

Umatilla County reaching for 'hard to count' during census

Committee holds brainstorming session Tuesday afternoon

By PHIL WRIGHT
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — The Umatilla County 2020 Census Complete Count Committee aims to count every person it can for the 2020 census. And most of that effort will go toward counting members of “hard-to-count” groups.

The Complete Count Committee kicked off with a brainstorming session Tuesday afternoon at the Pendleton Convention Center involving around 40 civic leaders, public officials, employees and others. Bob Waldher, Umatilla County planning director, said about 70% of people comply and report census data. But reaching 100% is the goal, and that takes finding strategies to reach the “hard-to-count”

groups, including seniors, children younger than 5, migrant workers and even renters.

Sarah Bushore with the Census Bureau told the crowd the Constitution requires a count of all people residing in the country, not just of all citizens. Establishing residency is a crucial component of the count, she said, and the rules of residency cover five pages. But she said the bureau relies on two rules for most situations.

The first: Where do you stay most of the time? And when that does not work, where did you sleep April 1?

Working in small groups, the participants came up with ideas ranging from getting churches to encourage parishioners to take part in the census to



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan
Sarah Bushore, an employee of the United States Census Bureau, explains on Tuesday the list of questions to be asked and how to properly count people living at more than one address, such as children with split custody or exchange students.

staffing tables with English and Spanish speakers at local Walmarts to get the word out.

“We probably had like a hundred different ideas,” Waldher said Wednesday. Next month, the commit-

tee will meet to determine which of those are the most viable, which could mean which are the most afford-

able. He said the committee has a budget of about \$10,000.

County Commissioner George Murdock also attended the Tuesday session. He said during a recent trip to Washington, D.C., with the National Association of Counties he learned the census helps the federal government distribute more than \$1.5 trillion.

“That’s \$4,000 per person,” he said, and thus a major reason to get as accurate a count as possible. In addition to the federal funds, Oregon also stands to gain a sixth representative in Congress.

Murdock also told participants Umatilla County is not just leading Oregon in preparing for the census, it’s leading the nation. Out of 500 county commissioners at the meeting in D.C., he said, Umatilla County was among the 10 who could say its county has a complete count committee.

Tax incentives for housing developers

Hermiston officials say city in need ‘of all types’ of housing

By JADE MCDOWELL
East Oregonian

HERMISTON — A housing report compiled by a city of Hermiston staff has found tax incentives for subsidized housing but few options for incentivizing developers to build market rate homes.

“All of those are really targeted toward affordable housing,” City Manager Byron Smith said, adding that the city needs housing “of all types.”

One option in the report presented to the city council Monday is the New Market Tax Credit, which offers a federal tax credit to investors for certain types of projects in low-income census tracts. The credit is mostly for commercial development, but is available for mixed-used projects where less than 80% of the gross rental income is from residential units.

Another federal tax credit is the Opportunity Zone credit, which applies to one of Hermiston’s census tracts west of Highway 395 between Orchard Avenue and South Punkin Center. It allows developers to defer capital gains taxes on certain developments, including residential, in low-income neighborhoods.

The city could declare a portion of town a Vertical Housing Development Zone, allowing a partial property tax abatement on multi-story, mixed-use projects in the zone, if all of the residential units in the project are for



Staff photo by Jade McDowell
Subsidized housing is under construction on Southeast Fifth Street in Hermiston. Most tax incentives for housing are for low-income options.

low-income residents. The report written by Hermiston City Planner Clint Spencer stated the criteria involved made it a “challenge to think of a property that might benefit from this designation.”

The state also allows some property tax abatements for affordable apartment projects in places the city has declared a “transit-oriented development” zone. Properties within one-quarter mile of one of the stops for Hermiston’s HART bus system would be eligible to be included in a zone.

“This is an intriguing possibility for Hermiston,” Spencer wrote. “There is considerable residential land within a quarter-mile of a bus stop. It may be worth doing a targeted parcel inventory to determine if/where parcels which are of sufficient size, vacant, and properly zoned exist.”

The city could also slowly increase property taxes to newly annexed properties over 10 years instead of asking property owners to pay the full rate starting their first year inside city limits. That

option could provide incentive to developers building just outside the city limits.

The city council asked staff to compile the incentives report earlier this year as part of the city’s ongoing efforts to increase housing availability. Other efforts have included changes in zoning and reducing some requirements for rules, such as lot coverage.

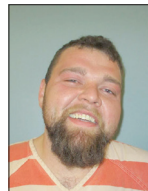
City Councilor Jackie Myers said the city’s efforts to build and improve infrastructure in town can also help incentivize developers. For example, the new water tower and water mains the city is installing in the northeast part of the city will provide the water pressure developers need to build housing on acres that were previously too cost-prohibitive to develop.

Several new housing projects have been announced in Hermiston this year, including a subsidized apartment complex under construction off of Southeast Fifth and Sixth streets and subdivisions off of Theater Lane and Elm Avenue.

BRIEFLY

Judge decides if manslaughter defendant’s slurs, photos are evidence

PENDLETON — Umatilla County Circuit Judge Jon Lieuallen could rule Friday on whether a jury hears derogatory comments John Mattila made about the woman who died in the crash he was in.



Mattila

The state has accused Mattila, 24, of Weston, of driving drunk the evening of Feb. 22 and killing Adelaida Solis Torres in a car crash on Highway 11 near Weston. She was 52, worked for the Oregon Department of Human Services and was driving a state vehicle at the time.

Mattila has pleaded not guilty to charges of manslaughter, hit-and-run on an injured person, driving under the influence of intoxicants and more.

Deputy District Attorney Daniel Pachico filed a motion with the court to allow the comments at Mattila’s trial Nov. 4-8. Pachico also wants the jury to see the county jail mug shots showing Mattila grinning after his arrest.

But Defense Attorney Jody Stutsman Vaughan, of Pendleton, filed an argument with the court to prohibit the profanity and photos.

Rather than hearing Mattila called Torres slurs, Vaughan argued, “the state can offer this evidence in a non-inflammatory and non-prejudicial way by stating that the defendant referred to the other driver as a female.”

Likewise, she asserted, the use of the photos showing her client is too prejudicial for the jury to see.

Lieuallen during the hearing at the Umatilla County Courthouse, Pendleton, also will consider a motion from Pachico to allow Mattila to wear non-visible restraints during the trial.

Umatilla Bridge crash injures three from Hermiston

BENTON COUNTY — A three vehicle crash on the Umatilla Bridge, involving a tractor and a semitruck carrying a load of salt, left three injured Wednesday morning.

All three vehicles were westbound, according to a press release issued by the Washington State Patrol. Asa Gbur, 43, of Arizona, was

driving a red semitruck with a trailer when he struck Alonzo Alonzo-Simon, 28, of Hermiston, who was driving a 1998 Toyota Camry. Rosa Antonio-Alonzo, 27, of Hermiston, was a passenger in the Camry.

The *Tri-City Herald* reported that Gbur was checking his GPS at the time of the crash.

Alonzo-Simon then struck Edith Flores-Pinto, 31, of Hermiston, who was driving a John Deere tractor. The force of the crash caused the tractor to drive part way over the edge of a bridge barrier.

Alonzo-Simon’s vehicle was totaled, and Flores-Pinto’s tractor received reportable damage and required towing.

Alonzo-Simon, his passenger and Flores-Pinto were transported to Trios Health in Kennewick, Washington, after the incident. WSP Public Information Officer Chris Thorson said the three suffered minor injuries.

Gbur was not injured, and the semi-truck was able to be driven from the scene of the crash.

WSP said Gbur was cited for second-degree negligent driving.

Mike Turner new OSP captain over Eastern Oregon

PENDLETON — Oregon State Police promoted Lt. Mike Turner to captain of its East Region Operations.



Turner

Turner took over the region, which includes Central and Eastern Oregon, from Capt. Rob Edwards, who retired at the end of September.

“It was not something I was expecting anytime soon,” Turner said.

Edwards worked in Bend, but state police are allowing Turner to remain in Pendleton. Turner said he is invested in the community and his family is here, and Pendleton is in the region. Additionally, technology has made it easier to work remotely at times.

State police also is working to fill the lieutenant slot the promotion created. Turner said applications were due Wednesday, and he knew of two locals who applied, but OSP human resources could have more applicants.

Next, state police will convene an interview panel. Turner said he hopes to have a new lieutenant soon.

— East Oregonian staff

Pendleton City Council approves millions in airport grants

By ANTONIO SIERRA
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — The Pendleton City Council spent Tuesday accepting and doling a flurry of grants.

In both their roles as the city council and the Pendleton Development Commission, members accepted millions of dollars of grants for the airport and approved hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of grants for downtown projects and an art installation.

The big ticket items were related to the Pendleton Unmanned Aerial Systems Range.

The council voted to

accept Business Oregon’s offer to designate the range’s upcoming UAS industrial park a “Regionally Significant Industrial Site.”

The designation will allow the city to apply for a 50% income tax reimbursement from the state for each job created on the site, up to \$18 million.

The council also voted to accept a long-awaited \$3 million grant from the U.S. Economic Development Administration, which will also go toward the UAS industrial park.

Other actions from the council included:

- The council approved a \$65,000 grant to help estab-

lish the Pendleton Veterans Memorial Park near the corner of Highway 11 and Southeast Court Avenue.

A collaboration between the Pendleton Arts Committee and the Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 922, the VFW has already acquired some of the materials that will complement the planned art installation.

Johnny Blagg, a member of both the VFW and the arts committee, said the planned centerpiece will be patriotic without referencing a specific gender, time period, or branch of the military.

- As the Pendleton Development Commission, coun-

cil members agreed to give grants to Sister’s Cafe and the Bowman Building in the downtown area.

Charles Denight, associate director of the commission, said the \$61,390 would go toward roof repairs at the cafe, which is historically known as the Bond Building.

Denight said the roof is being repaired with the idea of turning the second story of the restaurant into a boutique hotel, and the commission should expect another grant application for internal renovations at a later date.

The Bowman Building will get \$98,317 for devel-

oper Al Plute to build five apartments on its second floor.

After thanking the commission, Plute said he expects to submit another application for another of his properties, the Odd Fellows building, in the next month or two.

• It wasn’t a grant, but the council also agreed to award DW Excavating of Davenport, Washington, a \$1.6 million bid to replace a gravity sewer line at Southeast Fourth Street.

According to a staff report, the project will help allow for more development of vacant land in the South Hill area.

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