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EAST OREGONIAN

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 2015

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Umatilla land deal ends year-long conflict



Staff photo by E.J. Harris
The Port of Umatilla and the city of Umatilla have come to an agreement after a year of negotiations over the disputed property between Draper Road and the Big River Golf Course.

Port to sell disputed land

City agrees to pay \$176K for lot between golf course and port
By GEORGE PLAIVEN
East Oregonian

After months of negotiations with a mediator behind closed doors, the port and city of Umatilla have mended fences and agreed to resolve their year-old zoning dispute along the west side of Bud

Draper Road. Port commissioners voted Tuesday to sell the narrow strip of land to the city for \$176,000, stepping away from the conflict while avoiding a hearing before the Oregon Land Use Board of Appeals. The sale does not include property where Aramark Uniform Services already has its building. Umatilla City Council will vote to accept the deal at its meeting Tuesday, Feb. 17. City Manager Bob Ward said he expects they will approve the purchase.

If that does happen, it will be up to the city to determine how the property — located next to McNary Industrial Park — should be developed. Prior to the sale, the port wanted to build a 15,000-square-foot container warehouse north of Aramark, on the southwest corner of Bud Draper and Roxbury roads. Adjacent landowners, in particular the Big River Golf Course, raised concerns about having a noisy trucking operation close to their homes and businesses. The city later determined the area was

previously slated for residential development, despite its own map and comprehensive plan approved in 2012 that has it zoned industrial. The confusion was due to a mapping error that slipped through the cracks more than a decade ago, according to the city. Port Manager Kim B. Puzey accused the city of a bait-and-switch that left a \$1.5 million state grant for the project in jeopardy. Lawyers were called, and argued.

See PORT/8A

MILTON-FREEWATER Schools could consolidate by grade level

By ANTONIO SIERRA
East Oregonian

After closing its alternative schools last year, the Milton-Freewater Unified School District could be taking an even more dramatic step in consolidating its schools. Under a plan proposed at a school board workshop Tuesday, each of the district's three elementary schools — Freewater, Ferndale and Grove — would handle two grades for the entire district. Currently, all three schools run on a standard K-5 format. Milton-Freewater Superintendent Rob Clark began the meeting by throwing his support behind a consolidation. "I believe this is best for the district," he said. "I believe this is best for the kids. I just think that the pros outweigh the cons."

Board Chairman Michael Lesko said the move was intended to boost academic performance and ease the transition to middle school, where student performance has taken a nosedive.

According to the district's 2013-2014 report card, Central Middle School obtained a Level 2 rating, with 1 being the lowest and 5 the highest. In contrast, Freewater and Grove sported Level 4 ratings, although Ferndale was also rated Level 2. Ferndale Principal Ami Muilenburg said there could be other advantages to a reconfiguration. With a building supporting just kindergarten and first grade, the district would have the option of turning that school into an early learning center with a preschool. From her experience as the former special education director for the InterMountain Education Service District, Muilenburg said a school dedicated to younger students would give speech pathologists better access to students with speech problems. Due to their similar student population and demographics, Board

See SCHOOL/8A

HERMISTON Pet Rescue shelter complaints spotlight stray animal problem

By JADE MCDOWELL
East Oregonian

The Hermiston City Council and both supporters and opponents of Humane Society of Eastern Oregon Pet Rescue all agree that fewer stray animals on Hermiston streets would be a good thing. The disagreement is over

what to do about it. "We're not going to make everyone happy," city councilman John Kirwan said. The council discussed the fate of Hermiston's strays during their Monday meeting after City Manager Byron Smith gave a report on the city's contract with Pet Rescue. The animal shelter is on call to take in animals picked up by the Hermiston Police Department and handles the city's dog licensing program in exchange for about \$30,000 a year. Some residents had previously urged the city to re-examine that

"I was not only treated poorly but given no resource."
— Raelynn Moon,
Hermiston resident

contract, citing the shelter's 39 percent euthanasia rate and their concerns that the animals are kept in cramped quarters with too little exercise. Kirwan said there might be things Pet Rescue could do to lower its euthanasia

See ANIMAL/8A



Staff photo by E.J. Harris
Goodnight, deer
A pair of deer graze in a field in the late evening light on Tuesday in the wildlife area near McNary Dam outside of Umatilla.



Staff photo by George Plaven
Jeff Blackwood (left) addressed the crowd at the Eastern Oregon Forum Tuesday at Blue Mountain Community College, along with Mary Wister, David Powell and Chad Kruger (sitting).

PENDLETON Farms, forests changing with climate

By GEORGE PLAIVEN
East Oregonian

Climate change is driving management decisions on farms and forests across Eastern Oregon as warmer, drier weather impacts everything from explosive wildfires to reduced water for crops. A panel of experts had only enough time to scratch the surface of climate change in the Mid-Columbia Basin during Tuesday's Eastern Oregon Fo-

rum at Blue Mountain Community College. Their data included a range of models showing the Earth is getting hotter and that means more sustainable practices are needed to maintain a healthy landscape. In December 2013, the Umatilla County Board of Commissioners decided to renew their efforts examining the effects of climate change on local communities, economy and resources. This led to the creation of the Umatilla

See CLIMATE/8A

