

City committees struggle to keep members

By JADE MCDOWELL
East Oregonian

HERMISTON — If giving approval for a \$55 million budget sounds fun, the city of Hermiston's Budget Committee has a few openings that might be right for you.

"Position No. 8 has been open for about two years, and position No. 9 has been open for about a year," City Recorder Lilly Alarcon-Strong said.

The budget committee is one of about 15 committees that the city regularly finds itself struggling to keep full. If someone wants to volunteer for the city, Alarcon-Strong said, there's generally at least a couple of openings on committees at any given time.

Currently there are five open positions on the Budget Committee, one on the Recreation Projects Fund Advisory Committee, one on the Faith Based Advisory Committee and one on the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center Committee.

A committee can't vote on anything without a quorum — meaning at least half the committee members are present — so some commit-



Sheriff Terry Rowan, left, speaks during a 2018 Hispanic Advisory Committee meeting at Hermiston City Hall.

tees have reduced the number of people on their committee in order to be able to meet that requirement more often when seats are vacant or committee members are absent.

"The Hispanic Advisory Committee went from nine to seven to five," Alarcon-Strong said.

The commitment for serv-

ing on a committee varies. Some, like the Library Board or Parks and Recreation Committee, meet once a month to discuss recommendations for the city council on their allotted subject. Others, like the Budget Committee, meet once a year for a specific purpose. And some committees, such as the Rebuild Funland

Committee, exist only temporarily to see a specific project through.

Often committees do the legwork for the city council in researching and developing projects, before asking for the council's approval on the plan. One of the city's most influential committees is the Planning Commission,

which rules on zoning, conditional use permits, plats and other land use decisions that can make or break a building project.

Volunteering to sit on a committee can be a good way to step up participation in local government — somewhere in between "votes once a year" and "running for mayor." Often candidates for city council started out on a city committee, and those who win a seat on the council can continue to sit in on that committee as a council liaison.

"I think if people volunteered more, they would have more knowledge of city happenings," Alarcon-Strong said.

Mayor David Drotzmann said committees help bring a diverse perspective to the city council and increase transparency, creating the opportunity for input from 50 to 60 people instead of just eight city councilors and the mayor.

"We vet a lot of concepts and ideas through these committees," he said.

He said joining a committee is a great way to have an influence on city government without taking the "heat" that the city council does on

high-profile decisions.

City committee openings are kept up to date on the city's website at hermiston.or.us/volunteer, and application forms can be printed off of there or picked up from city hall. The city performs a background check on applicants. If more than one person applies for the same seat on a committee, the Committee to Review Committee Vacancy Applications will interview candidates before making a recommendation to the city council.

Hermiston isn't the only city that is continuously working to fill seats on committees. Pendleton also has a wide range of committees, listed on the city's website. Some, like the Planning Commission, are universal to cities in Oregon. Others such as the Arts Committee, Historic Landmarks Committee and Air Quality Commission are different than Hermiston's chosen committee topics.

Information about each committee and forms to apply for committee vacancies can be found online at pendleton.or.us/committees-boards-commissions or picked up at city hall.

Union County sheriff's challengers deep on background, lack credentials

Bill Miller, Shane Rollins lack police officer certification

By PHIL WRIGHT
East Oregonian

LA GRANDE — If either challenger in the race for Union County sheriff wins, he would have to spend at least a few weeks in Salem for training.

Bill Miller, 53, of Elgin, and Shane Rollins, 45, of Cove, aim to oust Sheriff Boyd Rasmussen, who seeks a fifth term. Miller and Rollins have plenty of law enforcement experiences, but they lack a critical component for being a sheriff in Oregon: police officer certification.

The challengers said they can work out a way to deal with that if they win. Miller said he would have to attend a couple of weeks of courses to reactive his certificate. Rollins, however, would spend 16 weeks training at the Oregon Public Safety Academy in Salem.

Rasmussen, meanwhile, has certificates from basic to executive and all in good standing.

Oregon Revised Statute 206.015 sets out the qualifications for sheriff: Candidates must be at least 21; have at least four years experience, either as a full-time law enforcement officer or a mix of work and post-high school education; and candidates cannot have a felony conviction or other convictions

preventing them from obtaining police officer certification. Sheriffs have up to a year to obtain that certification.

If a sheriff fails to follow through, the county declares the office vacant.

Jason Myers, executive director of the Oregon State's Sheriff's Association, said while the law provides that grace period, a sheriff "absolutely must" complete certification at the academy.

Marsha Morin manages the Criminal Justice Certification Program for the Oregon Department of Public Safety Standards and Training, which is in charge of the academy. Each of the Union County sheriff candidates meet the eligibility requirements to run for the office, she said, but that assessment does not check the box for certification.

"We've had a couple of sheriffs come through the academy," she said. "It's not common by any means, but it does happen. They usually have out-of-state experience."

She also said those sheriffs obtained the certification.

Miller left the Union County Sheriff's Office in August 2018 for a job in parole and probation and has the certificate for that job, according to the Oregon Criminal Justice Infor-



Miller



Rasmussen



Rollins

mation Records Inquiry System, the state's online searchable database of law enforcement and emergency services personnel certification and training. But that certification cannot substitute for the police officer requirement, and Miller's police officer credentials are out of date.

Miller said the way he understand it, as sheriff he would have to return to the Public Safety Academy for two weeks of training on criminal law to reactive his certification.

"All I have to do is go back and refresh it," he said.

Just how he would manage the sheriff's office from Salem remains a question. He said that answer would depend in part on his evaluation of the administrative roles in the sheriff's office. He said he was confident he could remain in communication and work with staff to ensure smooth running if he was out of the office.

Rollins said while he could seek a waiver to the academy's 16-week long basic police course, he is ready to dive into education as sheriff.

"I feel it's better for me to go through the academy to learn the laws of Oregon," he said. "Plus, that

would build a bit of trust with the deputies knowing I went through the same academy they did."

Morin with DPSST said there is no guarantee when it comes to waivers.

"It's a case-by-case basis if we're going to approve it or not," she said.

If either challenger wins, Union County would pay for their time at the academy. The sheriff is the county's top paid official with an annual salary of \$90,723.

Rasmussen said while a lot of people think they can do the work of the sheriff, it takes a "boots-on-the-ground" approach to build trust with the community and staff. He said the recent unanimous endorsement from Union County Law Enforcement Association supporting his re-election shows he is doing just that.

County Clerk Robin Church said Union County has not had a sheriff's race with three candidates since the 1980s. March 10, 2020, is the deadline to file for candidacy in the primary election. Plenty of time for more challengers to step in.

Pendleton considers permanent ban on tobacco in city parks

East Oregonian

PENDLETON — The ban on tobacco in Pendleton parks could become permanent.

The Pendleton City Council has a public hearing during its regular meeting Tuesday evening to consider repealing the sunset provision on the local ban.

The council in September 2017 passed a ban on the use of tobacco and related products in city parks. The council at the time also approved a two-year sunset provision.

City Attorney Nancy Kerns in a memo to the council explained the sunset would repeal the ban on Nov. 31. She also informed the council that Umatilla County's Tobacco Prevention Education Program coordinator is preparing a petition to request the city make the ban permanent.

The city's parks commission recently gave its support for making the ban permanent, according to Kerns, and Pend-

leton Police Chief Stuart Roberts had no objection to a permanent ban as long as officers don't have to actively enforce the provision.

In new business, the council will consider renewing a lease at the Eastern Oregon Regional Airport to Dustin Sorenson, who has been a tenant there for 13 years.

"Sorenson has been an exemplary tenant and continues to maintain the same business, Eastern Oregon Building Enterprise," according to the memo to council. The lease is for about \$1,500 a year.

And the city will hear the first reading of Ordinance 3947, amending the marijuana code language to reflect marijuana as an agricultural product and address the non-retail component of the marijuana industry.

BRIEFLY

Volunteers needed for aquifer recharge in Oregon

WALLA WALLA, Wash. — The Walla Walla Basin Watershed Council is looking for a few landowners in Oregon interested in

helping to recharge the shallow aquifer by irrigating this winter.

The landowner must have a water right that allows wintertime irrigation, according to the release.

The council is especially interested in working with landowners who have prop-

erty in the "cobbly, coarse soils near Milton-Freewater," the announcement stated.

Contact Marie Cobb, with the Walla Walla Basin Watershed Council, for more information at 541-938-2170 ext. 105.

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From The Pendleton Pathfinder Club

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