

BRIEFLY

State fines company for raw sewage pollution

PENDLETON — State environmental regulators fined Pendleton property managers almost \$3,000 for allowing raw sewage to run in the street.

The Oregon Department of Environmental Quality in a written statement reported real estate managers and brokers Garton & Associates failed to “quickly address a broken pipe that caused a discharge of raw sewage” at 609 S.E. Eighth St., Pendleton.

The pipe broke on Jan. 4, according to the DEQ, and the raw sewage “ran down the street and onto a neighboring property.” A plumber repaired the pipe on Jan. 20.

The mismanagement of the sewer discharge led the DEQ to issue a \$2,850 penalty to Garton & Associates.

The environmental department in its June 15 notice of the fine pointed out the company “failed to have the broken pipe repaired for more than two weeks while the discharge of sewage continued. Failing to ensure that all plumbing fixtures are connected to a sewer system and that all waste water or sewage is discharged into a sewer system is a violation of Oregon environmental law.”

The state agency further stressed the sewage was a public health hazard.

The DEQ also reported Garton & Associates appealed the penalty.

Irrigon man takes deal, avoids sexual crimes

HEPPNER — An Irrigon man who faced first-degree rape and other serious sex crimes took a plea deal Thursday.

Jason Kane Kissler, 35, pleaded no contest to the domestic violence charge of fourth-degree assault. Circuit Judge Lynn Hampton sentenced him to 13 months in state prison, per the plea agreement he made with the Morrow County District Attorney’s Office. He also has to serve two years post-prison supervision.

The Morrow County Sheriff’s Office arrested Kissler on April 15 after responding to a disturbance at a home off Depot Lane, Irrigon. The victim told deputies that Kissler raped her, according to a statement from the sheriff’s office. The district attorney’s office subsequently charged Kissler with rape, sodomy and unlawful sexual penetration, all in the first degree, and the one count of fourth-degree assault.

The state dismissed all the sexual assault crimes in the plea deal.

Change of plea on schedule for Villegas murder case

MILTON-FREEWATER — The murder case of Oscar Pastor Garcia Villegas of Milton-Freewater is moving

toward a plea bargain. Villegas, 27, has undergone two evaluations to determine if he is mentally fit and can participate in his own defense, according to Umatilla County Circuit Court records. His attorney, Kara Davis, notified the court of the intent to rely on insanity defense. And District Attorney Dan Primus raised concerns Villegas was trying to fake mental illness.

Villegas’ most recent court hearing was in June to evaluate the status of his case. Circuit Judge Lynn Hampton then set Aug. 10 for the next proceeding — a change of plea hearing.

The state accused Villegas of stabbing and killing his wife, Maria Villegas, 24, and trying to kill their two young children in May 2016 in their Milton-Freewater home. He faces charges of murder, attempted murder, assault and more.

Committee raising money for Main Street courtyard

HERMISTON — The Hermiston Downtown District’s beautification committee is raising money for improvements to the Main Street courtyard between Andee’s Boutique and Bendixsen Law.

If donations are made before July 31, Edward Jones and the National Main Street Center will match the donation up to \$2,500. The committee has raised \$1,950 so far out of a goal of \$5,185.

The money will be used to add benches and shade trees to the plaza, providing a place for downtown shoppers to take a break in the shade.

To donate, go online to www.ioby.org/project/hermiston-main-street-courtyard.

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

PENDLETON
Motor home goes up in flames

By **GEORGE PAVEN**
East Oregonian

A New Hampshire couple escaped injury after their motor home caught fire Friday morning on Southwest Emigrant Avenue in Pendleton.

The blaze likely started in the vehicle’s engine compartment before spreading into the coach, according to Pendleton Fire Chief Mike Ciraulo. Bystanders watched as a cloud of thick, noxious black smoke forced police to temporarily close the road.

“It was nasty,” Ciraulo said.

Carrie Beloit, of Lewiston, Idaho, was eating breakfast with her husband, Tom, at Cadillac Jack’s when they first noticed the RV in flames.

“The back end was all engulfed,” said Beloit, who is visiting for Pendleton Bike Week. “It’s very



Photo courtesy Kelsey Williams

The rear of a motor home burns Friday on Southwest Emigrant Avenue, Pendleton.

heartbreaking. It’s like losing your home.”

No one was hurt, though the RV is likely destroyed, Ciraulo said. It was also towing a trailer with a vehicle and other equipment inside that sustained some minor smoke

damage. The couple was driving through Pendleton on their way to the coast, he said.

Friday marked the second motor home fire in Pendleton in the last two months. On June 8, an RV burned up on Southwest

Court Avenue near the Round-Up Grounds, hauling \$80,000 worth of pinball materials. The driver was not hurt.

Contact **George Paven** at gplaven@eastoregonian.com or 541-966-0825.

HERMISTON

City to consider authorization for eminent domain

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
East Oregonian

The Hermiston City Council will consider a series of resolutions paving the way for a new trail along Highland Avenue, including permission to use eminent domain if needed.

The council will have a work session at 6 p.m. at city hall to hear a presentation on the proposed new taxing district for the Oregon State University extension center, followed by a regular meeting at 7 p.m. that will include action on items related to the planned trail.

The trail, when completed in 2018, will stretch along the south side of Highland Avenue from Southwest 11th Street to the bridge over the Umatilla River, where it will loop underneath the road and connect with River-

front Park. Work is being completed by the Oregon Department of Transportation.

According to a memo in the agenda packet, project engineers have determined easements will be needed from five parcels along the trail route. The easements would need to be 20 feet wide to accommodate the trail plus slopes to contain earthwork. Assistant city manager Mark Morgan said the two resolutions before the city council Monday do not condemn the properties in question, but give ODOT the authority to contact those property owners and begin negotiations, and also to begin the legal process for eminent domain should they not be able to come to a mutual agreement with the

property owners.

One of the largest parcels along Highland Avenue is owned by Hermiston Christian School, where city councilor Rod Hardin is principal.

Another resolution on the table Monday would authorize the mayor to sign an intergovernmental agreement with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, transferring Steelhead Park to the city. The city would be given the five acres adjacent to Riverfront Park at no charge on the condition that it make improvements, including a boat ramp on the Umatilla River, by 2025. The acquisition of the park will allow the city to connect the West Highland Trail to Riverfront Park.

Monday’s agenda also

includes approval of a downtown light pole project that is part of the Hermiston Downtown District’s efforts to beautify downtown, plus consent agenda items, committee reports and the May and June financial reports.

The work session at 6 p.m. will provide information about the proposal to create new tax districts in Umatilla and Morrow counties for OSU Extension. The property tax rate of 33 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value would pay for things like additional staff and supplies. The extension service plans to place the proposal on the ballot in May.

Contact **Jade McDowell** at jmcdowell@eastoregonian.com or 541-564-4536.

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