



Linn County NEWS



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Linn County to sell SH mill site for \$800,000

ALBANY — Linn County Commissioners Roger Nyquist, Sherric Sprenger and Will Tucker agreed unanimously Tuesday morning to sell the former Willamette Industries mill site in Sweet Home to Sweet Home Real Estate Restorations for \$800,000.

At the board's Feb. 1 meeting, two bids were received. In addition to the bid from Sweet Home Real Estate Restorations there was a \$450,000 bid from Sweet Home Mill Site, whose principal is Scott Lepman of Albany.

County Property Manager Rachel Adamec told the commissioners the Sweet Home Mill Site bid did not comply with bidding criteria. Adamec said materials submitted to the county by Sweet Home Mill Site after the bidding deadline were not opened and could not be considered.

Owner Josh Victor said after the meeting that he intends to begin the process of developing a road system to provide access to the neighboring property Linn County has already given to the city of Sweet Home, the former Morse Bros (Knife River) rock quarry. The city plans to create a venue for the Oregon Jamboree and other community events at the 250-acre property.

Victor said his plans include both housing and commercial development of the 154-acre property.

Board Chair Nyquist provided a short summary of the history of the property, noting that in 2010, Linn County received the property in lieu of more than \$500,000 in back taxes per state statutes. Nyquist said former County Assessor Mark Noakes gave owner Dan Desler of Western States Land Reliance Trust nu-

merous "last chances" to make tax payments before the county was forced to foreclose.

Nyquist said the county realized an environmental assessment was needed at the site and that was accomplished with a \$360,000 grant from the Department of Environmental Quality. The county has been working with environmental agencies since that time and has mitigated most of the areas of concern.

Commissioner Tucker has previously said he believes the remaining areas of concern could receive an environmental approval within a year if the mitigation process were to continue.

In other business, the commissioners:

- Approved a 2.6% increase in a contract with Summit Food Services, which provide meals at the Linn County Jail.
- Were told by Alyssa Boles of Planning and Building, that the county has waived more than \$102,000 in permitting fees for homeowners affected by wildfires in the Santiam Canyon. She added that building permits issued in January were down slightly from the same month a year ago and total land used permits jumped 10% during the same month.
- Approved a refund of \$3,252.15 for Cordle Construction. Building was destroyed in wildfires.
- Approved an extension of an agreement with the Oregon Department of Transportation for work at Seven Mile Lane to December 2025 and extended an agreement with Western Federal Lands Highway Division for work on the North River

Drive Improvement Project (Sweet Home) to December 2024.

- Had considerable discussion about what to do with about three acres of the Willamette mill site that the city of Sweet Home had wanted for development of a homeless sleep center. The city became concerned because there had not been an environmental study on the site, changed plans and proposed creating a temporary sleep center behind city hall. That proposal was not well received by neighbors and was scrapped. Commissioner Tucker proposed giving the property to the Family Assistance and Resource Center Group, which assists homeless persons in east Linn County. The commissioners said they would encourage the city and FAC to bring a plan back to the board for consideration.
- Noted that the state may end its COVID-19 facemask mandate by late March and counties could have the option of maintaining a facemask requirement. Linn County has no intention of implementing such a mandate, Nyquist said.
- Announced they had participated in an executive session with the Marion County Board of Commissioners at noon on Monday. The agenda included discussion of possible litigation.

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