

City council postpones decision on airport leases

Delay allows city extra time to assemble a working group

By **ANTONIO SIERRA**
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — The city of Pendleton’s new airport lease policy is meant to prevent perpetual rent agreements, but ironically, the debate over the rules seems to be extending into perpetuity.

The Pendleton City Council voted on Tuesday to table the issue for a period not to exceed 60 days, giving the city extra time to assemble a working group to quell further conflict between airport staff and airport business owners.

By the time the council approved the policy last summer, the concerns of the business community were already well known. The plan to include a piece of contract language called a “reversionary clause” in all future contracts would allow the city to take back leased land at the end of the lease, and stifle business at the airport along with it, argued the business owners.

The policy the council passed was meant as a compromise, offering some business owners a chance at avoiding reversion as long as they paid a higher lease rate.

But a contingent of business owners returned to council chambers in February, saying that city staff



EO file photo
Harold Nelson, owner of Pendleton Aircraft Service, works on removing the oil filter on an Air Tractor while performing an annual inspection on the aircraft on Feb. 21, 2019, in his hanger at the Eastern Oregon Regional Airport in Pendleton.

wasn’t offering tenants the non-reversion clause in lease negotiation and asking for further clarification on the policy.

The airport commission reviewed the policy and recommended offering the non-reversionary option to all tenants, but the council took a different tack at a recent workshop, agreeing informally to offer non-reversion contracts only to new tenants.

With official council action on the agenda, Jeff Guenther and Brad Wahl, acting as spokesmen for airport businesses, made a last-minute argument against the policy amendment at the Tuesday meeting.

In an email to councilors, the pair calculated that offering all tenants non-reversion contracts would actually generate 17% more revenue than the standard lease with

the clawback provision.

While the city has long maintained that the reversionary clause is needed to comply with Federal Aviation Administration rules that prohibit perpetual leases, Wahl said the FAA’s clock starts over each time a lease is renegotiated.

Councilor Chuck Wood took a conciliatory tone with the business owners, adding that he felt a compromise could still be reached.

“I think we can work this out,” he said. “I think we’re close to doing it.”

Wahl said he was amenable to Wood’s work group idea, and the rest of the council agreed to hold off on amending the policy for two months while the group met.

The council appointed councilors McKennon McDonald and Becky Marks to the group, although Marks voted against tabling the issue.

Four more cases of COVID-19 in Umatilla County

UMATILLA COUNTY — Four more people tested positive for COVID-19 in Umatilla County on Thursday, bringing the county total to 13 cases, Umatilla County Public Health announced in a press release.

Of the county’s 13 cases, nine are active, four have recovered, and none are hospitalized at this time, the release stated. All individuals who are considered “active” are self-isolating at home.

Someone is considered “recovered” when they have been free of symptoms, such as fever, cough and shortness of breath, for 72 hours, according to the release.

No demographic information, such as age ranges, sex, or where the individuals reside, was provided.

However, the release emphasized that Umatilla County Public Health staff have been contacting all close contacts of confirmed cases per Oregon Health Authority guidelines.

“As such, the number of COVID-19 tests performed on symptomatic individuals and the resulting number of confirmed positive cases continue to rise in Umatilla County,” the release stated.

According to Umatilla County Public Health’s website, 299 of the 315 COVID-19 tests conducted on samples from Umatilla County residents have come back negative as of Thursday.

As the number of local cases rise, public health officials continue to urge residents to do their part to stop the spread.

“Both the short-term and long-term success of con-

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taining COVID-19 in Umatilla County hinges on every single resident of Umatilla County adhering to the ‘Stay Home Save Lives’” order from Governor Brown,” the release stated. “Maintain social distancing, stay home unless absolutely necessary and help fight the spread with proper hand-washing and hygiene techniques.”

Hermiston School District saves money on bonds

HERMISTON — The Hermiston School District officially opened sale of the bonds that will fund \$82.7 million in construction projects over the next two years.

The bonds, handled by underwriter Piper Sandler (formerly PiperJaffrey), were priced on March 31 and have a final closing scheduled for April 9. They will pay for replacement of Rocky Heights Elementary School, a new elementary school on Theater Lane, a new annex for Hermiston High School and property for future growth.

According to a news release from the district, in addition to the sale of the \$82.7 million approved by voters in November 2019, it also refinanced \$2.8 million of a 2010 bond issue. The district will realize an additional \$1.7 million in bond premium, and refunding the 2010 bonds means a savings of \$382,448.

Previously, financial experts for the district estimated the bonds would carry \$108 million in interest, but the total interest costs at closing were only \$57.9 million, saving the district another \$50 million. The district stated these savings were achieved through its strong Standard & Poor’s

Global reaffirmed AA-credit rating and the market value at the time of the sale.

According to the news release, Hermiston voters can expect to see their property tax levy rate for the district to remain steady at approximately \$3.65 per \$1,000 of assessed value until 2030. Rates are now expected to drop to approximately \$2.16 after that until 2045, which is almost a dollar less than the earlier projections of \$3.15.

Morrow County confirms two new COVID-19 cases

MORROW COUNTY — Morrow County is up to five cases of COVID-19 after the Morrow County Public Health Department confirmed two new cases Thursday, according to a press release.

The two individuals who tested positive are self-isolating at home and were in known contact with an individual who previously tested positive in the county.

No other demographic information, such as the individuals’ age range, sex or residence in the county, was provided in the release. However, it noted that positive cases have been found in northern and southern areas of the county.

“This is a reminder to follow physical distancing guidelines, wash hands often, and to stay home,” the release said.

Residents are also reminded the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend wearing a nonmedical face covering when leaving the home, and that the virus can be spread by people who aren’t showing symptoms.

— EO Media Group

Court-ordered community service complicated by COVID-19 pandemic

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
East Oregonian

UMATILLA COUNTY — For anyone with court-ordered community service hours to complete, it hasn’t been easy to find opportunities in the age of social distancing.

Usually, people can get their hours in at nonprofits, such as the Agape House or PAWS. But Dawn Skinner, supervisor at Umatilla County Community Corrections, said many agencies are not currently taking volunteers in order to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and to comply with Gov. Kate Brown’s executive order for everyone to stay home as much as possible.

Salvation Army’s thrift store is currently closed, for example, and Hermiston’s community garden has delayed its opening in order to keep people away from the Good Shepherd Health Care System campus where the garden is located.

“Everyone’s kind of in the same situation at the moment,” Skinner said.

She said some places may still be taking volunteers, and people are welcome to check, but she is hesitant to tell people that’s what they have to do, since everyone should be reducing their time spent in public right now.

For people who still have a lot of time left on their deadline to complete all their hours, Skinner said

she’s telling them “not to stress about it” for now. For those who are coming up on their deadline and still need to complete more hours, she has been directing them to talk to the court, which has the authority to make accommodations.

“The court has been pretty forgiving,” she said.

Skinner said, like everyone, Umatilla County Community Corrections has been making adjustments to enforce social distancing in its buildings. Since March 19, all county offices have been closed to visitors, with staff available over the phone and by appointment when necessary. Community Corrections can be reached at 541-276-7482.

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There’s no place like home



to slow the spread of the coronavirus.

Social distancing is the most effective tool we have for slowing the spread of the coronavirus. And that means staying home, if you can.

Work from home. Play at home. Stay at home. If you must go out, keep your social distance—six feet, or two arm-lengths apart. Young. Elderly. In between. It’s going to take every one of us. If home really is where the heart is, listen to yours and do the life-saving thing.

Visit **Coronavirus.gov** for the latest tips and information from the CDC.

#AloneTogether

TOGETHER, WE CAN HELP SLOW THE SPREAD.

I-84 EXITS 207 & 210 INTERCHANGE AREA MANAGEMENT PLAN

ODOT and the City of Pendleton are preparing long-range plans for the I-84 Exits 207 (Airport area) and 210 (OR 11/Nye Avenue) interchanges.

Come visit our Virtual Workshop to:

- Tell us what you think could be improved about these areas for walking, biking, driving, freight movement/trucking, and riding transit.
- Learn more about the project objectives and process.
- View preliminary concept sketches identifying various opportunities for improving circulation and access.

Come learn about the project and provide your input on transportation needs in the City.

The Virtual Workshop is currently open and will close April 17th, 2020

Online:
Please visit pendletoniamps.com

Project-related questions please contact:
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