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## County intends to sell SH mill property in one piece

### *Will accept sealed bids until Jan. 27*

ALBANY — Linn County intends to sell the 146-acre former Willamette Industries mill site in Sweet Home by sealed bid in early February, Commissioners Roger Nyquist, Sherrie Sprenger and Will Tucker agreed Tuesday morning.

The trio had gone into the meeting with plans to partition some portions of the property and sell them individually. But members of the Sweet Home City Council asked the commissioners to reconsider that plan and sell the property — which the county foreclosed on 12 years ago in lieu of \$500,000 in back taxes — as one contiguous piece.

Council members present were President Pro-Tem Diane Gerson and Dave Trask, who spoke to the board, and Lisa Gourley.

County Property Manager Rachel Adamec said she could advertise the process immediately. The sealed bids will need to be in the county’s possession no later than 5 p.m. on January 27 and the commissioners will open the bids at their Feb. 1 meeting.

The commissioners’ actions Tuesday came after their joint meeting with the Sweet Home City Council on Nov. 9.

Over the years, Linn County has worked with the Department of Environmental Quality and Weyerhaeuser, which gave the property to the Western States Land Reliance Trust — which would become a failed housing development — to identify and mitigate areas of environmental concern.

But, several portions of the site still have contamination concerns and an unknown amount of mitigation costs, which has caused issues for potential buyers. The county has previously offered the site for sale and had an auction at which four proposals were rejected.

Councilor Gerson said the city is concerned that if the county sold the areas cleared of contamination issues by the DEQ, “the dirty” areas would never be cleaned up and “piece meal” the property would diminish its overall value.

The commissioners told her that would not be the case and the county would continue to work on contamination mediation until final DEQ approval is given.

The commissioners are concerned that if the property is sold as one unit, the new owner could partition off the contaminated areas into individual lots and cease paying taxes on those units.

In six years, Linn County could be forced to take the



*Tony Howell, who will retire Dec. 31 after 39 years with Linn County Alcohol & Drug Program, shakes hands with Board Chair Roger Nyquist. Also pictured is Senior Administrative Assistant Marsha Meyer.*

parcels back in lieu of unpaid taxes and during that time, there would be no contamination clean up, leaving both the county and city in no better position, environmentally speaking.

Chairman Nyquist reiterated his belief that a hot housing/property market will not last forever and it is time to get the property back into private ownership.

“The risk is waiting to get a clean bill of health from DEQ while the marketing opportunity goes away,” Nyquist said. Nyquist emphasized he was ready to sell the property as quickly as possible.

After a lengthy conversation, the commissioners asked the councilors to pinpoint what they wanted to see happen and they were told the City Council met Monday evening and agreed the property should be sold as one unit.

The commissioners unanimously agreed to make that wish come true.

The commissioners talked about whether to use an auction or sealed bid process to dispose of the property and chose to seek sealed bids.

In other business the commissioners:

- Presented Tony Howell with a plaque in honor of his 39 years of service to the county. Howell will retire at the end of December as head of the county’s Alcohol & Drug Department.
- Accepted a \$1.54 million grant from the Coronavirus State Fiscal Recovery Fund. The money will be used for a Fire Radio Improvement Project; the Lewis Creek Park water safety barrier; and to purchase a snow cat and trailer to provide access to radio

infrastructure in mountainous areas in snowy winter months.

- Were told by Alyssa Boles of the Planning Department that the county has waived about \$90,000 in permitting fees for residents who experienced fire losses in the Santiam Canyon. There were 13 single-family dwelling permits issued in October.
- Were told by Ryan Vogt, executive director of the Council of Governments that work is progressing toward merging COG with the Community Services Consortium. Staff members are meeting and discussing ways of co-managing and shared office spaces are being researched.
- Approved a rental agreement with Benton County for the use of the Sweet Home Health Services Building. Rent will increase from \$3,530 to \$3,965 per month. Approved an agreement with North Central University to provide practicum learning at the Master’s Degree level within the Mental Health Counseling Program. Approved an agreement not to exceed \$69,669 with Samaritan Health Services to provide substance abuse treatment services in east Linn County.
- Approved advertising for bids for the Shimanek Covered Bridge rehabilitation project.
- Approved advertising for Requests for Proposals for Linn County Audit Services.

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