

Hermiston takes over ownership of EOTEC

By JADE MCDOWELL
East Oregonian

The Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center is officially the city of Hermiston's.

After the Umatilla County board of commissioners voted to withdraw from the joint project last week, the Hermiston city council voted Monday to approve the deal, taking on full ownership and liability for EOTEC in the hopes that the switch will help the center run more efficiently and cut down on the amount of hoops other organizations have to jump through when dealing with EOTEC.

"As my Scottish grandmother used to remind me, too many cooks spoil the

broth," said commissioner George Murdock.

Representatives of the city and county alike took pains to stress that the breakup was an amicable one.

"You are part of Umatilla County and own the home of one of our biggest events and so obviously we want you to be successful," Murdock told the council.

As a result, the county is still living up to its share of several costs of EOTEC in the deal, the components of which include:

- The city takes full ownership of EOTEC and the land it is on

- The city takes ownership of Ott and Airport roads after the county improves them to a certain standard, with the

help of \$1.5 million from the state's transportation package.

- The city pays half of the cost of building office/storage space for the Umatilla County Fair, up to \$250,000.

- The county pays an annual contribution of \$75,000 per year for operations through 2022 and an additional \$160,574 in 2018 for expected operational losses.

- The county pays \$105,000 to cover its half of construction budget overruns.

- The county pays \$595,000 by June 1 to provide half the cost VenuWorks estimates for fully equipping the facility.

- The county agrees to

loan the city up to \$500,000 for EOTEC if needed in the future.

- The fair lease increases from \$10,000 annually to \$100,000 annually for the use of the fairgrounds for six weeks each year.

The lease for the fair was renegotiated, and Smith said there were a few things that were clarified, such as the guarantee that the county can hold the fair appreciation dinner at EOTEC each winter. He said there were no plans to renegotiate the Farm-City Pro Rodeo lease.

Mayor David Drotzmann said the city was aware that the county could have just left the city "holding the bag" and was grateful for the county's willingness to be

a good partner even as they dissolved the intergovernmental agreement that first formed EOTEC.

"It was a great partnership and we achieved some awesome things," he said.

Councilor John Kirwan said the deal represented the next chapter for EOTEC and said he was excited to see how it will grow.

When it came time for a vote on the deal, councilor Lori Davis made a motion to delay the decision for one more meeting, but the motion died for a lack of second. Davis did not explain why she wanted to wait. When a second motion was made by Kirwan to approve the deal, it was passed unanimously.

Afterward the council

approved the first reading of an amendment to the city's charter, adding an EOTEC advisory committee to the city's list of committees. The committee will be made up of a member of the Umatilla County fair board, a member of the Farm-City Pro Rodeo board, a member of the hospitality/tourism community and two at-large members who can apply through the city's usual committee application process. The city manager, the general manager of EOTEC hired by VenuWorks and at least one city councilor will also attend meetings as liaisons.

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Mark Morgan, right, talks about the renovations in the basement of the former Carnegie Library during a tour Monday in Hermiston.

Staff photo by E.J. Harris

SENIOR: Board has raised funds for equipment

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showed off the spacious great room complete with fireplace, offices, restrooms, breakout rooms and a large back deck.

"The LED lighting out here, when it gets dark out, it's beautiful on the exterior," he said, noting that the deck and landscaped back yard would be a "nice draw" for people. Under the terms of the \$2 million federal Community Development Block Grant the Harkenrider

Center must be used only for activities for seniors for the first five years, but after that could be used in the evenings for things like receptions and recreation classes. The city hopes to create a second reception hall in the basement as well.

On Friday, parks and recreation director Larry Fetter said one of the reasons for the decision to finish the parking lot separately is because none of the block grant money is going

towards it. He said the senior center board had done a good job of fundraising for kitchen equipment and the city would help where it could with moving things into the building.

After the council finished the tour of the building, which is mostly complete but still without most of its carpet or paint, they also stopped by the old Carnegie Library next door to see the newly-remodeled basement, which was transformed from

storage into a reception area, two offices and a conference room. Smith said the city was still figuring out the best staff configuration to use that space, but one thing it did allow was for the fire marshal to have office space for doing his building plan inspections in the same place as the building department offices.

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TEACHER: Students in tears after Daniels resigns

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over Daniels' sudden departure.

"Why is she the one that's being forced to resign when there's tons of teachers who are doing so much less, who aren't putting in the extra mile?" Pendleton High School student Madison Furstenberg said.

Daniels had a much broader base of support than the four current and former students who testified on her behalf. After the meeting ended, Pendleton High School student Natalie Waggoner presented a petition with 198 student signatures to Fritsch while urging him to listen to students.

Daniels was in the audience but did not speak during

the public comment section, leaving the room shortly after the last person spoke.

As some students openly wept in the hallway outside the boardroom, Daniels greeted and comforted them.

Daniels said she attended the meeting to support her students. "I would walk through fire for my students," she said.

Daniels said she resigned because Fritsch told her that her contract would not be renewed for the following school year. She said Fritsch's reasoning is that she had used bad judgment and could not be trusted.

According to Daniels, she has received good evaluations throughout her tenure but was getting complaints from a particular family.

She declined to identify the family.

Even if the district changed its mind and invited her back, Daniels said she was unsure she could come back to the district as long as Fritsch was in charge.

While some audience members pressured the board to reverse the decision, board member Debbie McBee told the crowd that state law mandated the board stay uninvolved in personnel issues, unless an employee specifically asks the board for a review.

"There's a very clear separation of roles and responsibilities between board and superintendent," she said.

The board's approval of district staffing decisions

like hirings and resignations was just upholding the state's procedural policy, McBee said.

This is the second month in a row that the board meeting's public comment section has been used to protest a staff resignation.

Several community members voiced their opposition to Pendleton High School Principal Dan Greenough resignation last month. Since then, the Hermiston School District has announced that Greenough is a finalist for the Desert View Elementary School principal position, for which he will interview Tuesday.

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Package bombs in Texas capital likely tied to earlier blast

Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas — Two package bomb blasts a few miles apart killed a teenager and wounded two women in Austin on Monday, less than two weeks after a similar attack left a man dead in another part of the Texas capital.

Investigators said the bombings are probably connected, and they are looking into whether race was a factor because all of the victims were minorities. The blasts unfolded just as the city was swelling with visitors to the South By Southwest music festival.

The first of Monday's

attacks killed a 17-year-old boy and wounded a 40-year-old woman, both of them black. As Police Chief Brian Manley held a news conference to discuss that attack, authorities were called to the scene of another explosion that injured a 75-year-old Hispanic woman. She was taken to a hospital with potentially life-threatening wounds.

Authorities suspect that both of Monday's explosions were linked to a March 2 attack that killed a 39-year-old black man. All three blasts happened as the packages were opened, and officials urged the public to call police if they receive any

unexpected packages.

"This is the third in what we believe to be related incidents over the past 10 days," Manley said while briefing reporters near the site of Monday's second explosion. He at first suggested that the blasts could constitute a hate crime, but later amended that to say authorities had not settled on a motive.

"We are not ruling anything out at this point," said Manley, who said the intended targets were not clear since multiple people live in the homes where explosives were placed. "We are willing to investigate any avenue that may be involved."

The police chief refused

to provide many details about how the explosives were packaged, citing the ongoing investigation. But he said they were an "average-size letter box" and "not particularly large."

In all three cases, he said, the packages did not appear to have gone through the U.S. Postal Service or private carriers like UPS. They were left on doorsteps without a knock or ringing of doorbells.

The explosions happened far from the main events of the wildly popular festival known as SXSW, which brings about 400,000 visitors to Austin each year. Manley urged visitors to "be aware of what's going on."

WALKOUT: Protest one month after 17 people killed at school in Florida

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on Wednesday explaining the concept. The campaign encourages students to perform an act of kindness for their classmates every day starting Wednesday and lasting 17 days.

Students are then asked to highlight their good deeds on social media using the #PHSWhatsUR17 hashtag.

If students still feel the need to walk out, Greenough said the school will remain lenient on students who stick to the 17-minute period.

But if students leave longer than 17 minutes or fail to return to class, they will face the usual punishments for an unexcused absence, such as lunch detention.

While some school districts have threatened to suspend students if they participate in the walkout, Greenough said its never been his policy to suspend students for absence issues.

"It flies in the face of the what we're trying to do in trying to change the behavior," he said.

The Hermiston School District isn't proposing an alternative activity for Wednesday, but is proposing some parameters.

Interim Superintendent Tricia Mooney wrote a letter to parents and community members about the district's response to the walkout.

Mooney wrote that students who choose to walk out on Wednesday will be supervised by school staff. District spokeswoman Maria Duron said students will not continue to be supervised should they decide to leave school grounds.

Although the district is concentrating on potential walkouts at Hermiston High School, Sandstone Middle School and Armand Larive Middle School, elementary school staff is prepared to supervise their students if they walk out as well.

Like Pendleton, Hermiston students will be expected to return to class after 17 minutes. The events are not open to the public and students or community members who want to support the students are being asked to remain off school grounds for safety reasons.

Mooney's letter included a statement from the Associated Student Body of Hermiston High School.

"We, the Associated Student Body Leadership of HHS, recognize that there needs to be a solution found to end school violence. There are varied opinions and feelings associated with this topic throughout the student body and we believe there is no simple singular solution. What we know is that our students need an opportunity to voice their opinions... We support our student body in their opinions and ability to express their ideas and concerns in a safe, appropriate, and respectful manner."

The walkouts are supposed to be a part of a national movement to commemorate the 17 people killed in a high school shooting in Parkland, Florida on Feb. 14.

According to CNN, the idea originated from IMPOWER, the youth branch of the Women's March. The organization's website lists more than 2,800 walkouts across the country, although a map of planned walkouts displays no events in Umatilla County or Eastern Oregon.

The national campaign also includes policy demands from Congress, like an assault weapons ban, universal background checks on gun sales and a restraining order law that would allow authorities to disarm people with warning signs of violent behavior.

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