

HERMISTON

Violent crime dips, total crime unchanged

By PHIL WRIGHT
East Oregonian

Hermiston police officers initiated more actions on their own in 2015 as calls for service fell to a 10-year-low. And violent crime shifted down from the year before, but crime overall remained stagnant through 2015.

Hermiston police Chief Jason Edmiston this week released his department's annual crime statistics, which measure crime across eight categories. While individual types varied, Hermiston had 524 reported crimes in 2015, just one more than in 2014. Still, that was a

35 percent drop from the city's 10-year average.

Violent crime — homicide, rape, robbery and aggravated assault — fell from 24 incidents in 2014 to 21 in 2015, yet the city had its first homicide since 2012 and assaults jumped from eight to 12. Assaults are 56 percent lower than the 10-year-average, but after a low of four in 2013 are trending up. Edmiston in the report stated the department will monitor that for causation purposes.

Burglaries hit 53 last year, 22 fewer than in 2014 and the lowest in the city in a decade. Edmiston stated curbing that crime has been a focus since he

became chief in 2012.

Property crime ticked up 1 percent in 2015, primarily due to an increase in larceny from 388 incidents to 413.

Hermiston police took 10,032 calls for service in 2015, almost 2,100 fewer than in 2014. Edmiston in the report stated that was concerning to him, but he was confident some of the decline has to do with tracking information that comes into the police department compared to when the city had its own dispatch center.

The drop in calls also corresponds to police taking more initiative. Edmiston reported Hermiston police experienced an

increase of 20 percent in officer initiated activity, including a 26 percent increase in traffic stops. That work also bumped up total reports 9 percent, arrests 6 percent and citations 11 percent.

Edmiston also reported Hermiston police from Dec. 21, 2015, to Jan. 4 arrested eight people for driving under the influence of intoxicants, cited 17 people driving while suspended and handed out 26 citations for hazardous crash-causing violations (not equipment-related violations). A grant provided the funds for the crackdown.

Edmiston also plans to release juvenile crime numbers later this month.

Hermiston crime stats

	2014	2015
Calls for service	12,129	10,032
Officer initiated activity	10,970	13,205
Total violent	24	21
Homicide	0	1
Rape	2	4
Robbery	14	4
Aggravated assault	8	12
Total property	499	503
Burglary	75	53
Larceny	388	413
Auto theft	34	36
Arson	2	1
Total crime	523	524

PENDLETON

No filings for city council seats

Chuck Wood won't seek reelection

East Oregonian

As of Wednesday, no one has committed to running for the five Pendleton City Council seats that are up for election in May.

Among the incumbents, two councilors intend to leave their seats while the other three say they haven't yet made a decision. With less than two months before the filing deadline, no challengers have submitted paperwork to file for office either.

Following three years on the council, Ward 2 Councilor Chuck Wood said he won't seek reelection and will leave the council when his term expires at the end of the year.

A retiree since 2008, Wood said he commits 30 hours per week to council business, a time commitment he didn't want to sustain for another four years.

Although he'll turn 70 by the time he leaves office, Wood said he plans to stay involved with the city in some form.

Wood won his seat in 2012 by beating then-incumbent Bryan Branstetter in a landslide. His Ward 2 seat covers North Hill, Westgate and the Eastern Oregon Regional Airport.

Wood won't be the only first-term councilor

to decline a reelection campaign.

At-large Councilor Jane Hill announced in December that she would resign her seat to seek a job with the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation.

Because Hill intends to resign before the end of her term, her appointed replacement would have to file for election if they wanted to stay beyond 2016.

The other three members of the council facing election — Ward 1 Councilor Becky Marks, Ward 3 Councilor Tom Young and Mayor Phillip Houk have yet to make a decision.

"You have to weigh wanting to serve with the time commitment," Young said, echoing the sentiments expressed by Houk and Marks.

Houk said he expects to make a decision around Feb. 1 while Marks is aiming for mid-February to render her verdict. Young didn't commit to a timeline for his decision.

City Recorder Andrea Denton said no one has filed yet, and the deadline to submit a candidacy petition is March 8.

Although the filing period has been open since September, Denton said candidates tend to file after Jan. 1, with some waiting until the last minute to submit a petition.

Gatherings celebrate MLK Day

East Oregonian

A pair of local events in Hermiston and Pendleton are planned to commemorate Martin Luther King Day.

In its 16th year, citizens of Hermiston and the surrounding area are invited to the Community Walk. The Black International Awareness Club is hosting the event, which is Monday from noon to 2:30 p.m. at the Hermiston United Methodist Church, 191 E. Gladys Ave., Hermiston.

The gathering will include a march, special speakers, music, prayer, the Polynesian Dancers, an open mic time and refreshments. For more information, call Virginia Rome at 541-720-6895 or search Facebook for "Hermiston Martin Luther King Peace Walk."

"It's a wonderful opportunity to connect with other community members and celebrate our unique and diverse community," said Jesus Rome.

A musical celebration is planned in Pendleton featuring an evening of folk songs and protest songs in honor of King and in recognition of the progress we've made as a nation.

Sponsored by the Pendleton Baha'i



EO file photo

Marchers gather in front of Hermiston City Hall to listen to city government officials speak during a past Martin Luther King Day celebration in Hermiston.

community, everyone is invited to attend. The music begins at 6 p.m. at Great Pacific Wine & Coffee Co., 403 S. Main St., Pendleton. The gathering will include local musicians singing their

favorite songs from the civil rights era. Those attending are encouraged to be prepared to sing along.

For more information, call 541-276-9360.

PENDLETON

Wtechlink owners mum on settlement deal

By PHIL WRIGHT
East Oregonian

The owners of Wtechlink in Pendleton are resolving their dispute for control of the company outside the courtroom.

Jordan McDonald, the minority owner of the Pendleton Internet company, dropped his lawsuit late last year against his business partner and majority owner Byron Wysocki, according to Umatilla County Circuit Court Records.

Wysocki did not return a call seeking comment. McDonald declined to comment.

McDonald sued Wysocki in 2013 for control of the company. A source familiar with the situation reported Wysocki is buying out McDonald's share of Wtechlink.

Wysocki and another business partner also reached a civil deal and avoided prosecution for theft in a separate case.

Wysocki and Mason

Murphy own the Pendleton bar 40 Taps. The pair faced first-degree theft charges for taking doors from the old St. Anthony Hospital demolition site on Southeast Court Avenue at the beginning of October 2014 and installing them at their bar at 337 S.W. Emigrant Ave., on the block next to Pendleton City Hall.

The doors were worth about \$4,600, according to Pendleton Police Chief Stuart Roberts. Attorney Dean Gushwa of Pendleton represented the two entre-

preneurs and confirmed Tuesday his clients and the demolition company with an interest in the doors reached a civil compromise in late December 2015.

"We gave them some money for the trouble," Gushwa said, and the court agreed to that and dismissed the criminal case. Gushwa said courts tend to go along with the parties in those situations.

"The doors are back [at the bar]," he said, "and everyone's happy."

PENDLETON

City council communicates desire for communication officer

By ANTONIO SIERRA
East Oregonian

Long talked about but never acted on, Pendleton City Council heartily endorsed the idea of hiring a spokesperson for the city at a workshop Tuesday.

The proposal was one of several recommendations made in a communications plan, a draft of which was presented at the workshop.

After the council expressed interest in improving city communication, City Manager Robb Corbett approached InterMountain Education Service District spokeswoman Michele Madril about creating a communication plan.

Madril said the IMESD offers communications services as part of its entrepreneurial division. The city is paying the IMESD up to \$1,500 for Madril's services.

Using feedback from six department heads, Corbett and Madril produced an eight-page document detailing ways the city can improve internal and external communication.

The proposal that seemed to draw the most support from the council was the recommendation to hire a designated communications employee.

"We need a communication-focused department," Councilor Chuck Wood said. "One or two people,

somewhere in the city, that's their job. Whether its a full-time job or a part-time job, I don't know."

Although many councilors were excited to hire someone who could share their side of the story, the plan also advised the council against directing all lines of communication through a spokesman.

"(The) very nature of city organization makes it necessary for direct communication to happen between elected officials/city departments/city employees and citizens," the plan states. "It is not feasible to funnel all communication through a central point of contact or department."

Citing letters to the editor and editorials in the *East Oregonian*, Councilor John Brenne asked if a designated person should respond to criticism the council feels is factually incorrect.

Although the city should respond if its a particularly egregious disagreement, Madril said responding sometimes exacerbates the issue rather than quells it.

"My big thing that I go by is that I can control my message, I can control what I put out there," she said. "I cannot control what other people are going to say, but I can consistently keep saying my message and I think that's important."

Madril said that a plan

and a communications officer could lessen backlash, but it won't eliminate it completely.

Councilor McKennon McDonald agreed with Madril.

"People are going to have their own thoughts about everything and we're all going to have differing thoughts about it, so the people should be able to write those letters too ... As long as we have our piece along with it, then people can make up their minds in a more educated way," McDonald said.

Discussion of a public information officer spilled over into other topics.

The council reached a consensus that the city shouldn't seek another ballot measure in 2016, with some councilors reasoning that the extra time could be used to get a spokesman to help communicate the city's perspective on tax proposals.

Some city officials cited a lack of communication in the demise of a proposed 5-cent gas tax on the ballot last November.

Corbett said he would take the feedback on the draft from the council and come back with a more specific recommendation on how to hire a communications specialist.

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

Pilot Rock helicopter pilot injured in crash

GRANT COUNTY (AP) — Authorities say one man was injured and another walked away after a helicopter crash in Grant County.

Grant County Sheriff Glenn Palmer said 60-year-old Cliff Hoeft, of Pilot Rock, was flying a 1988 Enstrom helicopter when it crashed just after

10 a.m. Tuesday. Palmer said the helicopter ran out of fuel and crash landed among juniper trees and a rock outcropping near Ritter Butte Lookout.

Palmer says Hoeft was injured and transferred by aircraft to a hospital in Bend.

Hoeft's passenger,

34-year-old Cody J. Cole, of Monument, walked away from the crash and was taken to a local hospital for observation.

The men had been hired by people who were coyote hunting on adjoining properties in the area.

Palmer says the helicopter sustained major damage and is a total loss.

RED TAG SALE

12 Month Interest Free Financing

HUGE SAVINGS

20% TO 50% OFF

Storewide Savings

Mattress Sets, Bedroom Sets, Recliners And More...

Weekdays 9:30-6
Open Sun. 12-4

Greg's Sleep Center

Sofas 'n More

541-567-1099

North Hwy 395 Cottage Plaza

Min. Purchase of \$999 OAC

Excludes any other promotions or offers.