

**GREEN THUMBS SPROUT  
IN PHS GREENHOUSE**

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saving time**



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Facebook, Apple and Google save tens of millions of dollars each year thanks to property tax agreements for data centers in Prineville (above) and The Dalles.

## Big tech tax breaks create small town conundrums

When big tech companies hunt for tax breaks in rural places, communities often compete against one another for the big prize

By MIKE ROGOWAY  
*The Oregonian*

**H**ERMISTON — As bustling metropolises have grown increasingly skeptical of big tech companies demanding tax breaks, Oregon's rural communities keep doling them out.

The Hermiston City Council and Umatilla County commissioners voted unanimously last month to grant Amazon broad property tax breaks for massive data centers planned in Eastern Oregon.

It's the latest in a string of similar agreements with Amazon that shave nearly \$50 million annually off the company's Oregon tax bills. Facebook, Apple and Google save tens of millions of dollars more each year thanks to similar

### AMAZON'S OREGON DATA CENTERS

Amazon received property tax breaks worth \$49.4 million for its Eastern Oregon data centers in the 2017-18 fiscal year (this past year's totals haven't been published yet.)

Umatilla County and the city of Hermiston have now approved additional tax breaks worth hundreds of millions of dollars more.

Here's a rundown of the data centers Amazon operates or plans in Eastern Oregon.

- Port of Morrow, near Boardman: 3 campuses with four or five buildings apiece.
- Port of Umatilla: 1 campus
- City of Umatilla: 1 campus
- Umatilla County: 1 campus
- City of Hermiston: 1 campus planned with up to four buildings.

agreements for data centers in Prineville and The Dalles.

Amazon didn't respond for a request for comment on its plans for Hermiston. Its total savings in the new deal will depend on how much the company spends on its data centers, but the assistant city manager in Hermiston overseeing the new tax deal estimates it will run in the "hundreds of millions" of dollars over the next 15 years.

In exchange, Amazon need pay only \$40 million in compensatory payments in that timespan and create just 10 jobs.

Oregon law gives small communities the sole responsibility to grant such local property tax breaks, even for mammoth projects like this one. The state has no authority to reject Amazon's incentives, no matter how large, so long as the company complies with the technical require-

ments of Oregon's "enterprise zone" program for tax exemptions.

That autonomy may not be a blessing. Since Oregon sets no limits on how big the tax breaks can be and exercises no oversight over how communities negotiate them, these cash-strapped small towns end up competing with one another to offer the biggest tax savings to the companies that arguably need it the least.

Hermiston, population 18,200, is a largely agricultural community that sits south of the Columbia River. Officials there and in Umatilla County say they can't afford to risk losing whatever Amazon offers.

Amazon's \$40 million will be divided up by councilors and commissioners in

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### HERMISTON

## Immigrants avoid services due to rule change

By JADE MCDOWELL  
*East Oregonian*

**H**ERMISTON — A Trump administration rule keeping recipients of public benefits from a green card is causing some immigrants to steer clear of needed services, according to members of Hermiston's Hispanic Advisory Committee.

In August, the administration announced a "public charge" rule allowing it to turn away legal immigrants applying for a green card (a step to citizenship) based on factors, such as a lack of English proficiency, or legally accessing benefits, such as Medicaid or food stamps.

A judge temporarily blocked the rule in October before it took effect. But Jose Garcia, chair of the Hispanic Advisory Committee, said he is seeing people in the immigrant community refuse any sort of free services out of fear it might count against them in the path to citizenship.

"People don't even want to know about services — free health care, a flu shot. Everything free they are running from," he said.

The public charge rule would only count certain federal benefits against green card applicants. Many services in Hermiston, such as free screenings at the recent Family Health Fair or free car seat checks at Umatilla Morrow County Head Start, would not be included. But Garcia said many people's attitude is that it's better to be safe than sorry.

Jonathan Lopez, another member of the Hispanic Advisory Committee, said a big part of HAC — whose meetings are always well-attended — is educating the local Hispanic community on things in the community that could help them. Now, he said, they're having to reassure people that accessing services, such as Hermiston's free bus system, won't put any noncitizen's chance at citizenship in jeopardy.

"We tell them they don't even ask any information, you just wait at the bus stop and they pick you up," he said.

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### UMATILLA COUNTY

## Ballot measure aims to clear up charter language

Polls close at 8 p.m. on Tuesday

By PHIL WRIGHT  
*East Oregonian*

**P**ENDLETON — Umatilla County residents have the opportunity Tuesday to clear up the language in the county charter regarding the sheriff's office. Sheriff Terry Rowan said it would be about time.

The charter specifies the sheriff "shall have charge of the Department of Law Enforcement." But Rowan said there's a problem with that.

"The sheriff's office isn't a department, it does not operate as a department of the county," he said.

So when the county in 2018 established a charter review com-

mittee, Rowan took the opportunity to recommend changing "department" to "sheriff's office" to make it consistent with the name of the operation and the elected position.

He said he understands the origin for using "department" may have been in case the county commissioners wanted to shift other functions under the wide umbrella of the sheriff's office. But, he said, the county board can do that anyway.

He also recommended the charter should refer to Oregon law when it comes to the duties of the sheriff.

"There's plenty of Oregon statutes that speak to the office of

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EO file photo

A Umatilla County sheriff's deputy walks a handcuffed suspect to a patrol vehicle on Highway 11 north of Pendleton following a high-speed pursuit Aug. 4, 2014. Umatilla County residents have the opportunity to vote on the language of the county charter regarding the sheriff's office.

