

March 24, 2025

Senator Daniel Bonham
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Representative Jeff Helfrich
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Dear Senator Bonham and Representative Helfrich,

I write to ask for your support, and for you to ask other legislators for their support, for state funding to help construct a joint City Hall / Fire Station in the City of Mosier (the Mosier Community Center). A joint committee of the City and Fire District, formed by an Intergovernmental Agreement, has been working on design and funding of that facility for over five years. It has assembled around \$8 million, and has a design, working, drawings, local and state government approvals, and contractor bids. The facility is in HB 3870 for a Capital Construction grant of \$2.5 million: that grant would complete the funding and allow construction to begin.

Sixteen years ago I moved to Mosier, where I have lived on and managed 20 acres of agricultural and forest land with my wife, son and daughter-in-law, and three grandchildren. I was one of the three founders of ECONorthwest, a consulting firm public policy and finance. That professional background got me involved in City and County policy:

- I have been working on some aspect of the Mosier Center continuously for over 12 years.
- I started when the Chief of the Fire District asked me to evaluate possible sites for a new Fire Station. I concluded that (1) there were substantial benefits, in theory, of locating in the City and combining a needed Fire Station with a needed City Hall; and (2) further evaluation was merited. I wrote a grant to the Oregon TGM program that got funds to conduct a preliminary evaluation of such a joint facility.
- I served on the Wasco County Economic Development Commission for five years. In two of those years, the Mosier Center was recommended to the County Commissioners as the top economic development project in the County.
- After the Union Pacific derailment, I led the creation an Intergovernmental Agreement among the City, Fire District, and School for the purpose of jointly negotiating a settlement with Union Pacific. I then chaired the committee created by that agreement, and was that committee's designated negotiator. The settlement ultimately created City and Fire District funds that were dedicated toward the creation of a joint facility.
- For the last five years I have facilitated all public meetings of the Mosier Center (Joint Use) Committee as it has worked to design and fund the facility.

There are more good things to do with State resources than there are resources to do them. Mosier must compete with other worthy projects and answer the question "Why should a region of only a few thousand people get \$2.5 million of state funds?"

- **Fire protection and emergency services for a globally unique natural resource.** The Mosier Fire District is part of a network of fire districts that protect the Columbia Gorge, a globally unique geological, hydrological, habitat, and cultural environment. Fires in the Gorge and throughout the Western U.S. have increased in number and severity. The steep and heavily forested area needs proximate and trained local firefighters. Mosier needs a fire station to attract and train volunteers, to protect and maintain its equipment, and to improve its ability to respond quickly and effectively to local and regional fires.
- **Economic development.** The Gorge economy has depended, and continues to depend on its natural resources; the economy of the West Coast depends on the only at-grade passage of trucks and trains through the Sierra Nevada / Cascade mountains.
- **Project Readiness.** Mosier has been working on this project for over a decade. It has 80% of the funding in-hand for an effective fire station and a multipurpose community facility that is worthy of the Gorge and its Scenic Area designation.
- **Leverage and lost opportunity.** The facility provides benefits to a population that is regional, national, and international. Mosier's small population does not have the financial resources to build this facility on its own. The facility will not get built without additional funding. Most of the federal, state, and foundation resources Mosier has secured are not transferrable to different uses; some can only be used for the facility as it is now designed and approved. At risk is \$2 to \$4 million dollars. The legislature can give the Gorge \$10-million facility for \$2.5 million. Absent that money, it is my strong opinion that there is no joint-use / community-center option that will make sense to both the City and the Fire District. We have been through three rounds of value engineering. The facility as planned will not be built. The City may have sufficient funds for a modest city hall. The Fire District will have to start over and address a series of difficult problems. Most importantly, having lost much of the funding previously secured and contingent on a joint-use facility and City financial support, it will not have the budget to secure land, build its own station to current standards, purchase necessary modern equipment, and provide basic amenities, training, and safety procedures to make being a volunteer a tenable option for more people in the Mosier Valley.

Many people in the Mosier area have worked hard to get this far. We have been one grant away from our goal before. To me, the State and this funding cycle looks like the last chance. I know we have your support, and we count on you to do what you can to encourage your colleagues to consider the full benefits to Oregon of our funding request. Thank you.
support

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