

MILTON-FREEWATER

Voters will make decision on marijuana

By **ANTONIO SIERRA**
East Oregonian

Nov. 8, 2016, is shaping up to be a pivotal day for the future of marijuana sales in Umatilla County.

Milton-Freewater joined Pendleton and Hermiston on Tuesday night in enacting a temporary ban on medical and recreational marijuana sales until the issue appears on the ballot late next year.

Milton-Freewater was the last of the county's three biggest cities to make a decision as the city council wove through a contentious process.

Tuesday night's meeting was no exception, as the council began the meeting by considering an amendment to the zoning code that would have recognized medical marijuana dispensaries as a business.

The Milton-Freewater Planning Commission voted 4-2 to advise the city council against adopting the amendment, with the commission spending a significant amount of time debating the medicinal merits of marijuana.

The public hearing was ostensibly held to receive

comments on the city's proposed zoning regulations for medical marijuana dispensaries, which include 1,000-foot buffer zones around schools and other marijuana dispensaries and a 100-foot buffer from residential areas. But meeting attendees mirrored the planning commission and instead used most of their time to share their opinions about marijuana.

Although the people who spoke at the meeting were fairly split between pro- and anti-marijuana sales, the longest testimony came from Sunni Danforth.

Danforth peppered her speech with a bevy of figures from the CLEAR Alliance, an anti-marijuana group connected with former Umatilla County sheriff John Trumbo.

Danforth found an audience with Councilor Jeff Anliker, who said he was familiar with the "drug world" through his previous battles with addiction.

"It's a miserable, miserable life and I just don't want to have that," he said.

Anliker said he was concerned drug dealers

would buy medical marijuana legally at dispensaries only to resell it later on the black market.

Councilor Ed Chesnut was less receptive, questioning the data Danforth collected from the alliance, which focused on the negative effects marijuana has on youth.

Chesnut cited an academic study he said showed marijuana use did not rise amongst teens after the drug was legalized in Colorado and Washington state.

"My point is when you see a fact let's identify whether it's a fact or not," he said. "There are a whole lot of non-facts being touted as facts."

Members of the public and the council did bring forth some issues regarding the zoning regulations, referencing a bond the Milton-Freewater Unified School District is pursuing that would add an elementary school on the south end of town and possibly vacate another school at the north end, which would change the buffer zones and allow the possibility that a dispensary would be located near the site of the proposed school.

When the zoning amendment was voted on, councilors Orrin Lyon, Steve Irving and Anliker voted against while Steven Patten, Brad Humbert and Chesnut voted for it, leaving the tiebreaker to Mayor Lewis Key.

Citing the uncertainty surrounding the school district's bond, Key voted against the amendment, effectively shutting the door on the city council legalizing medical marijuana sales outright.

The council subsequently, and unanimously, approved a referral of the marijuana sales ban and a 3 percent recreational marijuana sales tax to voters.

While buying marijuana is at least temporarily illegal in Milton-Freewater, finding a legitimate retailer is only a short drive away.

Walla Walla is the home of two marijuana stores, although crossing state lines back into Milton-Freewater after making a purchase with the drug is illegal.

Contact Antonio Sierra at asierra@eastoregonian.com or 541-966-0836.

HERMISTON

City to help improve regional water system, increase irrigation

First of three phase project gets underway

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
East Oregonian

The Hermiston City Council voted Monday to help increase irrigation capacity in the region, which could bring as much as \$1 billion in value to the Umatilla Basin.

The council approved an intergovernmental agreement that will make improvements to the regional water system and help the Port of Umatilla certify its water right.

Craig Reeder of the Northeast Oregon Water Association gave the city council "very much the Cliffs Notes version" of why the move was important, during an hour-long work session before the council's regular meeting.

"There is nothing not complicated about what we are doing," he said.

During the work session he explained that Hermiston is the focal point of one of the premier places in the world for growing non-citrus crops. The region is under-utilized, however, due to restrictions on the amount of water that can be drawn out of the Columbia River.

That's about to change, thanks to a landmark funding package passed by the legislature this year allotting \$11 million in grants and \$22 million in loans for Umatilla Basin water projects.

"We can add another billion dollars back into the regional economy," Reeder said.

The project is divided into three phases. Reeder said that getting water to crops involves a combination of irrigation infrastructure and water rights, so the first phase will improve the infrastructure and get the Port of Umatilla's water right certified. That will allow the port to lease part of its water right — 100 cubic feet per second — to boost agriculture in the region.

The port signed an agreement in March to lease the water right to NOWA, capping nearly three years of negotiations.

The second phase will involve water conservation and mitigation projects

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— **Craig Reeder**,
Northeast Oregon Water Association

further upstream, and the third will push water into storage areas, like dam reservoirs, when water flow is high so that it can be used later.

"It's a six year process, which some people think is a long time, but in the water world that's moving lightning quick," Reeder said.

J.R. Cook of NOWA told the council it was important to act quickly and decisively while interest in water issues was high due to the drought and available funding.

He said the intergovernmental agreement before the council on Monday would use a \$664,000 grant from the governor's Regional Solutions office to increase capacity in the Regional Water System by installing a pump and creating a flushing system.

"We want to get moving," Cook said. "We want to get some pipes built."

Reeder noted how important the acquisition of the Port of Umatilla's water right was, calling it the "lead domino" in a chain of events that would bring that \$1 billion in new crop production home.

Port director Kim Puzey had high praise for Cook, Levy and Reeder and the "bureaucratic miracle" they had accomplished in pulling together all of the right resources and agencies.

"J.R. (Cook) did something no one thought he could," Puzey said.

He said he thought that \$1 billion was a modest estimate of how much the project could add to the regional economy.

The council voted unanimously to approve the intergovernmental agreement for the improvements to the Regional Water System.

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Ski Bluewood to open for the season

Spout Springs waits for more snow

By **GEORGE PLAVERN**
East Oregonian

Ski Bluewood will open its 2015-16 season Friday, with snow in the forecast through the end of the week. Currently, the mountain has 26 inches at base and 46 inches on the summit.

Both the Skyline Express and Platter Pull chairlifts will run opening day, with the first chair at 9 a.m. The Triple Nickel lift is still to be determined.

"We're stoked that opening day is almost here, and we can't wait to welcome our guests and go out and have fun," said resort Manager Kim Clark.

Starting Dec. 18, Ski Bluewood will be open every day through Jan. 3, except for Christmas Day. Daily hours are 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., except for Christmas Eve, when the hill closes at 2 p.m. Ski Bluewood is located outside of Dayton, Washington, about 95 miles from Pendleton.

Anthony Lakes Mountain Resort also opened Dec. 5, and now has 90 inches of snow on the season to go



Contributed photo

Ski Bluewood will open Friday for the 2015-16 season.

with a 35-inch base. The resort is located 19 miles west of the North Powder exit off Interstate 84. Meanwhile, Spout Springs Ski Resort — the closest downhill ski area to Pendleton, located along Highway 204 near Tollgate — is waiting for more snow to fall before owner John Murray will consider opening for the season. The last two years have been a wash for Spout Springs, as unseasonably

warm and dry weather has limited snowpack in the Blue Mountains.

Murray said the hill has about 8 inches of packed snow at base, which isn't enough to open safely. He would like to see a 20-inch base, which likely won't come until after Christmas.

"Keeping it safe and sane is what's important to us," Murray said.

Spout Springs remains for sale, listed at \$1.25 million.

Murray, 66, has owned the 1,400-acre resort since 1999 and said he is looking to retire.

The resort has 14 ski runs and operates on a lease with the Umatilla National Forest. It is listed through Coldwell Banker in Walla Walla. For more information, call 541-938-0100.

Contact George Plaven at gplaven@eastoregonian.com or 541-966-0825.

Fire district merger goes to commissioners

By **PHIL WRIGHT**
East Oregonian

Umatilla County Board of Commissioners look to give their OK to a combined Hermiston-Stanfield fire district.

Voters in November 2014 shot down a local measure to tax residents in and around Hermiston and Stanfield at \$2 per \$1,000 in assessed property value to fund a larger district with more resources. This time, proponents are seeking a slightly smaller tax for city residents of \$1.75 per \$1,000.

The board of commissioners meets Wednesday at 9 a.m. at the county courthouse, Pendleton, to initiate formation of Umatilla County Fire District No. 1, though the county will not be in charge of the district. If they do, their action will be followed by public hearings and possible referral to the voters in the May election, who will have the final say.

Last month, Hermiston Fire & Emergency Services Chief Scott Stanton pitched the need for the bigger district to the Hermiston City Council. He said about 70 percent of the tax revenue would be used to hire six more employees and provide 24/7 staffing at the Westland and Punkin Center stations and more staff at Hermiston's main station, 320 S. First St. The rest of the revenue would pay for safety equipment and vehicles.

Residents in the Hermiston fire district now pay \$2 per \$1,000, so they would see rates drop, while Stanfield residents already pay \$1.75 per \$1,000. Folks living outside either city limits, though, would pay more in taxes.

The public can learn more about the district and weigh in on the matter at a hearing Jan. 20 at 9 a.m., in room 130, Umatilla County Courthouse, 216 S.E. Fourth St., Pendleton.

Heppner gets ready to celebrate

HEPPNER — Festive fun is planned during Celebrate Heppner Christmas.

The event, which offers a spaghetti dinner, is Thursday beginning at 6 p.m. at the Morrow County Fairgrounds, 74473 Highway 74, Heppner. The meal, which is limited to 100 people, is \$6 per person or \$20 for a family of four.

The rest of the fun includes pictures with Santa, drawings of rewards cards for shopping local, a raffle, a penny board and lots of prizes. Also, rumor has it, Scrooge plans to

crash the party. For more information, contact the Heppner Chamber of Commerce at heppnerchamber@centurytel.net or 541-676-5536.

Caring Trees help kids in need

BOARDMAN — A pair of Caring Trees are still available for people to help brighten the holiday season for children in the Boardman community.

The trees are at the Bank of Eastern Oregon, 100 City Center Drive, and Banner Bank, 204 N. Main St. People can drop by during regular business hours to

BRIEFLY

pick up a card or two and shop for gifts on the child's wish list.

The gifts need to be wrapped and returned by Friday to the bank.

For more information, call 541-481-3445.

The free event, which is open to the public, is Friday at 6:30 p.m. at 32339 Diagonal Blvd., Hermiston. The grange will provide main dishes and those attending may bring salads or desserts to share.

In addition, donations will be accepted on behalf of Pet Rescue and the Hermiston Warming Station.

For more information, call Doris at 541-567-8663 or Diane at 541-564-1481.

Grange sets Christmas event

HERMISTON — A Christmas meal and celebration is planned at the Columbia Grange.



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STUDENT OF THE WEEK

Katie Ward
NIXYAAWII COMMUNITY SCHOOL

Katie Ward, a Sophomore at Nixyáawii Community School, has put forth exceptional effort in learning the basics of the Nez Perce language last year and the Umatilla language this year. She has learned to pronounce Native American words by reading and using the Umatilla alphabet and has learned to use the Salish font and symbols on the computer. Katie is a two year participant on the Nixyáawii volleyball team, played softball her freshman year and is currently the girls' basketball manager. Her attendance is near perfect, she is quiet and attentive and is always pleasant to be around.

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