

POT: Utility fee use on the table

Continued from 1A

Since 63 percent of Umatilla County voters rejected the measure that legalized recreational marijuana, the Pendleton City Council could vote to opt out of marijuana sales as long as members decide to opt out within 180 days of June 30, 2015.

The council could also refer the issue to voters at the next general election in 2016, imposing a moratorium on marijuana retailers until the election.

Banning any category of marijuana sales could have a downside — the city would be prohibited from imposing a local tax on marijuana sales, which has a limit of 3 percent.

If the city decided to allow recreational marijuana sales, the market would be subject to a host of new regulations, including mandatory permit for retail employees that handle marijuana and a seed-to-sale tracking system.

The council changed the city’s zoning laws to allow medical marijuana dispensaries but hit a road block when members of the council couldn’t agree to amend the business license rules, which currently prohibits businesses that operate in violation of federal law.

The council will also return to another oft discussed topic in local politics — street maintenance.

Besides considering bids for a crack seal project and new overlays at NW Carden Avenue and SW Second Street, city staff will approach the council to allocate the \$481,000 raised from a transportation utility fee to city streets.

In a report written by city engineer Tim Simons, associate engineer Wayne Green and public works superintendent Jeff Brown, the staff members explain the methods the city uses to determine which streets to focus on.

The city uses a computer program called Street Saver to prioritize street maintenance.

Factoring the city’s \$300,000 budget, the program’s algorithm usually recommends preserving roads that are considered “satisfactory” or “good” because it gives more “bang for the buck.”

This means most street maintenance funds go toward the city’s busiest streets at the expense of neighborhood roads.

“In summary, we will never get ahead of the curve, and there will continue to be an increase in streets that need reconstruction,” the report states. “The only way the computer program would pick some the lower classified streets that are in the poor condition to be rehabilitated would be if there was excess dollars or unlimited funding.”

City staff previously recommended instituting a utility fee, which can be passed by the city council without voter approval.

The meeting will be held at the council chambers in city hall, 500 S.W. Dorion Avenue at 7 p.m.

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WATERMELON: ‘This is what good neighbors do’

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Umatilla County ranks second in the state, behind Marion County, with about \$500 million in annual gross farm and ranch sales. The region is best known for Hermiston watermelons, but grows a wide variety of irrigated vegetables as well.

“We provide the fruit and vegetables you pick up in the grocery store every day,” Drotzmann said.

In his remarks to the crowd at Pioneer Square, Drotzmann said the eastern side of the state gladly extends its hand to Portland.

“We know when Portland is successful, all of Oregon is successful,” he said.

The watermelon delivery and accompanying melon seed spitting contest began in 1991 with a friendship between longtime Hermiston mayor and councilor Frank Harkenrider and colorful Portland Mayor Bud Clark. That first, Harkenrider piled a load of watermelons into the back of a pickup truck one summer day and went to challenge Portland mayor Bud Clark to a seed-spitting contest.

The event ran for 17 years then faded, but was renewed this year by civic leaders and



Photo contributed by Mark Morgan

Hermiston Mayor Drotzmann, former Hermiston Mayor Harkenrider, former Portland Mayor Bud Clark, Portland Mayor Charlie Hales.

the Hermiston Chamber of Commerce. Harkenrider and Clark attended Friday’s renewal, and Harkenrider admitted the city slicker bested him at seed spitting. “He got me all the time,” he said with a laugh.

Portland Mayor Charlie Hales said the exchange “was a good idea then and is a good idea now.”

“This is what good neighbors do for each other,” Hales said, “they share their bounty.”

“I think it’s kind of a cool thing for the biggest city in the state to have a relationship with one of the smaller cities,” City Manager Byron Smith said. “It’s a way to build goodwill.”

Drotzmann told the Hermiston City Council earlier in the week that he saw the giveaway as a valuable way to build relationships with politicians from the west side of the state.

“It’s an opportunity for the east side and west side to meet and discuss what we have in common,” he said

Hales presented Drotzmann with a tie embossed with a depiction of Portland’s new Tilikum Crossing bridge, which opens in September and will carry light-rail trains and bikes over the Willamette River, but not cars and trucks.

The melons and potatoes, donated by Walchli Farms,

Bellinger Farms and Bud-Rich Potato Inc., disappeared in about 20 minutes as a long line of pleased Portlanders took advantage.

The growers said they were happy to help resurrect a tradition that helped spread a fondness for Hermiston watermelons around the state.

“It’s a little bit of nostalgia for me,” Jack Bellinger said.

Bellinger Farms was a participant in the giveaway back in the Harkenrider days and Bellinger said his mother went on some of the early trips to Portland.

For the record, Hermiston swept the seed spitting contest. City Councilor Doug Primmer took first, and Drotzmann was second. Both sent seeds flying more than 300 inches. Hales showed he was no slouch with a 296-inch launch, and Portland City Commissioner Dan Saltzman managed to spit one 126 inches.

Primmer indicated the city boys didn’t have a chance against people who grew up in watermelon country.

“You live in Hermiston, you get into competition when you’ve got brothers,” he said.

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FATAL: Motorcycles’ narrow profile make them hard to spot

Continued from 1A

tough to pin down.

The state road department shows a slight increase in driving on state highways, but Strandberg said that is not enough to account for the steep rise in deadly crashes. Distraction is a constant in crashes, and Strandberg said drivers today have more distractions than ever.

Visibility also plays a key role in motorcycle crashes. Their narrow profiles makes it easy for them to disappear behind bushes or structures or to hide in a car’s blind spot. And their smaller size can make it difficult for drivers to judge their speed.

Victor Gutierrez has experienced his share of close calls on a motorcycle. He is the patrol corporal for Hermiston police, and for the last four years he has been the department’s motorcycle cop. He said offensive driving is a key to motorcycle safety.

“I don’t assume people see me, I stay

out of the blind spot, and I make sure I make eye contact with the driver,” he said. “People just don’t look out for motorcycle riders, just to be honest with you.”

The first year on the bike he tracked 17 near misses.

“I stopped counting,” he said. “I started to worry too much.”

A Hermiston video cam caught one of those near misses. Gutierrez was south-bound on Highway 395 near the Panda Inn when he said he saw a Chevrolet Camaro speeding ahead. He started to chase when a passenger car zipped into traffic from West Jennie Avenue.

Gutierrez said he saw the car in a glance and hit the brakes. The car missed by inches. Gutierrez turned on the lights, flipped a u-turn and stopped the driver for a ticket.

“I couldn’t write her name I was so shaky,” he said.

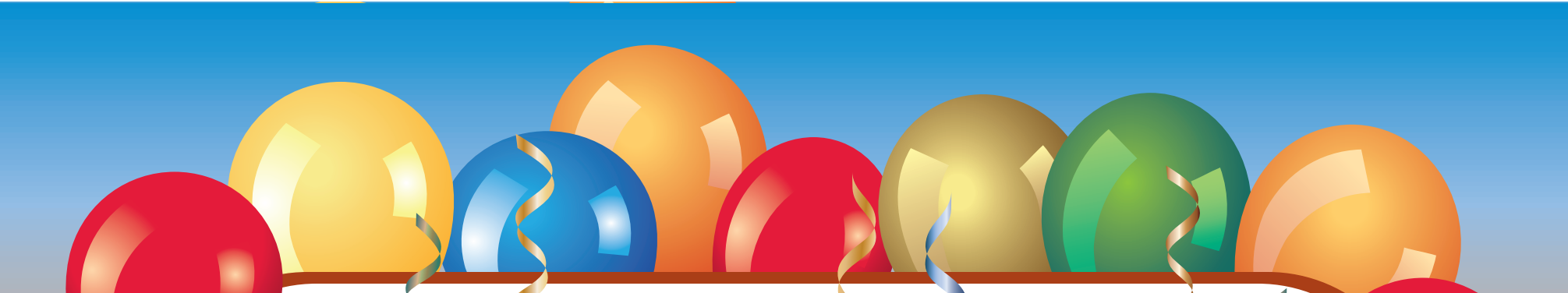
Drivers behind the wheel often tell him

they did not see him, he said, and some are in tears, upset they almost ran over him.

“Look once, look twice, then look again,” Strandberg said, is the mantra ODOT recommends for all motorists, especially before changing lanes or turning. Taking that extra moment to check can make a difference.

Gutierrez’s work is to reduce crashes, not be in one. Hermiston traffic patrol focuses on four areas: hazards, most of which are drivers talking on their cellphones; seatbelt use; failure to obey traffic control devices; and speeding. Gutierrez estimated he writes 150-200 traffic tickets a month on those four areas. That might seem heavy-handed for a city the size of Hermiston, but two state highways carry plenty of drivers through the city. To accomplish the work, though, he said he takes all the precautions he as he can.

At the end of the day, he said, he wants to go home safe.



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