

**HERMISTON**



Photo contributed by Umatilla County

Umatilla County will clean up this property on Lorraine Ave. near Hermiston.

**County to clean up abandoned property**

By JENNIFER COLTON  
East Oregonian

Umatilla County will clean up an abandoned Hermiston property that has attracted squatters since it caught fire in February.

Wednesday morning, the Umatilla County Commissioners voted to take abatement action on a debris-scattered property off Lorraine Avenue north of Hermiston. Photos provided by code enforcement show debris, building materials and garbage scattered around the property, both inside and outside of buildings.

The house on the property caught fire Feb. 6 and did have people in it at the time, according to emergency reports. Police were also called to the abandoned home on Feb. 25 after reports of people on the property burning material.

Umatilla County code enforcement began working on the property in the summer of 2015. The county voting to abate a property is unusual, according to code enforcement coordinator Gina Miller. Miller said this is likely the fifth abatement to come from a vote in 10 years.

"This doesn't happen all that often. This is a kind of unique circumstance where the people who are on the deed are no longer living, and there has been no contact from any heirs," Miller said. "This is a health hazard in that garbage like that attracts vermin. In the interest of public health, we're going to get that cleaned up."

In most code enforcement cases, the county works with the owners to bring the prop-



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— Gina Miller, code enforcement coordinator

erty into compliance.

"It's a matter of education. That's our first and foremost: reaching out to people and educating them on what they can and cannot do on a property, such as with solid waste," Miller said. "We're trying to do a good thing here. When we get a property cleaned up and we have a resolution, that's a really great feeling."

Because of the long process of working with landowners — often exacer-

bated by issues like weather and health concerns — code enforcement cases can take months to resolve.

The commissioners' vote followed a judgment through the court system for a solid waste violation. Now that the vote has been approved, the next step will be to have a representative from the Umatilla County Sheriff's Office post notices at the site so anyone illegally staying on the property has time to relocate.

**LAWSUIT: Investigation found nothing criminal**

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model, so Mason had the Valdezes audit the system.

Laura Aviles-Valdez discovered "several questionable costs," including over-paying GOBHI for administrative services. Mason and the Valdezes concluded GOBHI was underfunding the human services department to line the pockets of "private human services providers whose CEOs served on the GOBHI board with Commissioner Murdock."

Mason and her companions' demise with the county came after the state overhauled reimbursement rules for the Oregon Health Plan.

The county's human services billing clerk began submitting non-Medicaid screenings for reimbursement. The Oregon Health Plan rejected the submissions in April 2015. The lawsuit alleges the county used those errors as an excuse to fire Mason and the Valdezes.

The lawsuit also alleges the county leaked information to the *East Oregonian*. The *EO* covered the suspensions and firings in 2015, but the tip to the paper did not come from Murdock or other county officials.

The *EO* reported GOBHI in April 2015 investigated the county's alcohol and drug treatment program. Henry O'Keefe, GOBHI's in-house attorney, confirmed the investigators sent findings to the Oregon Department of Justice. However, he did not discuss what GOBHI found.

Neither Mason nor either Valdez returned *EO* requests for comment at that time.

Umatilla County Counsel Doug Olsen said this week that the investigation found

nothing criminal, and Justice Department spokesperson Kristina Edmunson confirmed Wednesday the agency did not open a criminal investigation.

The new lawsuit demands a jury trial and that the county pay the three plaintiffs for monetary losses, including back pay and future earnings and impairment of earning capacity. They also seek damages for physical and emotional injury, humiliation, embarrassment and "loss of enjoyment of life in an amount to be determined by a jury." They also want the county to pay for the cost

of the suit.

The county received a copy of the lawsuit on March 2. Magistrate Judge Patricia Sullivan is presiding over the case in federal court in Pendleton. County counsel Doug Olsen said at this point the county has nothing to say.

Attorney Robert Franz of Springfield is representing the county and did not respond to an email Wednesday. He has 21 days to file a response to the suit.

Contact Phil Wright at [pwright@eastoregonian.com](mailto:pwright@eastoregonian.com) or 541-966-0833.

**PENDLETON**

**Cop-fleeing suspect faces attempted murder charges**

By PHIL WRIGHT  
East Oregonian

The man injured by Oregon State Police in January after he fired at them and tried to escape near Pendleton faces two counts of attempted aggravated murder and more.

Bryan Alberto Corona, 24, of Pendleton, led troopers on a high-speed chase Jan. 2 on back roads through Umatilla County, Oregon. State Police reported Corona fired a gun at troopers in pursuit, and one trooper crashed his car into Corona's to end the chase. Then as Corona got out of the car to run, another trooper's car struck him and put him in the hospital.

Corona arrived Monday at the Umatilla County Jail, Pendleton. Undersheriff Jim Littlefield said Corona was at Oregon Health & Science University, Portland, then went to the nearby Multnomah County Jail, which had the medical facilities to care for him until he was well enough to return.

Umatilla County District Attorney Dan Primus said Corona faces 14 counts in all, including two of

attempted aggravated murder for shooting at police. The other charges are:

- four counts of reckless endangering;
- one count each of reckless driving, unlawful use of a weapon, felony attempting to flee police for the car chase and the misdemeanor attempting to flee for trying to run on foot;
- two counts of assault of a public safety officer;
- and two counts of first-degree assault.



Corona

Primus, who is running unopposed for re-election, also said Circuit Judge Christopher Brauer of Pendleton presided over Corona's arraignment on March 4, and his next court hearing is April 1.

Until then, Corona remains in the Umatilla County Jail in lieu of a \$1,075,000 bond. The online jail roster displays Corona's most serious charges as aggravated murder, not attempted aggravated murder. Primus and Sheriff Terry Rowan, who also is seeking re-election in a contested race, said that information was not accurate.

**County to get three new officers**

PENDLETON — Three new officers are graduating from the state's basic police class to join local agencies.

Curtis Harper, 24, of Heppner, becomes the newest officer with the Pendleton Police Department.

Zachary McCarl, also of Heppner, will join the Umatilla Police Department. McCarl served in the U.S. Marines in Afghanistan and left the military with an honorable discharge in May 2015.

And Mason Murphy is a new officer with the Umatilla Tribal Police

Department.

They are among 39 graduates from Oregon Public Safety Academy's 355th basic police class that will work for agencies throughout Oregon, according to a written statement from the Oregon Department of Public Safety Standards and Training.

The class is 16 weeks long and includes dozens of training areas, from survival skills to firearms to community policing. The class graduates Friday at 11 a.m. at the Oregon Public Safety Academy, 4190 Aumsville Highway S.E., Salem.

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