South Santiam River due to the drawdown of Green Peter Reservoirs by the Corps of Engineers to meet a federal judge's order concerning fish passage issues. Communities including Sweet Home, Lebanon and Albany have had to make extensive investments in purifying water due to that turbidity. Commissioner Tucker noted that the Corps of Engineers has already begun bringing the water level back up and the turbidity level in the river is improving. He noted there has been extensive sedimentation, thousands of fish have been killed and mud has covered vital spawning gravel beds.

- Approved renewal of the Emergency Management Performance Grant that provides about half of the funding for the county's emergency management personnel at the Linn County Sheriff's Office.

- Accepted grants from the InterCommunity Health Network to provide \$4,500 to the Harrisburg, Central Linn, Scio, Sweet Home, Santiam and Lebanon school districts. The funds will assist low-income families with power bills, food etc.

- Were told by Environmental Health Manager Shane Sanderson there were 71 births (42 females and 29 males) and 94 deaths in November.

- Approved funding transfers/grants presented by Treasurer Michelle Hawkins: \$14,000 within the Juvenile Department for psychological assessments; \$350,000 for rental income into General Services from the Wheelhouse purchase; \$10,750,000 for purchase of the Wheelhouse office complex, remodeling for the Linn County Veterans Services building and enlarging the female section of the Linn County Jail.

- Announced the Tuesday, Dec. 26 meeting will be moved to 9:30 a.m. on Wednesday, Dec. 27 due to the holiday weekend.

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