

UMATILLA

New mayor to be chosen next month

By JADE MCDOWELL
East Oregonian

The Umatilla City Council will choose a new mayor at its May 2 meeting. The council approved a plan Tuesday night to accept applications at city hall up until that meeting, then submit questions to city staff that will be asked of all candidates during a public meeting on May 2 at 7 p.m. Afterward, the council will vote on a candidate to fill the remainder of former mayor David Trott's term, which expires at the end of 2018. Trott resigned in March, citing "irreconcilable differences" with the council. On Tuesday the council appointed Kelly Nobles as the newest member of the city's planning commission. Nobles, who is recently retired, told the council that he applied because he believed the commission needed someone with considerable time and energy to devote to it. Planning commission chair Boyd Sharp proposed that his commission swap meeting dates with the city's parks committee. Currently

the planning commission meets on the fourth Tuesday of the month and the parks committee meets on the second Tuesday of the month. Because the city council meets on the first Tuesday of the month, councilors have only a few days to review packets of information that are hundreds of pages long before they are asked to approve land use recommendations from the planning commission. The result is that they often table the decision for the next month's meeting to give them more time to get their questions answered, causing a delay for the developer. Sharp said if the planning commission started meeting two weeks earlier in the month, it would give councilors sufficient time to read through the packets and get their questions answered ahead of the city council meeting. Councilors supported Sharp's proposal, and also supported the idea of a joint work session between the council and planning commission for large, complex decisions so that developers' applications did not get passed back and forth between the two bodies for months.

"We don't want to keep people waiting and waiting," council president Mary Dedrick said. On Tuesday the council also approved an updated intergovernmental agreement with the Oregon Department of Transportation for design and construction of a project to replace sidewalks along Sixth Street between Yerxa Avenue and the Umatilla River Bridge. The loss of one of Umatilla's own weighed heavily on Tuesday's meeting, as city councilors and staff paid tribute to Staff Sgt. Austin Bieren, 25, who died of natural causes in northern Syria last week while serving as an Air Force security forces airman. "We lost a hero last week," police chief Darla Huxel said. She said Bieren, who graduated from Umatilla High School, exemplified "everything good about our community" with his kindness and dedication and service. She and several city councilors expressed their condolences for Bieren's family and expressed their sadness at his loss.

"I think in his honor, all of us need to start building Umatilla as a community as he saw it, as a place he wanted to come back to," Dedrick said. On a more positive note, councilors, city staff and members of the public all praised Umatilla's annual Slam Dunk the Junk event, which took place Saturday. Volunteers divided up the city into zones and worked to clean up yards and streets. Councilor Mel Ray said in his zone alone in McNary there were seven or eight industrial-sized dumpsters worth of garbage hauled away, plus stacks of tires and "bicycles galore" for the prison's bicycle recycling program. Roak TenEyck said the city needed to continue to find solutions to address "problem properties" that continue to allow junk to stack up, but complimented everyone who came out on Saturday. After Tuesday's regular session the council met in executive session to conduct the annual review of city manager Russ Pelleberg, but did not make any public comments or motions after the review.

BRIEFLY

Residents report phone scam

UMATILLA — A Umatilla resident said she received a phone call this week attempting to scam her, and wants others to be aware of similar calls. Jackie Lewis said a caller attempted to pull a "Grandma and Grandpa" scam on her. She said the caller claimed he was her grandson, and that he had been arrested and needed money. Lewis said she recognized immediately that the call was fraudulent, and quickly ended the call. "I said, thank you, I know what this is about, and hung up," Lewis said. Lewis said for a while, she was receiving similar calls every year, and that she has heard from other people in Umatilla and Morrow counties that they've received calls, too. Scammers often target older people, claiming to be family members in trouble. If this happens, ask specific questions that only real family members would know. Hang up and call family members to verify their locations, and, above all else, don't send money.

to share how residents can save for college and disability expenses. The first seminar — College Savings 101 — will run from 6 to 6:45 p.m., and the second — ABC's of ABLE — will follow immediately after, from 6:45 to 7:30 p.m. Both will be held at Blue Mountain Community College in Room ST-214 of the science and technology building, and are free to the public. College Savings 101 will give tips on how families can save for higher education using the Oregon College Savings Plan, a state program that offers tax advantages and lower investing fees than found in the private sector. ABC's of ABLE will explain the new Oregon ABLE Savings Plan, which allows for people with disabilities to save money without losing government benefits such as Medicaid and Social Security.

Grange plans full weekend

PENDLETON — A variety of breakfast entrées are available during the all-you-can-eat breakfast at White Eagle Grange.

If people go away hungry, it's their own fault. The menu features pancakes, French toast, ham, sausage links, hash brown potatoes, eggs any style, ham and cheese omelet, ham scrambled, biscuits and sausage gravy, and beverages.

The meal is Saturday from 6-10 a.m. at 43828 White Eagle Road, located off Highway 395 between Pendleton and Pilot Rock. The suggested donation is \$7 for ages 8 and older, \$4 for ages 5-7 and free for ages 4 and under. For \$1 off, donate two nonperishable food items, which will be distributed through local food banks. Also, the grange accepts hearing aid batteries and aluminum can tabs for other nonprofit organizations.

On Sunday, the grange will host a potluck dinner (5 p.m.) and meeting (6 p.m.), also at the hall. Everyone is invited to learn more about the grange, which is making plans for a 150th birthday celebration.

For more information, contact Gail Wilson at 541-310-9655, 541-276-3778 or gail11wilson@gmail.com.

Briefs are compiled from staff and wire reports, and press releases. Email press releases to news@eastoregonian.com

HEPPNER

Walk to raise money for MS research

Community to hit the streets April 22

By TAMMY MALGESINI
East Oregonian

The tiny town of Heppner has a big heart when it comes to supporting events, said Merilee McDowell, co-chair of the Eastern Oregon MS Walk. "Whenever you have a worthwhile cause in this area, everyone steps up to help," she said. McDowell, who was instrumental in spearheading the fundraising walk in Heppner 19 years ago, has lived with multiple sclerosis for 40 years. Over the decades, she has seen the benefits of money raised for research to help in treating the disease. During a 2016 interview with the East Oregonian, McDowell said there were no therapies when she was first diagnosed with MS. Now, there are more than a dozen FDA therapies for people with relapsing/remitting multiple sclerosis, she said. In its 19th year, the Eastern Oregon MS Walk is Saturday, April 22.



Staff photo by Tammy Malgesini

All forms of transportation were utilized during the 2015 Eastern Oregon MS Walk. This year's event is Saturday, April 22 beginning at All Saint's Episcopal Church in Heppner.

Registration and check-in starts at 9 a.m. at All Saint's Episcopal Church, 460 N. Gale St., Heppner. Coffee and a continental breakfast will be available before the walk. The well-marked 5K walk, which is wheelchair accessible, begins at 10 a.m. There's also a route map for

a 10K walk. A lunch follows at the church. There is no set registration fee — donations of any amount are welcome. Participants raising \$100 or more can earn prizes, including a T-shirt (while supplies last). Those unable to participate on April 22 can still

help the cause by registering as a virtual walker. Virtual participants can walk on their lunch break, to and from work or with other people on another day. People are encouraged to pre-register at www.walkms.org or by calling 855-372-1331. Also, walk-ons are welcome and can register at the event. Multiple sclerosis is a chronic disease that affects the central nervous system. Symptoms vary, including changes in sensation, visual impairments, muscle weakness, coordination problems, speech difficulties, fatigue and pain. In severe cases, MS results in impaired mobility. The 2016 Eastern Oregon MS Walk raised a record amount for the regional event, which has been held in Heppner for all but one year. Although the turnout was smaller than past fundraisers for the National Multiple Sclerosis Society Oregon Chapter, committee co-chair Barb Orwick said the Heppner event raised more than \$14,000. For more information, call McDowell at 541-571-5853, Orwick at 541-256-0455 or visit www.walkms.org.

Committee to take first look at county budget, seek to bridge \$1.7M shortfall

By GEORGE PLAVEN
East Oregonian

Umatilla County is bracing for painful cuts as department heads seek to bridge a \$1.7 million shortfall in this year's budget. Commissioner George Murdock, who oversees the county budget process, said they have come up with a balanced proposal that reduces total employees from 317 to 307 and trims full time equivalent hours from 177.94 to 166.85. The county budget committee will take its first look at the proposal Thursday before meeting again April 19-21. Murdock said the committee has the authority to make changes, but needs to be presented with a spending plan that matches revenue with expenses. "There was a lot of pencil-sharpening going on with our department heads, but I applaud them for making the cuts necessary to get where we need to be," Murdock said. The two biggest budget hurdles, according to Murdock, are insurance and Public Employees Retirement System, or PERS. The county will need to find \$3 million over the next four years just to make up for the added cost of PERS, he said. "In the meantime, we're required to have a balanced budget every year," Murdock said. Crafting this year's budget proposal began Oct. 1, and Murdock said department

heads were asked to prepare their projections months in advance. Right off the bat, Murdock said departments were told they would not be accepting any requests for additional staff. "I wouldn't want to suggest our process has been a bed of roses, because all of our departments are faced with a greater demand for services and less money with which to do the job," he said. "Anytime you have to ask people to do more with less and actually have to eliminate people's jobs, it is an unpleasant thing." In its proposal, the overall county budget comes in at just more than \$74 million,

with about \$28.4 million in the general fund. Some staff reductions would come from eliminating positions, Murdock said, while others would come from shifting employees to other agencies. For example, Umatilla County has already sent four clerical workers to Oregon State University Extension Service, and is in negotiations to shift its watermaster division to the state Water Resources Department. Umatilla County isn't the only local government having to deal with these cuts, Murdock said. "The \$1.8 billion shortfall facing Oregon is based upon

many of the same issues which have been facing the county," he said. "We are all being hit with the same issues." In the long run, Murdock said the county will need to consider alternative ways of funding services, "or we may end up looking like counties in southern Oregon which are teetering on the brink of bankruptcy." Already, the county

announced it will be cutting drug court due to a lack of state funding, and inability to backfill \$516,000 to keep the program going. The Local Public Safety Coordinating Council will hold a meeting Tuesday, April 11 to consider alternatives for the service. Jerry Baker, chairman for the county budget committee, said Thursday's meeting will help members become acquainted with the shortfalls.

"We know it's going to be a tough one this year," Baker said. Contact George Plaven at gplaven@eastoregonian.com or 541-966-0825.

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