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PENDLETON

Council explores collecting tax money on vacation rentals

By **ANTONIO SIERRA**
East Oregonian

According to Pendleton Convention Center Manager Pat Beard, the local tourism industry generates \$100 million in direct spending every year. And he wants to make sure the city collects “every penny” of the lodging tax revenue it’s due.

“It’s a huge economic boon that we are now growing,” he told the Pendleton City Council at a workshop Tuesday. “This is the fruit that we harvest.”

The city’s lodging room tax and tourism promotion assessment charge have grown in recent years, with the city projecting \$1.1 million and \$105,750 from the taxes, respectively, for the current fiscal year, which ends June 30, 2019.

The pair of taxes go toward the convention center and tourism promotion through the Pendleton Chamber of Commerce.

While Beard commended the city for collecting from previously non-compliant lodging providers, like the temporary recreational vehicle parks that pop up during Round-Up, he directed the council’s attention toward the “growing phenomenon” of vacation rental properties that are rented through websites like Airbnb.

While the chamber of commerce has long acted as a clearinghouse for rental properties during Round-Up, these other websites offer their services year-round.

As of late Wednesday afternoon, there were 24 Pendleton area properties listed on Airbnb. Beard anticipates that number will surpass 100 within a couple of years.

Councilor Neil Brown, who rents out properties through Airbnb, said local residents need to be trained in the city’s lodging tax laws. The taxes only apply to people who stay in a room 30 days or less, but Brown said many of his tenants stay at his properties for months at a time.

Councilor Dale Primmer said City Manager Robb Corbett should talk with city officials from coastal communities to figure out how they deal with the issue.

It’s an issue that Rosemary Johnson has been dealing with for years, first as the Astoria city planner then as a planning

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Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Pendleton Police officer Cass Clark takes a statement from Gloria Huber, center, about a hit-and-run on her son Brandon Josleyn's vehicle recently in Pendleton.

Cops and data

Chiefs have concerns as state mandates expanded collection

By **PHIL WRIGHT**
East Oregonian

The state mandate for police to collect race and gender data could lead to a downturn in some officer activity.

Local police leaders expressed that and other concerns about House Bill 2355, which requires police to document race and gender during traffic stops “to identify patterns or practices of profiling.” The law kicked into effect this summer but the state is giving more time for smaller departments to sort out how to gather, store and submit data.

Hermiston Police Chief Jason Edmiston said his department has to start by July 1, but will roll out the program in April so officers have time to learn the system. He said he anticipates at least one side effect.

“I think we’re going to see a very slight dip in officer initiated activity and a slight dip in traffic stops,” Edmiston said.



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Pendleton Police officer Cass Clark enters case notes into a mobile workstation in his patrol cruiser recently in Pendleton.

That could lead to police missing bigger crimes. Police catching unlawful activity during stops “happens all the time,” Edmiston said, but bogging down a cop in the field with extra work is likely to lead to backlash to avoid that work. The chief said that’s just part of human nature.

The bigger problem, police said, stems from gathering the data. Officers have to provide the reason for the stop and their perceptions at the moment.

“Just because you perceive some-

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HERMISTON

COMMUNICATION IS THE KEY

Grants fund tech upgrades in Life Skills classes

By **JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN**
East Oregonian

Whether letting their voices soar out over the

audience during a performance, or simply being able to spell out a word in class, all students have reasons to communicate. Two teachers at the Hermiston School District had polar opposite projects when applying for grants from the Hermiston Education Foundation, but both had the basic goal of

helping their students communicate more easily.

Karly Carlson, a special education teacher in Highland Hills’ Life Skills program, received a grant to purchase an app that will help her students with verbal communication issues be able to interact with others. The app is called “PECS,”

or Picture Exchange Communication System. Students can customize it as needed, to speak words or phrases that they want to say. Many of the already downloaded words come with pictures, or students can make their own to go along with the words they add.

“Most of my students are nonverbal,” Carlson said. “But as we know, just because we can’t speak doesn’t mean we don’t have things to say.”

Highland Hills will use the grant money from HEF, about \$230, to purchase the

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