

HERMISTON

City will examine water management, how to keep up with growing need

Top users of water in Hermiston are mostly residential

By JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN
East Oregonian

As Hermiston grows, so will its need for water.

The city will update its water system master plan this year for the first time since 1996, and city leaders are optimistic that because of a unique partnership it will be able to keep up with increasing demand.

"We are lucky that we had some visionary leaders come before us," said Assistant City Manager Mark Morgan. "The city is the co-owner of a regional water system with the Port of Umatilla."

The city has not met the projected growth outlined in the current master plan and will begin an update in a few weeks to see if there's a point at which growth would become unfeasible because of a strain on the current system.

"It's good we haven't outgrown the system, but we want to update it and see if we need additional storage capacity," Morgan said.

The city's geographical makeup may provide some hurdles.

"You look on the west side of town, and there's some topographical changes," he said. "We're not as hilly as Pendleton, but the intake supply where we suck the water out of the river by the port of Umatilla — there's a huge pump that essentially shoves the water nine miles up the hill."

Morgan said transporting that water and treating it can be expensive, but having a reliable backup is critical.

The existing regional water system line the city can tap into is on the southwest side of town. The city hopes to extend lines toward the north and the east.

"Our goal is to ultimately link the regional water system at other points with the municipal system," he said. "To bring in more connection points would really help our resiliency in being able to provide the city itself with water, and reduce the price of the regional water system."



In this 2015 file photo, Hermiston Foods General Manager Trent Waldern stands in front of the business on Highway 395 in Hermiston. Hermiston Foods was the top water user in the city in 2016, using 115 million gallons.

Top water users in Hermiston

Hermiston Foods-Norpac	115,047,200
Village Park Graceland Holdings	24,591,100
Good Shepherd Medical Center	11,357,100
Uma. Co. 4th Street Aspens	9,050,500
Viewcrest Apts	8,623,600
Chateaubri Park	8,613,400
Able Farms RV Park	7,945,300
Pioneer RV	7,595,500
Sundial Apartments	7,354,800
Uma. Co. Foxwood Homes	6,567,900

Total number gallons of water used in 2016

All told, the city used 1.54 billion gallons of water in 2016. The top user was Hermiston Foods-Norpac, using 115 million gallons. Following that was Village Park Graceland Holdings at 24.6 million gallons and in third was Good Shepherd Medical Center, using 11.4 million gallons.

The other top users of city water were all residential facilities, including apartments, RV and mobile home parks.

Trent Waldern, the general manager of Hermiston Foods, said the level of annual water use for the company has been fairly consistent over the years.

"It fluctuates depending on our crops," he said. "This year, we'll probably have lower use because our crops are down. But we monitor it pretty closely, and monitor how many gallons we use per finished product."

Waldern said the company

monitors energy efficiency as well, and tries to look at ways to curb consumption.

"We're kind of looking at conservation measures all the time," he said. "We look at ways to get rid of equipment or things that use more water. It's not always easy. We had some bulk transport flumes, and we've taken some of those out and gone back to just using conveyor belts."

Doug Paine, the facilities director at Good Shepherd, said the number one use of water for the hospital is a cooling tower, which is used to cool the air in the building.

"It takes the heat out of the building, and uses it to evaporate water," he said. "That's how we make the building cool."

Paine said the cooling tower, which was introduced a couple of years ago, is more efficient than other types of air conditioners, but

it does take a lot of water.

"When things are going full out, and it's a hundred degrees outside, it takes 10 to 15 gallons of water a minute to maintain the temperature in the hospital," he said.

He said the hospital is held to certain specifications, but tries to conserve water, using low-flow toilets and other fixtures when possible.

Morgan said the way rates are structured with the regional water system, the more gallons purchased every year, the lower the cost per gallon.

The city of Hermiston recently set a new schedule for increased water rates. Fees went up by 5 percent in March 2017, and will increase by 5 percent in October 2017 and 4.9 percent in March 2018.

Morgan said one of the reasons for the rate increase is that the city will replace all water meters in the next six months with a cellular-based system.

"All the data the system brings in will instantly get sent to city hall," he said. "Currently, two-thirds of the city's meters are read by hand, so the new system will free up employees who read the meters to work on other water system maintenance projects," Morgan said.

Contact Jayati Ramakrishnan at 541-564-4534 or jramakrishnan@eastoregonian.com



Photo contributed by Athena Volunteer Fire Department
Firefighters extinguished a power pole fire Monday night in Athena.

Power pole fire causes blackout in Athena

East Oregonian

Approximately 846 customers were without electricity for several hours Monday night in Athena after a power pole caught fire, broke and collided with other nearby power lines.

Firefighters with the Athena Volunteer Fire Department responded to the scene at North Hunt and Sherman streets at approximately 9:18 p.m., but were unable to extinguish the blaze until crews from Pacific Power could arrive and turn off the electricity. Fires in Pendleton and Hermiston delayed their arrival.

During the wait, the top

of the power pole broke and caused a collision of wires that resulted in the failure. Power was restored around midnight.

The East Umatilla Fire Protection District, Helix Fire and the Umatilla County Sheriff's Office provided mutual aid.

More than 2,000 customers were without power in Hermiston earlier in the evening after a failure at the Hat Rock substation.

The Morrow County Sheriff's Office reported the storm sparked fires, and its wind and 50-mph gusts resulted in downed trees, power poles and lines, along with fires, but there were no reports of injuries.

HERMISTON

Electric, water meters to be replaced soon

By JADE MCDOWELL
East Oregonian

Hermiston residents will be getting new meters to track their water and electricity use beginning this summer and finishing by early next year.

The council previously approved a contract to install new remote-read water meters, and on Monday approved a contract with Landis + Gyr Technology for new electrical meters for Hermiston Energy Services that can also communicate remotely.

The cost of the electrical meters and their installation was rolled into a bond restructure that Hermiston Energy Services completed in 2016. Superintendent Nate Rivera said it will replace 5,300 meters, including 4,700 residential ones.

The total cost for the meters and installation is \$1,021,460. The city received six proposals from four vendors before choosing Landis + Gyr. Rivera said HES was able to come up with some significant cost savings from what was initially budgeted, leaving more money for other infrastructure improvements the utility has planned.

Installation of the new electrical meters will begin sometime in the fall and wrap up late 2017 or early 2018. HES customers will get a heads-up from the utility about when theirs will take place. Rivera said the disruption to customers should be minimal, as it only takes seven to 15 minutes to install each meter. Afterward, customers will have more detailed information about their power usage available and the utility will not have to wait for customers to call to know that there is an outage in a neighborhood.

Hermiston residents will also be getting new water meters in an unrelated project taken on by the city of Hermiston. The water meters can also be read remotely, allowing the city to reassign the two employees it uses to read meters to other work, and will create an online account for each customer to track their water usage in detail.

Work to replace the water meters will begin in July and finish around the end of September. It is being paid for by the water rate increase enacted in January and the savings from not having employees go out to read meters. The new meters will also be insulated.

On Monday the council also approved an updated franchise agreement with Charter Communications. Mark Morgan, the assistant city manager, said the agreement contains two main changes from previous agreements. The agreement will last for seven years instead of five, and language was added making it clear the city has the option of adding additional fees for internet.

Currently Charter only pays the 3 percent franchise fee on sales of cable, not internet, even though other companies such as Eastern Oregon Telecom and Centurylink pay on internet. Morgan said staff would like to come back to the council soon with an ordinance that would apply the franchise fee to internet, too, as more and more people consume television through that medium instead of paying for cable.

During the public comment section at the beginning of the council meeting, Karen Primmer asked that the city consider changing the name of Airport Way after Umatilla County made the decision to table a request to rename East Airport Road. The two similarly named roads near each other continue to cause confusion for people trying to find the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center.

Drotzmann agreed that he would like city staff to consider a name change to something like Municipal Airport Way or Hermiston Airport Way, but city manager Byron Smith said that the city "is not going to take away the confusion until we get rid of 'airport' in one name." Councilors said solutions to the road name issue was something they would like to discuss again at a later date.

Contact Jade McDowell at jmcowell@eastoregonian.com or 541-564-4536.

Elfering talks economic development, specific projects

By JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN
East Oregonian

Umatilla County Commissioner Bill Elfering took the stage at a Hermiston Chamber of Commerce luncheon to discuss the state of Umatilla County, particularly some of the economic development projects taking shape in the next few months. Some things to look for, he said, will be the construction of data centers and the arrival of new businesses to the area.

Elfering said he and County Planning Director Tamra Mabbott have been working on attracting companies with the potential to add lasting value to the area.

"We focus on supporting efforts to result in increased jobs, or that bring an event that enhances a community," Elfering said. "If there isn't some way it's going to come back and benefit us, we're not really looking at it."

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— Bill Elfering, Umatilla County Commissioner

projects that haven't been confirmed yet, but which the county hopes will work out.

One is "Project Red" — an agricultural produce facility.

"Eighty acres under a greenhouse," Elfering said. "They want to hire 200 full-time employees and 120 seasonal employees."

Elfering said the project is not finalized, and he couldn't reveal who the company was. He said they had approached Umatilla County about locating there because they liked the inexpensive electricity, access to water and sunshine. He said he couldn't give the specific location, but it would be somewhere in

west Umatilla County.

Another new business he anticipates is a "meadery," or a facility that produces mead, an alcoholic beverage made with honey.

"It's quite small, and it's local people," Elfering said. He said the facility, which also hasn't been confirmed yet, would be located in the Hermiston area as well.

He also mentioned the Umatilla Army Depot, which he said has received many offers from businesses that want to use the land. Unfortunately, the land remains in Army hands until the end of the year at the earliest. Elfering said that many of the other previous issues,

like water and sewer access at that property, have been taken care of.

"Water is now available," he said. "The cities of Hermiston and Umatilla will take on the sewer system."

Elfering mentioned job-creating projects such as the Ranch and Home store and the data centers run by Vadata, a subsidiary of Amazon, which have been approved for construction in Umatilla County.

"They plan to have three data center campuses in West Umatilla County, and each campus would have four data centers," Elfering said. "It's half a billion dollars total per data center. We're looking at \$6 billion worth of infrastructure growth, and 40 to 60 jobs in each building."

He said the addition of those facilities would double the value of Umatilla County.

He noted that the influx of family-wage jobs would not come without challenges.

"Housing is going to be critical," he said.

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