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EAST OREGONIAN

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 26, 2017

141st Year, No. 137

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One dollar

Umatilla County economic development summit equation: Jobs + people + houses = taxes

By JADE MCDOWELL
East Oregonian

Umatilla County's second annual economic development summit highlighted a long and far-ranging list of projects that cities and other groups are working on in every corner of the county.

County commissioner Bill Elfering said the county is eager to assist those projects in any way possible.

"Jobs mean people, people mean houses, and houses mean taxes," he said.

Elfering kicked off the summit with examples of projects the county's economic development department has supported using lottery dollars from the state. In the past, he said, the

county has often given that money to events without a long-lasting impact to the county. Now it is focusing instead on projects that will leave something tangible for the community, such as the Rivoli Theater restoration in Pendleton and the disc golf course coming to Hermiston.

One project that Elfering described as in its infancy is working with west-end cities on a bike-ped trail along the Umatilla River that will eventually stretch from Echo down to the Columbia River.

He also described the county's efforts to assist in recruiting new business to the area. Some — sporting code names like Project Glitter



The Highland Summit neighborhood on the east side of Hermiston. The city of Hermiston has focused on promoting housing development after seeing the rate of workers commuting from the Tri-Cities outpacing the amount of new housing added to Hermiston.

See JOBS/10A

Data centers' boost to county taxes years off

By PHIL WRIGHT
East Oregonian

Four future data centers could boost Umatilla County's assessed valuation by \$2 billion. County officials, however, cautioned against the project providing any sudden spike in property tax revenue.

In April, county commissioners rezoned roughly 120 acres between Westland and Cottonwood Bend roads from exclusive farm use to light industrial. That provided a path for Vadata, an Amazon subsidiary, to build four new data centers. Commissioner Bill Elfering, who oversees economic development for the county, said the new buildings could be worth as much as \$500 million each.

See DATA/10A

Bill gives harsher penalties to texting drivers

By JADE MCDOWELL
East Oregonian

Getting caught texting and driving could hurt a lot more if certain bills pass the Oregon legislature.

Hermiston municipal judge Thomas Creasing outlined new traffic-related laws being considered by the legislature during a city council work session Monday.

He said both the Senate and House are considering upping the penalties for a first-time offense to as much as \$2,000. Senate Bill 2 as currently written would make texting and driving a misdemeanor that could include jail time for second and third offenses.

"It's basically treating it as another form of drunk driving," Creasing said.

The bills in question would also expand the penalties beyond texting to cover any operation of a "mobile electronic device" while driving. That includes checking Facebook on a tablet, inputting directions into a

See TEXTING/10A



"A lot of kids these days don't get the opportunity to get out into natural areas."

— Joani Bosworth, U.S. Forest Service

Highland Hills fifth-graders plant willow starts on the banks of a creek during the Watershed Field Days at the McNary Wildlife Area on Tuesday in Umatilla.
Staff photo by E.J. Harris

NATURE OF DISCOVERY

By GEORGE PLAVERN
East Oregonian

Finding the best spots to plant live willows took some poking and prodding, but the groups of fifth-graders from Desert View and Highland Hills elementary schools in Hermiston were up to the task Tuesday during Watershed Field Days at McNary Lock and Dam.

Richard Cissel, hydrologist for

the Umatilla National Forest, led the exercise to teach children about the importance of riparian areas, explaining how native vegetation keeps streams cold and clean for fish.

"When the willows grow up, they become these big shrubs and have all these benefits," Cissel said as students took turns digging into the firm ground.

Hands-on activities are the bread and butter of Watershed Field Days,

organized by the Umatilla County Soil and Water Conservation District. More than 150 kids cycled through seven stations Tuesday where they learned about everything from plants and animals to weather and soil, and how they are all connected in nature.

Kyle Waggoner, district manager for the SWCD, described the event as part outdoor school and part job fair, specifically for fifth-graders to expose them not only to natural resources,

but potential future careers.

"Fifth grade is just about the age when kids are getting interested in what they want to do when they grow up," Waggoner said. "(Watershed Field Days) educates them on what's actually out there, so at least they are aware."

Each station is represented by a local partnering agency, including

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HERMISTON

Second Street to transform into festival plaza

First phase to be complete by spring 2018, paid for by urban renewal district

By JADE MCDOWELL
East Oregonian

On Monday, Hermiston City Council approved designs for a downtown festival street.

The first phase of the project will transform the portion of Northeast Second Street between Main Street and Gladys Avenue from "building to building," according to GreenWorks PC principal architect Mike Faha.

"It will be quite a different look and feel," he told the

council, likening the finished product to "a big plaza."

Later phases will extend the project past Gladys Avenue to the Harkenrider Center (which breaks ground Wednesday) and add a plaza and fountain to the parking lot across the street from city hall.

The most expensive part of the first phase, which is expected to cost \$991,000, will be raising the street to the level of the sidewalk to create a more inviting pedestrian experience. Instead of curbs, street trees and

short posts called bollards will keep cars from coming up onto the sidewalk while still allowing pedestrians to easily move between them when the street is blocked off for events.

Decorative concrete pavers, ornamental lighting, metal benches, short stone walls and other touches will create a "sense of place," Faha said.

Phase 1 will remove five parking spots from the street, but phase 2 will restore them by restriping the parking lot across from city hall.

Adding a plaza will cost about \$277,000, adding a 25-foot-wide fountain and water play area will cost an estimated \$479,000 and extending the project to the Harkenrider Center will cost about \$571,000.

Money for the first phase comes from a bond that will be paid for using revenue from Hermiston's urban renewal district. City planner Clint Spencer said the citizens' group that helped develop the festival street design has expressed an interest in spearheading a

private fundraising campaign to help raise money for the later phases.

Mayor David Drotzmann said the city has recently had some "significant conversations" about the future of the old Carnegie Library on the corner of Gladys Avenue and Northeast Second Street, and noted that extending the festival street across Gladys as soon as possible would help make the library more attractive.

The first phase is expected to be complete in spring 2018.

"I'm excited to see what that looks like," Drotzmann said.

