

HERMISTON

EOTEC approves leases and operations plan

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
East Oregonian

The Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center board approved an operations plan and leases for the Umatilla County Fair and Farm-City Pro Rodeo at its Friday meeting.

The operations plan, which will be vetted by the Hermiston City Council and Umatilla County Board of Commissioners during a joint meeting March 20, calls for the hiring of a general manager for EOTEC who would hire and supervise staff, oversee day-to-day operations, market the center and perform other managerial duties.

The manager would oversee an administrative assistant and custodial staff, and would report to the EOTEC board, which would in turn report to the Hermiston City Council and Umatilla County Board of Commissioners.

Larry Givens, who represents the county commission on the board, acknowledged questions that had been brought up recently by city councilor John Kirwan and commissioner George Murdock about whether the city of Hermiston should manage EOTEC more directly and whether the county should continue to be a partner. He said people “jumped the gun” on that conversation, but said sometime down the road there could end up being changes.

“This is a good start,” he said.

The project’s two anchor tenants will be the Umatilla County Fair and Farm-City Pro Rodeo, and on Friday the board approved leases for both. The fair will pay \$10,000 a year to lease the fairgrounds for six weeks each summer, including the three weeks before the fair and two weeks after. The lease agreement also includes storage space, an office in the event center and access to the board room for fair board meetings.

The rodeo’s lease of the rodeo arena also runs at \$10,000 per year, which covers a 90-day period. Included in that lease is naming the arena the Farm-

Council meeting rescheduled to March 20

HERMISTON — The Hermiston City Council meeting and work session scheduled for Monday has been moved to March 20.

The meeting will take place at the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center, 1705 E. Airport Road outside Hermiston, starting with a joint work session at 6 p.m. between the council and the Umatilla County Commission regarding EOTEC.

The council’s regular session will begin at 7 p.m.

City Pro Rodeo Arena, leaving open the possibility that with the rodeo board’s consent EOTEC could add a corporate sponsor’s name.

The fair and rodeo will pay for their own utilities and will be responsible for custodial work and repairs caused by their events.

During Friday’s meeting the board got good news on the construction side as John Eckhardt of Knerr Construction reported that the company had found some “value engineering” opportunities to save money on construction, and with that in mind had made the call to use overtime work to make up for the lost time caused by snow storms in December and January.

“We have done that, and we are on schedule,” he said.

Carl Hendon of Hendon Construction also reported that the rodeo arena was still on track to be completed by mid-June.

The project’s overall manager is Frew Construction Group, which has been subcontracting with Knerr Construction in recent months as its on-site partner. In an effort to continue momentum on construction, the board approved new agreements on Friday transferring the Knerr subcontract directly to EOTEC and reducing payments to Frew Development Group by \$6,000 per month.

PENDLETON

Traffic stop ends with self-inflicted gunshot

East Oregonian

A 36-year-old Pendleton man pulled over by police for a traffic violation shot and killed himself Friday afternoon in his vehicle in a southwest Pendleton neighborhood.

His identity was not released by press time. Oregon State Police is leading the investigation.

According to Pendleton police chief Stuart Roberts, officers approached the vehicle on SW 41st Street during a traffic stop about 3:30 p.m. and a shot rang out from inside. Because the vehicle had tinted windows, the officers couldn’t tell if passengers were inside or if more shots would follow.

When they finally got a clear look moments later, they found a man with a gunshot wound to his head.

They pulled the man out of the vehicle, started CPR and an ambulance took him to St. Anthony Hospital, Pendleton. He was later pronounced dead, according to OSP.

Roland Eidam, a neighbor who lives on Southwest 44th Street, said he was taking his



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Oregon State Police investigate the scene of a police traffic stop that ended with a suicide Friday on Southwest 41st Street in Pendleton.

afternoon walk when he saw police pursuing the suspect vehicle.

After the car pulled over on Southwest 41st Street, Eidam said two or three more squad cars arrived on scene within a matter of minutes. The neighborhood is home to a number of children, Eidam said, and he

was relieved none of them were hurt.

“I was worried about the kids more than anything,” he said.

Farther down Southwest 41st Street, neighbor Bill Corwin said he heard shouting, followed by what sounded like a single gunshot. Shortly after that,

he saw officers open the car door and drag the suspect out of the vehicle, where they performed CPR until an ambulance arrived.

An article of clothing and pair of shoes remained in the roadway as officers taped off the crime scene. Officers shut down the street during the investigation.

PENDLETON

Family and iguana unhurt in house fire

East Oregonian



Staff photo by Kathy Aney

Pendleton firefighters spray water on a fire on Southwest Goodwin Avenue on Friday evening.

A fire did damage to a house in Pendleton, but the family — and their 20-pound iguana — were not hurt.

Shawn Penninger, the assistant chief of the Pendleton Fire Department, said the department got the call to 2600 S.W. Goodwin Ave. at 4:43 p.m.

Four vehicles initially responded before the department called for reserves and support from the tribal and Pilot Rock departments.

A family of three lives in the house, and only one adult was home at the time of the fire.

Firefighters removed an iguana from the home and gave it oxygen.

Penninger said preliminary investigation shows the cause of the fire was improperly disposed smoking material. Firefighters cleared from the scene after about two hours.

HERMISTON

Citizens quiz school officials on proposed \$104 million bond

By **JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN**
East Oregonian

Of those that attended Friday’s sessions about the proposed Hermiston school bond, many seemed to feel that the proposed changes are valid, while others are worried that tax increases are getting out of hand.

The \$104 million bond would replace Rocky Heights and Highland Hills elementary schools, expand Hermiston High School and build a new school on district-owned property on Theater Lane. The bond would add 90 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value to the \$4.09 Hermiston residents already pay in education taxes. However, Superintendent Fred Maiocco reminded voters that the tax will be shared as Hermiston continues to grow.

“As new businesses are added to the tax rolls, there will be more people to help with the tax burden,” he said.

The district is currently paying off two other bonds, one started in 2004 to fund the construction of Desert View Elementary School and one in 2008 which built new Sunset and West Park elementary schools and Armand Larive Middle School. That bond was \$69.9 million, and will be paid off in 2029.

Maiocco also said one of the reasons the district wanted to pursue the bond is to qualify for a matching grant, funded by the state of Oregon.

“Oregon is one of the five states without some kind of formal matching process,” he said. If the district gets the bond approved, they can then apply to receive \$5.7 million from the matching grant program. Without the bond, they’ll be ineligible

for that money. Several other area school districts, like Umatilla, Pilot Rock and Milton-Freewater, passed their bonds and received matching grants.

Some in the audience were upset at the prospect of more taxes and asked why the district hadn’t thought of more creative solutions to some of the issues.

“I haven’t seen any out-of-the-box thinking. It’s just spend, spend, tax, tax,” said Geri Weigum, a longtime Hermiston resident. “In my opinion, we’re not utilizing what we have.”

Weigum said she wanted to see Hermiston look into year-round school, full-day kindergarten or four day-per week school to make better use of district resources.

“We’re being taxed to death,” she said. “I will not vote for it.”

“There have been two community-based committees that looked at all those options,” said district Director of Business Services Katie Saul, in response to Weigum’s comments. “Those are options we have (considered). But at this point, the bond is the best option.”

Another audience member, who was there representing local construction companies, said he would support the bond.

“Do I like to pay more taxes? No,” he said. “But you do what you have to.”

Several district employees and board members were present at the meeting to answer questions.

District representatives also discussed some of the hazards of continuing to take money out of the general fund.

Hermiston School Board chair Karen Sherman said the main thing the school’s

“As a community, we need to make decisions about how we want to educate our kids.” — **David Drotzmann**, Hermiston Mayor

general fund pays for is personnel — and that it can’t address any capital improvement projects.

Currently the district uses about 34 modulars as classrooms, and could see an increase to about 56 in the next few years if the district populations continue to increase at projected rate.

“Every time we drag a modular onto campus,

it takes money out of our general fund,” said board member Josh Goller, who is also the chair of the bond’s Political Action Committee. “It’s not a viable long-term solution for the district.”

District officials said the expanded high school would have 14 new classrooms, which would offer space for increased career technical education classes.

Hermiston Mayor David Drotzmann, who is on the Political Action Committee for the bond, said the community has always been supportive of its schools.

“As a community, we need to make decisions about how we want to educate our kids,” he said.

“My kids are no longer in school, but other people helped me support them

when they were,” he said. “I’m doing that for the next generation.”

The district has conducted several surveys to gauge community support for the bond. The most recent survey, in October 2016, showed that 46 percent of likely voters supported the bond, 48 opposed it, and six percent were undecided.

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