

# Hermiston council to discuss rate increase, EOTEC

By **JADE MCDOWELL**  
East Oregonian

The Hermiston City Council will once again discuss raising rates for Hermiston Energy Services customers on Monday.

The council discussed the proposed \$2 per month increase during their Nov. 26 meeting, but councilor John Kirwan had asked that the vote be postponed so that HES general manager Nate Rivera could come back with more specific information about how revenue for the utility is spent.

The council will discuss those questions in a work session at 6 p.m. at city hall on Monday (180 N.E. Second St.), followed by a 7 p.m. regular meeting.

Rivera said during the Nov. 26 meeting that increasing costs for the wholesale power HES purchases from Bonneville Power Administration plus increasing maintenance needs have put HES on the path to a \$157,151 deficit during the 2018-2019 fiscal year. The proposed rate increase would generate about \$157,000 a year.

The \$2 per month increase in residential and commercial base rates would take effect on bills calculated after Dec. 31, 2018.

On Monday the city council will also discuss a draft of a strategic plan for the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center. The planning process was led by SSW Consulting in partnership with the city's EOTEC advisory board and VenuWorks, which is contracted by the city to run EOTEC.

The 32-page draft out-

lines a long list of recommendations for EOTEC to work on over the next 10 years. Suggestions include creating and implementing a landscaping plan, securing water rights for the site, adding noise mitigation, improving security, improving customer service, establishing vendor contracts, working to provide more nonprofit meeting options throughout the community, creating an EOTEC brand and hiring a marketing/sales position. The report also suggests larger capital projects such as an amphitheater, a multi-sports facility and an indoor arena.

Based on a community survey and focus groups, top suggestions for events in the venue include concerts, food festivals, farmers markets, beer and wine festivals, arts and crafts festivals, flea markets and athletic events.

During Monday's meeting the council will also consider an ordinance that would change the way found property is treated in the city.

Currently, if someone finds lost property and turns it into the Hermiston Police Department they forfeit all stake in it. Under the proposed amendment, city code would follow state law, which dictates that if a person finds lost money or goods and notifies the county clerk, the property is theirs to keep legally if the owner is not found within three months. For goods or money over \$250, the finder must also publish a notice in the local newspaper once a week for two consecutive weeks if they want to be allowed to keep the lost property.

## BRIEFLY

### Hermiston homeowners help contain attic fire

HERMISTON — Swift work from homeowners and firefighters late Thursday kept an attic fire from spreading.

The Umatilla County Fire District at about 9:45 p.m. received the call-out for a chimney fire at 2150 N.W. Dawn Drive, Hermiston. Battalion chief Corey Gorham said en route the emergency dispatch reported the fire may have spread to the home's attic.

Four engines and 19 fire personnel arrived and saw some flames in the attic around the chimney, and the homeowners were outside using water from a garden hose to squelch the fire.

"That really helped us out a lot and slowed it down," Gorham said. Crews attacked the attic

from above and below, dousing the remaining flames and hitting hot spots. No one suffered any injuries, and the last firefighters left the scene at 11:24 p.m.

Gorham also said the cause of the fire remains under investigation, but the culprit could be material that was around the stove pipe.

### Irrigon clinic introduces new provider

IRRIGON — A meet-and-greet is planned to introduce the new provider at the Irrigon Medical Clinic.

The public is invited to meet Jon Watson PA-C Tuesday, Dec. 11 from 9 a.m. to noon at 220 N. Main St., Irrigon. People are invited to enjoy some treats and visit with Watson.

For more information, call 541-922-5880.

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### Local groups funnel most donation sales back into community

By **JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN**  
East Oregonian

As Christmas draws near, shoppers may turn to thrift stores to donate items or to purchase gifts with a low price tag. For many local organizations, the money earned from those sales is going directly back into the services those groups provide. For others, the flow of money is slightly more complicated.

The size of the organization dictates how the money is used, as does the nature of the group itself.

For Hermiston-based organizations like Agape House, the Eastern Oregon Humane Society, and Divine Blessings Thrift Shop, all the money stays local, whether going into maintaining the facilities or providing services to the people and animals in the area. For a national organization like Goodwill, some of the funds go into hyper-local endeavors, but money from local sales also supplements regional services.

Goodwill operates by territory — Hermiston's is part of the Goodwill Industries of the Columbia, which includes 13 counties in Oregon and Washington.

About one percent of money from local sales goes to the national organization, said Ken Gosney, executive director of Goodwill of the Columbia. He said this year the Hermiston store earned about \$1.5 million from donation sales. The Hermiston store gets about 28,000 donations per year, counted by the number of people that donate, not the number of items.

"There's two sides of the house," Gosney said. "The retail side, and the mission side. Our fundraising is really through donations and stores."

He said because the store has the same expenses and challenges as a business like Walmart or Safeway, the retail side has to be profitable.

"But we take those profits, and if we're doing a good job managing stores, we have more money to fund the mission side," he said.

"Those services are cross-funded," said operations director Jeff Maddison. "Sales from the Tri-Cities may fund work in Hermiston, and vice versa."

The Hermiston store

# Follow the money



Staff photo by Jayati Ramakrishnan

**Jessica Araiza sorts donated items at Goodwill in Hermiston.**

employs 23 people, which Gosney said translates to about \$900,000 annually in salaries and benefits. Utilities and upkeep for the store are funded through donation sales.

Other community events are also funded by store sales. The company provides job training and hiring events for community businesses like Lamb Weston and Mid-Columbia Bus Company.

"We have an employee connections center in Pasco," said Joey Edminster, a community connection and marketing specialist for Goodwill. "That's through money from donations."

The job search center is free, and offers help with everything from job searches to writing a resume.

In 2019, Goodwill plans to expand the service with a mobile Employment Connection Center that will go to one of the eight stores in the region every day.

Dave Hughes, executive director of Agape House, said the organization takes in about \$700 a month from yard sales. Most furniture and electronic items are "you-name-the-price," while clothing is priced at 5 items for \$1.

The nonprofit has a contract with a Seattle-based company, to whom they send surplus clothes. Hughes said they get about \$1,200 a year from that contract.

Hughes said he has no idea of the value of the donations that come in, but about 93 cents of every dollar they earn goes back into one of their programs. The Agape House offers several services, including collecting and delivering food donations, and the backpack program, which sends school children home with a full backpack of food for the weekend.

If someone is truly in need, Hughes said they will give away clothing at no

charge.

Agape House has four paid employees, all of whom work less than full-time. Hughes estimated that they have about 120 volunteers.

The Humane Society of Eastern Oregon Pet Rescue opened a thrift store about a year ago. Executive director Beau Putnam said the store's revenue goes directly back into the shelter, funding utilities, cleaning supplies, blankets, and supplies for the animals. Some goes into spay and neuter refunds, and the shelter recently purchased a new washing machine and dryer.

Like Agape House, customers at the Pet Rescue thrift store are asked to pay what they can for items, including clothing, electronics and furniture.

Putnam said a common misunderstanding about nonprofits is that people think they don't make any revenue, or don't have to charge for anything.

"A nonprofit means all the money you make goes back into your business," he said.

Occasionally, he said, the funds will be used outside the shelter. Last year they funded Thanksgiving dinner for two families that couldn't pay for it themselves.

Putnam said the shelter has three employees — he is full-time, there are two part-time workers, and about 10 volunteers.

Though the thrift store has brought in some additional funds, the shelter has other revenue streams: they contract with the city of Hermiston and Morrow County for animal control services. Their largest source of revenue this year was from dog adoptions, a change Putnam attributed

in part to the opening of the thrift store.

"We get a lot more foot traffic in here because of that," he said.

Putnam said he didn't have exact numbers with him, but he estimated that the thrift store had brought in about \$20,000 in the past year.

Desert Rose Ministries, a Hermiston church that provides meals and helps people with homelessness and drug rehabilitation, has had a thrift store for a year. Divine Blessings Thrift Shop is entirely volunteer-run, and all the funds from the shop go back into Desert Rose's services.

"Our costs are somewhere around \$70,000 for rent for all our buildings," he said.

Sandy Valette, manager of the thrift store, said money also goes into helping people who need drug rehab treatment. Desert Rose volunteers will drive patients to treatment in Portland, Seattle or Yakima.

"It pays for gas to get them there, or giving out clothes to the homeless," she said.

Desert Rose also donates clothing items to Domestic Violence Services, as well as people who need clothes for job interviews.

Estle said the thrift store has probably earned about \$25,000 or \$30,000 from sales.

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