

HERMISTON

Senior center plans scaled back

City council to discuss plans at Monday meeting

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
East Oregonian

A packed agenda at Hermiston's city council meeting Monday will include consideration of plans for the city's new senior center.

The plans for the Harkenrider Center being presented are a scaled back version of what was presented in March, when the city council was asked to consider paying for a daylight basement.

The plans that will be recommended by staff on Monday include a 7,200-square-foot main floor, a 3,800-square-foot basement and a simplified parking lot design that would include the same number of spaces but remove some of the aesthetic elements included in the previous design. The current senior center at the Umatilla County Fairgrounds is 5,500 square feet.

If the city council approves the plans recommended Monday it will cost an estimated \$550,000 above and beyond the \$2 million Community Development Block Grant paying for the rest of the project.

Monday's agenda also includes:

- A presentation from the Hermiston Branding Committee, which will reveal the results of the community survey about what logo and tagline the city should use as it moves forward with its branding efforts.

- The city council also will be asked to approve a supplemental budget that includes \$437,333 (mostly grant money from the Federal Aviation Administration)

for a new lighting system at the Hermiston Municipal Airport; \$260,000 for capital improvements by Hermiston Energy Services; and \$1 million for the city to clean out and haul away sludge from the storage pond at its wastewater treatment plant and plan improvements to its solids handling system.

- Sanitary Disposal will ask for a 7.81 percent increase in rates for Hermiston customers, which includes an increase of .5 percent in the franchise fees that are paid back to Hermiston. The city plans to use the extra \$10,000 generated by the franchise fee increase to pay for abatement efforts on properties with code violations.

- The city council will be asked to approve an inter-governmental agreement with the city of Umatilla to take over building inspections in Umatilla.

- It will also be asked to approve an agreement for a wastewater feasibility analysis to discover options for bringing additional wastewater services to the industrial land south of Hermiston so the land could accommodate a food processing plant.

- The 7 p.m. regular council meeting will be preceded by a 6 p.m. work session on future city hall needs.

Assistant city manager Mark Morgan said there are no imminent plans to build a new city hall, and city staff have no recommendations for the immediate future, but they felt it was important to start assessing how to the city might address its needs for office and meeting space in what has become a "pretty cramped space here" in the current building.

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

Missing Milton-Freewater man linked to homicide investigation

By **STEPHANIE TSHAPPAT**
Union-Bulletin

A Washington State Patrol crime lab team combing through a Walla Walla house earlier this week is part of an investigation into a report of a missing Milton-Freewater man who may be a homicide victim, officials said Friday.

Walla Walla police Detective Sgt. Matt Wood said rumors of a man being killed at 1589 E. Alder St. led police to the family of Gabriel Ledezma Rodriguez, 33, who hasn't been seen since about April 26.

Police took the rumors seriously because information was corroborating, and "we believed we had probable cause to search for evidence of a crime," Wood said in an interview this morning.

Detectives contacted Rodriguez's family and helped his father, who doesn't speak English, report him as a missing person to Milton-Freewater police.

On Tuesday around 4 p.m., detectives knocked at the door of the Alder Street rental duplex. After speaking with the person who answered the door, the house was secured and police remained there through the night until a search warrant was served Wednesday morning.

Wood confirmed the duplex was being rented and

the occupant was relocated elsewhere.

Wood said the Washington State Patrol Crime Response Team was called in to process the scene to allow detectives to continue to investigate the suspected homicide.

"We have detectives freed up, talking to anyone whose name comes up and knocking on doors," he said.

A news release said numerous items were collected from the house for further examination, but Wood wouldn't comment on what those items were, except to say that no body was recovered.

"I can't go into a lot of specifics because we're still talking to people, searching the area," he said.

The areas being searched are in the Walla Walla Valley in Washington and across the stateline in Oregon.

"Those are the areas we've been concentrating on, been working in," Wood said.

Ledezma Rodriguez also goes by the names Luis, "Chocolate" and "Choco."

"We've been receiving information from the public and community since Tuesday when this started," Wood said. "We'd really like to find him."

Anyone who hears from him or knows where he might be is asked to call detectives at 509-527-1960.

Corrections

A May 4, 2016 story about Sunridge teacher Erin Donnelly misstated the number of years she has worked at the school. Donnelly has worked at Sunridge for four years; she worked for 11 years in California before coming to Oregon. The *East Oregonian* works hard to be accurate and sincerely regrets any errors. If you notice a mistake in the paper, please call 541-966-0818.

TEACHER APPRECIATION WEEK: ECHO



Teacher Brandi Russell pitches a softball game during a middle school physical education class at Echo Schools on Thursday. Russell teaches math, science and P.E. classes at the small school.

Staff Photo by Jennifer Colton

Science to softball: teaching it all

Echo's Brandi Russell teaches three subjects

By **JENNIFER COLTON**
East Oregonian

In a small school, each teacher wears many hats. Brandi Russell is no exception.

Thursday morning, Russell started her day pitching and teaching softball to sixth-graders. In the afternoon, she taught Algebra 1 and, in between, she checked on the progress of the pill bugs her elementary science students are raising to race.

With 22 years of teaching under her belt, Russell has the experience, the creativity and the drive to tackle anything the Echo School District can throw at her.

This school year, Russell teaches junior high math, junior high physical education and is piloting a science program for second- and third-graders.

The curriculum has allowed students to grow vegetables, raise pill bugs and engineer small robotic vehicles. Giving students a hands-on, practical application to science allows students who may not be the best readers or test-takers to thrive.

"Some of these kids who hated school love it because



Staff Photo by Jennifer Colton

Teacher Brandi Russell leads a physical education class at Echo Schools on Thursday.

they get to do the things they're good at," Russell said. "If we can hook them in second and third grade, make them love school, then we'll keep them engaged."

While the elementary students provide a break from the hours of junior high, Russell said she loves the hope and humor that middle school students provide.

"There's so much hope in junior high," she said. "The best thing about teaching is helping the students see what you see in them, to see the potential, what they can do."

The hardest part of teaching junior high, for Russell, is overcoming obstacles, such as students not taking education seri-

ously. The best part, then, is inspiring students to set and reach goals.

"The biggest thing is getting them to believe they can do it," Russell said. "We teach them they have value and they can do great things."

Russell's career has taken her from Gresham to the Philippines, where she provided relief and taught English and life skills for a year. The past 10 years have been in the Echo School District, including five years as a full-time teacher and five years as a substitute.

"The best thing about teaching is helping the students see what you see in them, to see the potential, what they can do."

— **Brandi Russell**, Echo teacher

Russell said she chose Echo as the place to raise her own children because of the community.

As a junior high teacher, the 2015-16 school year is the first time Russell has had one of her own children in her class, which provides its own joys and challenges.

Working in junior high and wearing many hats, Russell said she could not picture herself in another career.

"Some people that love to teach have just always taught. You teach your dolls, you teach whoever will listen," she said with a laugh. "I don't think you hit 18 and decided to do it. You've always done it."



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