

**PENDLETON**

# New director takes helm of watershed council

By **GEORGE PLAGEN**  
*East Oregonian*

Collaboration is key for management and restoration of the Umatilla River, and Michael Ward is confident he can be the emissary to build those relationships.

Perhaps no job is as important for Ward, 29, as he settles into his new role as executive director of the Umatilla Basin Watershed Council.



Ward

“It takes a lot of people coming together to make these projects happen,” Ward said. “We’re excited to work with all those groups.”

Specifically, Ward said the watershed council relies on working with landowners as well as partner agencies, including the Umatilla County Soil and Water Conservation District, Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife, Department of Environmental Quality and Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation.

In recent years, the watershed council has joined with local partners on a project to remove the Dillon Dam near Stanfield, which is finally expected to happen later this summer. Agencies have also nearly completed a final draft of the Birch Creek assessment, which is intended to identify projects to bolster steelhead habitat.

“We’re hopefully going to get everybody at the table and rely on their expertise,” Ward said.

Ward was hired by the watershed council in November, coming from the small mountain town of Leadville, Colorado, where he led the county chamber of commerce. But environmental work was always his passion, he said, and his lifelong goal was to eventually wind up on the West Coast.

Ward grew up in southern Appalachia, earning his bachelor’s degree in history from the University of Alabama and master’s degree in business leadership from Shorter University, a private Christian college in Rome, Georgia. While at Alabama, Ward also studied and worked in the university’s geology department, conducting

water and soil tests.

Healthy watersheds can harbor an entire culture and way of life, he said, as it did on the Etowah and Coosa rivers in Alabama and Georgia.

“Now, I’m lucky enough to be in a position where I can work in the field and hopefully have a positive impact,” he said.

After graduation, Ward moved to Colorado where he started working with Outward Bound USA and as a snowboard instructor in Breckenridge. He also cut his teeth writing grants for Great Outdoors Colorado, which works to preserve state parks, trails, wildlife and rivers.

When the opportunity came to succeed Jon Staldine at the Umatilla Basin Watershed Council, Ward said he and his family were instantly sold. The first time they visited Pendleton was during the Round-Up in September.

“We fell in love with it here,” he said.

Ward arrives with his wife, Emily, their 2-year-old daughter Tillie and identical four-month-old twin boys Knox and Davis. He said they are looking forward to getting involved in the community.

As for his role at the watershed council, Ward said he is looking forward to seeing the Dillon Dam project through, removing a year-round barrier for salmon and steelhead. The Birch Creek watershed assessment is also entering its final draft, with a public meeting scheduled for April in Pilot Rock.

Ward said he plans to reach out extensively to landowners later this spring, and will be seeking funding to help agencies tackle future proposals.

“I’m excited to serve the long-term goals of our organization, and also work with landowners to preserve their way of life, too,” he said.

Ward is in the process of redesigning the council’s website, at [www.umatilla-law.com](http://www.umatilla-law.com). More information about the Birch Creek assessment can also be found at [www.bcaap.net](http://www.bcaap.net).

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**BRIEFLY**

## Kindergarten 2017 registration starts April 3

HERMISTON — The Hermiston School District will hold its spring kindergarten registration from April 3 to April 14. Parents of children who will be entering kindergarten in fall 2017 can go to any of the district’s five elementary schools between 8:30 a.m. and 3:30 p.m. daily. Children must be registered at their attendance area school, according to district boundaries. Boundary information can be found at [hermiston.k12.or.us/boundaries](http://hermiston.k12.or.us/boundaries), or by calling the schools.

To be eligible for kindergarten this fall, children must be five years old by Sept. 1, 2017.

In order to complete the enrollment process, parents are asked to bring the student’s birth record, social security number, proof of residence and health/immunization records. Spanish translation services will be available.

## Cause of power failure still unknown

HERMISTON — About 4,000 Umatilla Electric Cooperative customers

were without power for an hour Tuesday night, but officials from the company and Bonneville Power Administration are still working to figure out the cause.

The fault occurred near the McNary Substation on a 500-kilovolt line that runs about 20 miles to the Calpine Substation south of Hermiston, according to BPA spokesperson David Wilson.

“Two lines were slapped together, but we don’t know the cause,” Wilson said. “It could be wind, a bird could have flown into it — they’re investigating the cause.”

The power went out at about 7:30 p.m. and was restored around 8:30 p.m.

Steve Meyers of Umatilla Electric Cooperative said customers of multiple power companies were reported to have lost power, including across the river. He said customers in Hermiston and Stanfield lost power.

“Nine times out of ten, an issue originates within our electrical system and we know the cause,” he said. “But this outage originated from outside our system.”

Briefs are compiled from staff and wire reports, and press releases. Email press releases to [news@eastoregonian.com](mailto:news@eastoregonian.com)

**HERMISTON**

# School district to host forums to discuss \$104 million school bond

By **JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN**  
*East Oregonian*

The Hermiston School District will host several sessions Friday to discuss its bond issue, which goes before voters in May.

The \$104 million bond would complete several projects in the district that will address safety concerns and the district’s quickly expanding student population. The initial cost to taxpayers is expected to be 90 cents per \$1,000 assessed value and take 22 years to pay off. Currently, local property taxes for education are \$4.09 per \$1,000 in value.

During the district’s meetings at 7 a.m., noon, and 7 p.m. at the Hermiston School District offices on 305 S.W. 11th St., district employees and members of the bond’s political action committee will present information about the bond and answer questions or concerns raised about the bond.

The major projects the bond plans to address are:

- Building a new school on district-owned property at Theater Lane.
- Demolishing and replacing Rocky Heights and Highland Hills elementary schools on their current properties.
- Making repairs and renovations at Sandstone Middle School, including the parking lot.
- Expanding Hermiston High School into the old Umatilla County Fairgrounds, which the district now owns.

Much of the expansion is aimed at accommodating a growing student population. Superintendent Fred Maiocco said the district anticipates a growth of around 150 students per year for the next few years.

In order to keep up with that growth, he said the district will need to expand its high school capacity and build another elementary school.

The high school expansion would increase the school’s capacity from 1,600 students to 2,000. Currently, the district uses 34 modular classrooms for overflow, but in two years district officials predict they may need as many



EO file photo

Students leave their modular classroom units on the first day of the 2016 school year at Rocky Heights Elementary School in Hermiston. Hermiston voters will decide on a \$104 million bond in May that will replace Rocky Heights and Highland Hills, build a new elementary school and expand the high school.

as 50. Although it wouldn’t eliminate the need for modular classrooms, the expansion would alleviate some of the need for the portable buildings.

Improving the fairgrounds would also include moving Weber Field, and creating room for potential future projects such as sports fields, parking and a garden.

Hermiston residents are in the middle of paying off two other school district bonds — one passed in 2004 that went toward construction of Desert View Elementary — and another passed in 2008. The 2008 bond, a \$69.9 million measure, replaced Armand Larive Middle School, Sunset Elementary and West Park Elementary and will be paid off in June 2029.

Maiocco also said while this bond would address the district’s short-term population growth, the district would likely have to issue another bond in 10 years.

The district is currently searching for property that could be used to build

a second high school — something Maiocco said they will look into once the high school population hits 2,000.

There are also safety concerns with some of the current elementary schools, Maiocco said. Rocky Heights and Highland Hills elementary schools — at 53 and 37 years old, respectively — are built in California style, meaning they have outside hallways and more entrances than the newer buildings, making it more difficult to monitor who goes in and out of the school.

The district has conducted a few surveys about the proposed bond. The most recent one in October 2016 showed that 46 percent of those surveyed were in support of the bond, 48 percent were against, and six percent were undecided. Thus far, the political action committee for the bond has raised about \$18,000 of their \$30,000 goal.

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**UMATILLA**

# City council moves on without mayor

By **JADE MCDOWELL**  
*East Oregonian*

The Umatilla City Council addressed city business without a mayor Tuesday night after David Trott resigned from the position last week.

Council president Mary Dedrick will preside over the council until a new mayor can be elected in November. Both she and councilor David Lougee voted against accepting Trott’s letter of resignation.

The letter came after Trott called a special executive session meeting that he stated beforehand was to address several concerns that had been brought to him about city manager Russ Pelleberg. The council emerged from that meeting without taking any action, and later councilor Mel Ray asked for a second closed-door meeting to discuss Trott’s behavior.

After Trott’s request that the meeting be conducted in open session was met with resistance from some councilors, Trott resigned, writing that “a majority of the council appears unwilling to discuss recent issues in an open public forum and would rather conduct their discussions behind closed doors ... attitudes like this show a disdain and lack of respect for the public that the mayor and council represent.”

Councilors were split in their assessment of Trott’s resignation. Lougee stated that while he did not always agree with Trott, he thought as mayor he had provided experience and a balance to the council that was important.

“I believe him to be an honorable man who was trying to do what was best for the city,” Lougee said.

He said that while he would presume Pelleberg was innocent of any allegations against him until proven otherwise, Lougee did believe that there should be a third-party investigation when there were claims against city staff.

Lougee also stated that he, too, felt that too much city business was discussed outside of open public meetings. He said when it was publicly stated that “the council” wanted former city manager Bob Ward to retire early, it was the first he had heard of it, suggesting that it had been discussed beforehand by certain councilors instead of going through appropriate channels such as a committee meeting or council work session.

“We need to do things openly,” he said.

Roak TenEyck took a different view of Trott’s resignation. He called Umatilla his “own personal paradise” he loves coming home to. He said he can’t

stand idly by, then, as a “self-serving person” with an agenda tries to publicly destroy the career of a city manager who “has done more in a year than some people have done in total” for Umatilla.

“Mr. Trott most definitely needed to resign and that’s about the only thing he and I agreed on,” TenEyck said.

He said the information that had been made public was only one side of the story and he stood by the council’s decision to promote Pelleberg to city manager.

“I thought then and still do now that he is the right person for the job,” he said, stating that Umatilla was on the cusp of growth and deserved a chance to grow.

His speech was met with applause from several members of the audience.

Despite the consternation caused by Trott’s resignation, the rest of the meeting moved through typical city business without disruption. The council authorized Pelleberg to sign a lease renewal with the Army Corps of Engineers for portions of the Lewis and Clark Trail, authorized Dedrick to sign

an intergovernmental agreement with the Department of Energy, passed an ordinance officially adopting the Youth Advisory Council as a city committee and approved a contract with Portland State University graduate students who are helping Umatilla create a downtown revitalization plan as a class project. The students are hosting an open house Friday at Umatilla High School from 3-7 p.m. to solicit feedback from the community on what residents want Umatilla to look like.

Pelleberg reported he is working with cities from the west side of the county to pursue funding for a trail along the Umatilla River stretching from the Columbia River to Stanfield or possibly Echo. He said he was delaying creation of a Community Development department for a month or two until he could give the council a detailed presentation about his plans for the department and how duties across city departments would be reorganized.

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