

# Planning commission approves data centers, mushroom compost

## Amazon project would remove farmland

By **GEORGE PLAVEN**  
East Oregonian

A proposed data center campus near Hermiston and mushroom compost factory north of Adams took big steps forward Thursday during separate land use hearings before the Umatilla County Planning Commission.

E-commerce titan Amazon — doing business through its subsidiary, Vadata — wants to build four new data centers along Westland and Cottonwood Bend roads, near interstates 82 and 84. The company already operates multiple data centers east of Umatilla, and two more campuses at Boardman.

Meanwhile, Ostrom Mushroom Farm of Olympia, Washington, plans to locate its newest compost plant along Sand Hollow Road, about five miles north of Adams. If built, the facility would generate 180 tons of finished compost every week.

After a marathon three-hour meeting, the planning commission voted unanimously to approve the conditional use permit for Ostrom, and voted 7-1 to recommend the county rezone 120 acres of farmland to light industrial for Vadata. The Board of Commissioners will have final say on land use for the data centers.

**Amazon**  
Gary Rhinhart, vice chairman of the planning commission, was the only one to vote against Vadata's request, saying he was frustrated with eliminating more

farm ground to accommodate another industrial development.

"I have a problem with that," Rhinhart said.

Rhinhart also asked why the company did not consider locations on the east side of the county toward Pendleton, which has more available industrial land to sell.

Jim Footh, real estate manager for Vadata, said all campuses need to be connected by fiber optic cable, and Pendleton is simply too far from their existing data centers.

"The distance between the Pendleton and Hermiston areas is just too far for our connectivity," Footh said. "Unfortunately, that's just the nature of our business."

The Hermiston site has other advantages, Footh added, such as access to nearby high-voltage power lines. Amazon is also signed on to use Hermiston's regional water system, which will prove the roughly 400 gallons per minute needed to keep the computer servers cool.

Footh said the company is considering options to recycle cooling water for local farms, but did not have a specific proposal.

"Our intention is to be able to take our process water and use it for agricultural purposes," he said.

Each of the four data centers would run 24 hours per day and support up to 40 jobs. Footh said multiple campuses are needed to create redundancy and avoid

outages.

"In other words, if one of these sites goes down, there can be another still operating," Footh said.

Several neighbors expressed concern about what the project will mean for their quality of life. Dan Burnam testified at the hearing, arguing the property could still be used as farmland if it had a water right. He also questioned what kind of buffer would be in place.

Mary Buckallew, who testified after Burnam, said she was worried about what a large industrial campus would mean for the neighborhood.

"It is a farming area," Buckallew said. "It's going to change the whole lifestyle."

The Umatilla County Board of Commissioners will hold another public hearing on the matter at 9:30 a.m. April 13.

**Ostrom Mushroom Farm**  
The mushroom farm was a decidedly less controversial hearing, with all testimony in support of the project. That was in contrast to pre-application meeting held last month in Athena, where neighbors grilled developers about odor and water use.

Founded in 1928, Ostrom Mushroom Farm is the largest edible mushroom grower in the Northwest, producing 15 million pounds of per year. It takes a specially made fertilizer to sprout mushrooms, composting wheat straw, chicken manure, canola meal and water before mixing in the mushroom spawn.

Ostrom president David Knudsen said the company has long sourced its wheat straw from Eastern Oregon. The company needs to expand to stay competitive, he said, and they are excited about the prospect of being so close to one of their primary raw materials.

"We're excited to be in this community," Knudsen said.

The facility in Umatilla County would be dedicated strictly to brewing compost, and not to growing and harvesting the mushrooms themselves, which Knudsen said is done at a different farm. Ostrom does intend to build a new mushroom farm, but has not yet determined where.

Members of the planning commission asked whether that process could also be done locally. Knudsen said it was possible, though the difficulty was finding access to an available natural gas line.

Knudsen said the plant would create 13 new jobs out of the gate, with plans to expand in the future. In the end, the planning commission was won over with little deliberation.

"This was presented to us very well," said commission chairman Randy Randall.

Ostrom still needs to obtain a permit from the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality before the development can move forward.

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### HERMISTON



EO file photo

Shannon Moulton of Richland holds a photo of her daughter, Alexxyss, as traffic passes by on Highway 395 in Pendleton. Moulton lost her daughter after she collided with a vehicle while driving on Highway 395 and using her phone in February 2016 south of Pendleton.

## Distracted driver's crashed vehicle on display at high school

East Oregonian

Alexxyss Therwanger of Hermiston was 19 when she died in a crash Feb. 19, 2016. Oregon State Police reported she was using her cellphone when lost control of her car.

That car will be on display April 3 and 4 at the Hermiston High School parking lot. The Oregon Department of Transportation announced Friday afternoon the display is part of a distracted driver safety campaign. The display also has information about the campaign and links to several safety messages, including a three-minute video about Alexxyss that features her mother, Shannon Moulton, and a plea from Oregon State Police.

"What we are asking people to do is to take a pledge," Oregon State Police Captain Bill Fugate said, "... to stay off their hand-held electronic devices and focus on the road."

ODOT then will take the

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— **Bill Fugate**, Oregon State Police Captain

display to Salem Capital Mall for the April 6 start of 2017 National Distracted Driving Awareness Month. From there, the display tours Oregon for six months.

Kelly Kapri, a program manager for ODOT's Transportation Safety Division, said the state has been working for years to raise awareness of the problems with distracted driving.

For more information on when and where the display will be in Eastern Oregon, contact ODOT Region 5 Traffic Safety Coordinator Billie-Jo Deal at 541-963-1387 or email [billie-jo.m.deal@odot.state.or.us](mailto:billie-jo.m.deal@odot.state.or.us).

### PENDLETON

## BMCC arena project opens up land discussions between Round-Up, city

By **ANTONIO SIERRA**  
East Oregonian

Thanks to a Blue Mountain Community College project, the city of Pendleton might have found a use for a collection of Southwest Byers Avenue properties it owns west of the Round-Up grounds.

The city council has had ideas for the land — dubbed the G2 properties — including a hotel, a housing complex and an equine center. But talk has now shifted to a less ambitious function for the checkerboard of properties the city owns in the area — parking spaces.

As a part of its FARM project, BMCC is targeting the Round-Up pavilion as the site of an arena for its rodeo team combined with classroom space for its animal science and veterinary programs.

The project has the support of the Round-Up and the city, but constructing the building would also remove parking space on Fallen Field for trailers and livestock.

Pendleton Mayor John Turner said the Round-Up has talked with the city about using the G2 properties for parking if the new arena is built, a development he's open to because of the lack of development on the land since the city started buying up properties more than a decade ago.

"Right now, there's no one knocking on our door saying, 'Gee, I would like to build something there,'" he said.

As both the city and the Pendleton Development Commission, city officials began buying properties on Byers in 2006 as a way to clear blight and with an eye toward future development.

Attracting a hotel to support the Round-Up and the nearby Pendleton Convention Center was a longtime goal, but a lack of contiguous land and a group of home owners uninterested in selling their land made it a difficult proposition.

The city and urban renewal district has spent \$296,000 to acquire various properties around Byers, the last purchase coming in 2015.

The last time the city discussed the G2 properties at length, Chuck Wood, a former councilor and commission chairman, suggested the commission fund a \$25,000 feasibility study to determine whether any developments are realistic.

Turner said there aren't any plans to sell the land at this point, but the partnership could portend future deals like a land swap.

Round-Up communications director Randy Thomas confirmed the city and Round-Up board had talked about using the G-2

properties for parking, but described the discussions as "preliminary."

Commenting on the FARM project as a whole, Thomas said they were excited to work with BMCC in potentially locating its new facility in the Round-Up grounds, especially since supporting higher education is a part of the Round-Up's articles of incorporation.

Casey White-Zollman, BMCC vice president of communications, said one of the reasons the college sought out the Round-Up location was that it didn't have enough room on its own campus.

White-Zollman added that the building also needed more centrality since BMCC's partners would be looking to book events at the new arena.

BMCC will have to clear some funding hurdles before the new facility can come to fruition. The college is currently seeking \$5 million from the Oregon Legislature, which would fund half the cost of the building.

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EO file photo

A studded snow tire sits at G&S Tire Factory in Hermiston.

## Studded tire season ends March 31

SALEM — Winter has ended, and Oregon's studded tire season ends Friday, March 31.

But the Oregon Department of Transportation urges drivers not to wait until the deadline to change the wheels on their rides.

Drivers with studded tires on their vehicles after the deadline can face a class C traffic violation, according to ODOT.

Studded tires cause about \$8.5 million in damage each year to state highways, according to ODOT, which encourages drivers to consider other types of traction tires or chains to help minimize the roadway wear and tear.

**THUNDER ROAD**

March 25th  
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### HEALTH FAIR SCREENING

April 8, 2017  
8:30 a.m. – 1 p.m.  
**Community Health Fair**  
Pendleton Convention Center

**Health Fair Panel \$45.00**

Broad screening tool to evaluate organ function and check for conditions such as coronary heart disease, diabetes, liver and kidney disease

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- Comprehensive Metabolic Panel
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