



Staff photo by E.J. Harris
Horizon Project Inc. recycling driver Dwayne Myers sorts recyclables while loading a cardboard bailing machine on Tuesday in Milton-Freewater.

RECYCLING: Hermiston Sanitary Disposal is continuing to accept plastic

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that began phasing out “sheltered workshops,” a model that allowed employers to hire severely disabled people at below-market wages. With Horizon’s recycling program considered a sheltered workshop, the organization switched to hiring able-bodied workers to man their five-day-per-week curbside recycling service in July, raising labor costs.

The recycling market was also driving up expenses. Currin said Horizon used to be able to sell its recycled materials for \$2,000 per month, but in recent years, had to start paying \$200 a month to get them hauled away.

Horizon eventually realized that it wasn’t getting paid enough by the city to afford continuing the program and raising their fees would be untenable for the city. The organization announced it would end curbside recycling on March 2.

At the council meeting, Hall joked that the city would be able to recycle the paper bags staff breathed into as they tried to figure out Milton-Freewater’s next step.

Hall said later that staff solicited interest from local businesses about taking on the recycling contract, but didn’t have any takers.

Recycling is no longer considered a profitable enterprise due to changes in the international market.

While China used to be a top destination for recycled materials, the country banned the import of certain mixed paper and plastic grades and lowered the contamination standard. Recycling services that could once rely on China to accept their material are now scrambling to find domestic buyers or forgoing plastic recycling entirely.



Staff photo by E.J. Harris
Horizon Projects Inc. recycling driver sorts recyclables in the back of a truck while doing his pickup route Tuesday in Milton-Freewater.

Local communities haven’t been spared.

While Hermiston Sanitary Disposal is continuing to accept plastic, Pendleton Sanitary Service announced in December that it would no longer accept it.

Although Milton-Freewater couldn’t find a private vendor to cover its recycling, Hall said the city needed to continue offering recycling services to maintain its landfill permit with the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality. If the city’s permit was revoked, Hall said the city would have to begin hauling its trash to Washington or Arlington.

“That can get spendy,” she said.

She added that hauling trash and recycling elsewhere would require passing those costs on to customers, a difficult prospect for a city that literally has “low cost utilities” inscribed into its city seal.

So the city decided to start its own recycling program, which will go into effect March 6.

Public Works Superintendent Brian Steadman explained to the city council that the city would operate two collection sites instead of doing curbside recycling so that the city wouldn’t have to raise its \$4.15 per

month recycling fee.

The city bought a pick-up truck, a trailer, four hoppers and five 30-yard drop boxes for its two recycling depots, located at 13 S.E. Mill St. in the south part of town and 640 County Road on the west end.

Steadman said customers would be able to retain their recycling bins and use them to sort out their recyclables before taking them to one of the depots. Although Milton-Freewater won’t accept plastic, it will take newspaper, cardboard, glass, tin, aluminum, used motor oil, scrap metal and appliances.

Both facilities will be fenced and staffed during operating hours.

The County Road depot accepts all the listed materials and is open noon to 4 p.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays and 8 a.m. to noon on Saturdays. The Mill facility doesn’t take motor oil, scrap metal and appliances and is open from noon to 4 p.m. on Wednesdays and Fridays.

Steadman said curbside pick-up is still available for the elderly and disabled as long as they submit a form and receive the approval of the city manager.

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HEALTH: Oregon was the first state to legalize suicide for the terminally ill

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ensure that every resident has access and how it will define “cost effective” and “affordable,” said Bruce Howell, a Portland-based health care attorney and adjunct professor at Salem’s Willamette University law school.

“The issue is going to be how are we going to make that work and what does that really mean?” he said.

Oregonians who did not have access to cost-effective and affordable health care could sue the state, he said.

“Reading the bill as it is, it just raises some interesting questions. I don’t see how [we] can create a right without a remedy,” he said.

In a Feb. 5 letter to lawmakers, the nonpartisan League of Women Voters wrote that universal health care needs to be orchestrated at the national level; otherwise, Oregon would be responsible for all of the cost.

“The state of Oregon has insufficient income to support its current responsibilities and cannot provide the added cost of health care coverage for all its residents at this time.”

— Norman Turrill, League of Women Voters president

“The state of Oregon has insufficient income to support its current responsibilities and cannot provide the added cost of health care coverage for all its residents at this time,” wrote league President Norman Turrill.

Oregon is one of the most liberal U.S. states and was the first sanctuary state protecting immigrants in the country illegally and the first to legalize suicide for the terminally ill. The state also expanded coverage on abortions and other reproductive services regardless of income, citizenship status or gender identity. Both chambers of the Oregon Legislature are controlled

by Democrats.

Amending the constitution to establish health care as a right would also be a first, according to Richard Cauchi of the National Conference of State Legislatures, who specializes in health and related issues.

“Some states have an extensive history of considering universal health coverage, going back 15 to 20 or more years,” Cauchi said. “However, no such binding ballot question language has been passed and added to a state constitution.”

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

FARM: ‘We’re finding dead fish in the pasture’

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removed much of that from the muck. They also removed hay from the shed so it could dry and put up fences.

“I couldn’t thank them enough,” she said. “If it wasn’t for their help, I don’t know what we would have done. It would have taken us forever. There was a lot of rock, a lot of tangled mess. They helped us a lot.”

Some brought large equipment to move rock into place to make a dam to divert future flooding.

The Afdahls were stuck in a quandary during the flood, which at times was waist high, because government regulations to protect fish prohibited the use of heavy equipment in the river. Ginger Afdahl said the Oregon Department of State Lands granted them permis-

sion to make the dam to stop the river from flowing on their property.

She also argued for allowing the removal of natural dams and river blockages that occur during high flows, such as in the spring. Those dams cause the river to re-route, she said, and that leads to flooding.

“We went walking out there, and we’re finding dead fish in the pasture,” she said. “This is the result of not letting people take care of the river.”

She also said their property needs a lot more work.

Removing the new rock bar in the pasture is going to take a tractor, then they have to rebuild fence, put down topsoil and install irrigation. Getting the pasture in order would be a big step. Their horse and pony, three sheep and 15 goats are sharing a small corral, she said, but

“not everybody’s happy.”

The Afdahls’ son, Chance Afdahl, started a donation page at gofundme.com to raise \$5,000 to help his parents. Ginger Afdahl said most of that money would go to covering the irrigation costs.

“Everything people have been doing for us is so much appreciated,” she said. “There is no way to thank them enough.”

Roberts extended his thanks to Team Rubicon and the community volunteers and neighbors for their help. And West said Team Rubicon is always looking for new members.

Qualified military veterans and civilians can join Team Rubicon on domestic and international disaster operations. For more information, visit <https://teamrubiconusa.org/> volunteer.

GONORRHEA: Symptoms usually appear within two weeks

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“At this point in history, the fear of HIV as a lethal diagnosis is going away,” she said. “Now, it is treatable.”

She said people are more relaxed about engaging in risky sexual behavior. But just because HIV treatments provide a better prognosis and even protect partners, she said, doesn’t mean they combat gonorrhea, syphilis or chlamydia.

With the threat of fatal HIV lifted, “obviously what’s causing a rise in STDs is unprotected sexual activity.”

The Umatilla County Public Health Department is dealing with the gonorrhea epidemic by frank discussions with clients and messaging to the public about the importance of protected sex. A poster greets those entering the Pendleton clinic.

“Half of all sexually active young people will get an STD before the age of 25,” it says in block print.

Jim Setzer, the county’s public health administrator, isn’t shy about the subject of STDs or how people get them.

“People don’t get gonorrhea by someone sneezing in line at Safeway,” Setzer said. “They don’t get this

by themselves.”

That’s why tracking down sexual partners is so important. He understands the hesitancy of those asked to divulge names, but it’s necessary.

“You know the old adage,” Setzer said. “You’re not just sleeping with that person. You’re sleeping with every person they’ve slept with.”

“If partners aren’t treated, you have exponential transmission with one person exposing others and those people exposing other people,” Helsley said.

To those working to stop the epidemic, it seems like the public health version of Whack-a-Mole.

The last time state gonorrhea rankings came out (in 2017), Umatilla County had the dubious distinction of having the third highest rate in the state.

The county made inroads by sending a communicable disease nurse and a disease intervention specialist into the field for several months to make home visits to partners of patients diagnosed with gonorrhea. Often the nurse, Riann Roggiere, tested for gonorrhea on the spot. If positive, she administered an intramuscular injection of ceftriaxone and another drug, azithromycin, by mouth.

Gonorrhea symptoms usually appear within two weeks, but sometimes symptoms aren’t immediately noticeable. Men might notice pain urinating, along with swelling, discharge and sore throat. Women may experience similar, but milder symptoms.

But, Setzer said, “Many people are asymptomatic.”

Untreated infections can lead to scarring, infertility, arthritis, heart valve damage or inflammation in the lining of the brain.

Most at risk are men who have sex with other men, illicit drug users and people with multiple sexual partners.

Helsley said the plan of attack involves diagnosing as early as possible and treating. Some cities have launched public awareness campaigns to jar people into getting tested for STDs. In Portland, an organization call Syph Aware posted signs on TriMet buses and MAX trains.

The message is to get tested, Helsley said.

“People in high-risk categories should get tested every six months,” she said. “Don’t relax.”

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