

HERMISTON

Skate park concept rolls forward

By SEAN HART
EO Media Group

Hermiston officials are beginning to plan a new skate park and are looking to get input from the skater community before breaking ground.

Parks and Recreation Director Larry Fetter said he is working on acquiring property for the park, and he believes a high-visibility location near Hermiston Police Department would be ideal. The park would be designed for both skateboards and BMX bikes.

“I would love to have one that’s either partially or entirely covered that would have not just active areas but passive areas where people could sit and see what’s going on,” he said. “It would also be largely indestructible, so primarily made out of concrete and steel, and would have modern features that would be modern into the future.”

The current skate park in Hermiston between the high school and police station is more than 20 years old and is considerably smaller than what the city is currently planning

Fetter said he plans to apply for grants this fall to help fund the facility and would know in spring 2016 whether the grants were secured. He said construction could begin as soon as next year, but is unlikely to occur that quickly.

“These things take time, especially if you’re going to engage the local skateboard community and what they want,” he said. “I would want to move this through as quickly as possible, in part to remove some of the pressure McKenzie Park is getting from that population.”

Fetter said he is not sure what the park would cost, but different funding options may be available.



This is a conceptual drawing of a proposed skate park in Hermiston, which is still in the early planning stages.

“The state has a community parks grant program that we would definitely be applying to,” he said. “Very often you’ll see half of the funding being asked for these kinds of facilities. We’re talking hundreds of thousands of dollars to build a modern facility, not unlike the investment we made in our trail system.”

He said the park could cost more than \$200,000 and he can envision getting as much as half of that from non-local sources.

Echo City Administrator Diane Berry said when its skate park was upgraded in 2006, the project was awarded more than \$74,000 in grants from the Wildhorse Foundation, the Tony Hawk Foundation, the Wal-Mart Foundation, the Oregon Community Foundation, the Ford Family Foundation, the Safeway Foundation and the PacificCorp Foundation. An additional \$10,000 grant was awarded for gener-

al park amenities, she said, and through fundraisers and donations, organizers were able to raise \$105,000 in total for the project.

She said the city found a company, Grindline Skateparks of Seattle, Washington, that agreed to build the park within the budget. Through luck and timing, the end product was actually larger than originally anticipated when Grindline chose to add on to the project without additional costs.

“Into the project, it just kept growing, and yet it didn’t cost us anymore,” she said. “We ended up with a bigger park than what we were planning on and a better park. We figure it would have cost us about \$150,000.”

Berry said people from Hermiston use the skate park in Echo, and people from farther away travel to use a circuit of parks in the region, including Echo, Hood River and Irrigon.

Umatilla raises water and sewer rates

By JADE MCDOWELL
East Oregonian

Water and sewer rates in Umatilla are four percent higher after the city council voted to raise them Tuesday night.

City manager Bob Ward said in the past, the city avoided raising rates for years by siphoning away its reserves until eventually being forced to increase rates a “significant amount” all at once. Last time the city raised sewer rates by 20 percent.

“We don’t want to be in that position again,” he said.

This time, he said, the city was looking for a gentler four percent increase, which he said still makes Umatilla’s water and sewer less expensive than most cities.

Resident John Nichols told councilors the city needed to do a better job of managing its money instead of raising rates and fees. He said as one of Umatilla’s many residents on a fixed income he was going to have to “put my tail between my legs” and ask city

hall for a waiver soon.

“The demands on my income are coming faster than the COLAs, or cost of living increases,” he said.

Mayor David Trott said he understood no one wants to see their bills raised, but he also knows that Umatilla’s aging water and sewer infrastructure needs maintenance or the city would have another incident like the water main that broke in McNary 10 years ago, costing the city more than \$500,000.

“The city does not have the leisure of having a water main break and saying ‘Oops, sorry, you’re just going to have to deal with it because we don’t have enough money,’” he said after the council voted 3-1 (with George Fenton dissenting and David Lugee and Mel Ray absent) to raise the rates.

Higher bills weren’t the only thing citizens turned out to comment about. Jack McWhinnie quit the code improvement board on Tuesday night, telling the council he felt like he had wasted his

time for four years because yards in Umatilla were still full of junk.

Several other people disagreed, however, saying in the last four years they had seen significant improvements to Umatilla’s appearance.

Rick Simpson said areas like Fifth Street and the trailer park look much cleaner and more presentable now than they did when he moved to Umatilla.

“I don’t agree that it was a waste of time,” he said. “It was hard work but it was worth doing.”

Other residents agreed that Umatilla’s image has improved, but they did take issue with one aspect: panhandlers.

Karen Hutchinson-Talaski said the people holding signs asking for money at the exit off the I-82 bridge is the only thing thousands of travelers see of Umatilla.

“That’s a lot of people who come through our community and see something that looks pretty bad,” she said.

Jody Brittain said she sees the same people standing there on a rotating schedule every day, refusing offers of food, pet supplies or a job but insisting they need cash for an emergency.

“It’s a racket,” she said.

The mayor and city councilors agreed that the panhandlers were a nuisance but pointed out that their right to hold signs asking for money was protected by free speech laws in Oregon.

“We can’t go in willy nilly and say you can’t do this and you can’t do that or there is a potential for litigation,” Trott said.

However, he assured residents the issue was on the city’s radar and was being discussed. In the meantime, he said if someone was truly in need they would accept food or a job instead of cash and encouraged everyone to go that route if they felt a need to give.

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

BRIEFLY

Chemical spill briefly closes PHS classroom

A science experiment gone awry closed a Pendleton High School classroom Wednesday.

According to a Pendleton School District press release, sulfuric acid dropped onto a hot plate during a routine chemistry experiment and created a chemical vapor.

The chemistry teacher and the student sitting closest to the spill were evaluated at the high school and found to be fine. After arriving at the high school, Pendleton Fire Department officials found no need to clear any hazardous materials.

A special ventilation system in the classroom was used to clear the vapor and will continue to do so throughout the night.

Public invited to Emergency Preparedness Fair

PENDLETON — Local organizations are invited to participate and help the community prepare for possible disasters at the second annual Pendleton Emergency Preparedness Fair.

The event includes booths for disaster preparedness education, emergency and non-emergency vehicles, a free lunch, mini-classes, prizes and children’s activities. As a nonprofit project, no money will exchange hands at the fair. Handouts, catalogs, business cards, sign-up sheets and websites may be used in presentations.

The public is invited to the Preparedness Fair Saturday, April 18 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at Sunridge Middle School, 700 S.W. Runnion Ave., Pendleton.

The fair is being sponsored and supported by community churches, businesses and agencies.

For more information, call committee chair Jan Taylor at 541-276-9492.

Cowboy event wrangles in fun

KENNEWICK — Country musicians Johnny Rodriguez and Barbara Fairchild are headliners for the 12th annual Columbia River Cowboy Gathering and Music Festival.

The event also features a Cowboy Idol Contest, cowboy poets, vendors, food, raffles and a cowboy church service. The gathering opens Friday at noon at the Benton-Franklin County Fairgrounds, 1500 S. Oak St., Kennewick. The evening concerts are at 5:15 p.m. Friday and Saturday.

Advance ticket prices for Friday and Saturday are \$15 each day for general admission; the reserved concert seating is sold out. Tickets are available at the gate (for an additional \$10) or in advance at Kennewick Ranch & Home, 845 N. Columbia Center Blvd. Daytime passes at the gate are \$5.

The event also includes a “Kids Corral,” with lots

of activities for the little cowpokes. Camping is available on the grounds.

For more information, call 509-851-4287 or go to <http://columbiarivercowboygathering.com>.

Columbia Grange hosts breakfast fundraiser

HERMISTON — A fundraising breakfast to help pay for new septic service at Columbia Grange is planned this weekend.

The meal is Saturday from 7-10 a.m. at 32339 Diagonal Blvd., Hermiston. The breakfast is \$5 per person.

For more information, call Doris at 541-567-8663 or Scot at 541-278-0615.

Mac-Hi to toast inaugural hall of fame members

MILTON-FREEWATER — The McLoughlin High School inaugural Toast to Talent is this weekend.

Jack Williams, Russell Blackley, Jerry Crimins, Jerry Ewing, Heather Botts, Dr. Norm Saager and John Zerba will be recognized Saturday from 6-9 p.m. in the Milton-Freewater Community Building, 109 N.E. Fifth St. The event includes hors d’oeuvres, wine tasting, live entertainment and a silent auction. Tickets are \$25, which includes childcare and two drink tickets. Tickets are available at Mac-Hi or the Milton-Freewater Chamber of Commerce.

For more information, contact Jay Rodighiero at jay.rodighiero@miltfree.k12.or.us or 541-938-5591.

Oregon Rural Action announces annual meeting

SUMMERVILLE — A chili cook-off, live and silent auctions and a no-host bar are planned during the Oregon Rural Action’s annual meeting.

The event, which also includes board member elections, is Saturday from 5-8 p.m. at the Pleasant Grove Grange, 67829 Hunter Road, Summerville. It’s located about 15 miles north of La Grande. Tickets are \$15 in advance or \$20 at the door. Carpooling is available.

Oregon Rural Action is a nonprofit group that promotes social justice, agricultural and economic sustainability, and stewardship of the region’s land, air and water.

For more information, contact Susan at 541-975-2411, susan@oregonrural.org or visit www.oregonrural.org.

Submit information to: community@eastoregonian.com or drop off to the attention of Tammy Malgesini at 333 E. Main St., Hermiston or Renee Struthers at 211 S.E. Byers Ave., Pendleton. Call 541-564-4539 or 541-966-0818 with questions.

BMCC festival highlights State of Change

By TAMMY MALGESINI
East Oregonian

Students and the community are urged to explore the changing landscape of Oregon during this year’s Arts & Culture Festival at Blue Mountain Community College.

In its 17th year, State of Change begins Monday and continues through Thursday on the Pendleton campus, 2411 N.W. Carden Ave. In addition, activities are planned Wednesday and Thursday on the Hermiston campus, 975 S.E. Columbia Drive. The activities are open to the public and most are free of charge.

Organizers have recognized Hermiston as a growing community and during the past few years have expanded festival offerings, said Shaindel Beers, a BMCC English instructor.

Among the festival highlights are Elizabeth Enslin discussing her memoir, “While the Gods Were Sleeping,” about her studies as an anthropologist in Nepal, and renowned blues guitarist Donna Herula.

Both are featured during the day and also in the evening. Enslin will make presentations Monday at 10 a.m. and 7 p.m. in the Bob Clapp Theatre in Pioneer Hall.

Herula, an award-winning musician, will present Women and Blues: A History Shift Monday at noon in the theatre. Also, in partnership with Great Pacific Wine & Coffee Co., she will perform a free all-ages show Monday at 7 p.m. at 403 S. Main St., Pendleton.

April’s Eastern Oregon Forum is being held in conjunction with the Arts & Culture Festival. Bob Bovett,

who serves as legal counsel for the Association of Oregon Counties, will discuss Medical Marijuana Tuesday at 7 p.m. in Science-Technology Room 200. The cost is \$6, except students and members, who are admitted free.

Bovett’s primary responsibility is working on policy matters relating to governance, elections, ocean issues and drugs. He is the author of many of Oregon’s drug laws, including those relating to methamphetamine lab control. Also, he has created numerous state and local initiatives that provide science-based solutions to problems caused by substance abuse.

“We also have fabulous guests coming from the Oregon Humanities and speaking on topics such as Community in the Age of the Internet, Life After War, and

Science, Technology, and the Future of Human Nature,” Beers said.

Wednesday’s salmon dinner provides an opportunity to bring people to campus who might not otherwise visit, Beers said. In collaboration with the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, the free meal is at 5 p.m. in the Student Union. It includes American Indian presentations, storytelling and hospitality, Beers said.

The full schedule is available at www.bluecc.edu/community/diversity-at-bmcc/bmcc-arts-and-culture-festival. For more information, contact Beers at 541-278-5938 or sbeers@bluecc.edu.

Contact Community Editor Tammy Malgesini at tmalgesini@eastoregonian.com or 541-564-4539

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