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City council puts street funding plan on hold

Despite tabling gas tax, Pendleton has been able to increase road maintenance revenue by approving new fees on utilities

By ANTONIO SIERRA
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — A year ago, the Pendleton City Council had a plan to inject \$1 million into its street repair program with the intent of reversing decades of degradation in the city's road system.

The Pendleton City Council mostly talked about why all these plans should go on hold. The council met Tuesday, Nov. 10, to go over its official list of goals, but talk focused on one topic.

"The real elephant in the room is what we're going to do about streets," Mayor John Turner said.

One of the centerpieces of the plan was a 4-cent gas tax, but 62% of voters rejected the proposal in May.

A council-backed, pro-gas tax political action committee ceased campaigning once the coronavirus started spreading in Umatilla County and the country went into an economic downturn. But the oil industry did not, distributing anti-gas tax material throughout the spring in an attempt to ensure the proposal's defeat.

Save Our Streets, the pro-gas tax PAC, raised \$6,570 in its abbreviated run, but Turner said he was disappointed the committee wasn't able to raise something closer to \$15,000 knowing its opponents were well-heeled.

With many businesses and families still struggling through the pandemic, there didn't seem to be much appetite among the council to begin pursuing the gas tax again.

"I'm firmly convinced that it's

the smartest way to go, but I'm not sure that passing a gas tax is the way to go in the next 18 months," Turner said, adding that the council could look at it again for 2022.

Other parts of the plan included a hotel room fee, a fee on tickets to large events and an increase to the street utility fee. But the climate created by COVID-19 seems like it will make implementation unlikely.

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Hermiston Energy Services to raise rates

Rates will go up by 6.98% in January 2021 and another 6.9% in October 2021

By JADE MCDOWELL
East Oregonian

HERMISTON — Hermiston Energy Services will raise its rates in January and again in October in 2021.

The Hermiston City Council approved a rate increase during their Monday, Nov. 9, meeting by a 4-2 vote.

Overall, rates will go up by 6.98% in January 2021 and another 6.9% in October 2021, but the effect to each customer's bill will depend on the class they fall under and how much energy they use. The average residential user would climb from \$111 a month now to \$117 in January and \$124 in October, according to Hermiston Energy Services General Manager Nate Rivera.

City councilors said raising costs on things is the least favorite part of their job, but it's their job to keep the city running as its own costs rise.

"Sometimes we need to realize we have to make these hard decisions, and sometimes it's no fun because we're going to raise the electricity, but if we want to survive, we have to do that," Councilor Manuel Gutierrez said before making the motion to accept HES's recommendation.

Before the vote, Rivera told the council that HES has been pulling \$85,000 a month from its reserves and has delayed maintenance in order to put off the rate increase for as long as possible during the pandemic, but even with that strategy, HES projected to have a more than \$1 million deficit for the 2020-21 fiscal year, mostly driven by increases in the cost of the power that HES purchases

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VETERANS DAY

'Veterans are heroes'

Pendleton pays tribute to its veterans during ceremonies

By ANTONIO SIERRA AND BEN LONERGAN
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — Even in a pandemic year, local groups got together over the span of two days to ensure Pendleton honored its veterans on Veterans Day.

More than a dozen people braved the rain and hail on Tuesday, Nov. 10, as members of the Pendleton's Veteran of Foreign Wars Let'er Buck Post No. 922 and Boy Scout Troop 700 worked to install the more than 120 flags that make up the Avenue of Flags at Olney Cemetery.

"These are all honorable veterans that the families donated their casket flags to fly here," said Clifford Smith, a former Army medic who served in Vietnam in 1971 and 1972.

One by one, members of the VFW called out the name written on each flag as Smith and Tom Tangney checked the names against a list of flags belonging to veterans who were killed in action or prisoners of war. The flags belonging to those veterans were set aside and placed along the main drive into the cemetery.

"Those are the ones that we honor the most. The ones that sacrificed the most," Smith said.

That sacrifice is one that Tangney understands deeply. The former Marine lost his brother on Nov. 3, 1952, while the pair was



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Chuck Hemphill carries a flag through a hailstorm while assisting members of the VFW Let'er Buck Post 922 in setting up the Avenue of Flags at Olney Cemetery on Tuesday, Nov. 10, 2020.

stationed in Korea together, a date that Tangney remembers to this day.

Tangney has been a member of the VFW since 1951 and has been participating in Avenue of Flags since its inception.

Tangney, a former VFW post commander, echoed the importance of the day and honoring veterans who have died and those who are currently serving.

"I tell my family it's important to honor their veterans," he said. "When the younger people see that they're given something and it's up to them to protect it. It plays a part in them coming up right."

Tangney added that he was happy to have the Boy Scouts out helping and learning from the

veterans, but said he hoped more younger veterans would join in in future years.

Since Memorial Day, the VFW has been working to replace the wooden poles on all of the flags with upgraded metal ones that are better suited for inclement weather. Following Memorial Day, many of the wooden flag poles swelled with water and some had to be broken off to get them out of the ground, leading to issues placing some this year.

Alexander Krokosz, 14, and Marley Blanchet, 12, were among the Boy Scouts out helping to clear space for flag poles and raise flags.

"It means that we're helping the community the best way that

we can," Krokosz said.

Scoutmaster Karl Farber said he feels it is important for the Boy Scouts to take part in events like the Avenue of Flags as a way of connecting them to the veterans and teaching them to support the armed forces.

"This is what the Boy Scouts is about, it's all about teaching leadership and teaching young men to be young men," he said.

Farber added that many Boy Scouts go on to serve in the military and events like the Avenue of Flags help them to understand the sacrifices made by many, including former Scouts.

"A lot of scouts go into the mil-

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Air Force vet shares story with Echo students

Colleen R. Shaw Piercy saw military service as a way to see the world, learn a trade

By JADE MCDOWELL
East Oregonian

ECHO — Echo School's annual Veterans Day parade may have been canceled, but the school kept its tradition of making sure students heard firsthand from a local veteran about what it's like to serve in the armed forces.

This year's keynote speaker — whose words were broadcast live during a virtual assembly — was Colleen R. Shaw Piercy, SSgt. E-5, United States Air Force, who served from 1995 to 2001. She talked about the "why" of her service to her country.

It started when she was 17, and saw military service as a way to get out of "sandy, windy" Eastern Oregon, see the world and learn



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Colleen R. Shaw Piercy, SSgt. E-5, United States Air Force, who served from 1995 to 2001, speaks to a virtual crowd during a Veterans Day assembly in the Echo High School gymnasium on Wednesday, Nov. 11, 2020.

a trade.

"After I learned more about my job and I defended my country, my 'why' for joining the armed forces evolved and became

much more. The ultimate goal at the end of the day was to support and defend our country. Being a part of the team to protect the rights of speech, press, petition,

religion and assembly gave me satisfaction," she said.

Piercy described the rigors of boot camp, where she and other recruits were "broken down" and rebuilt physically and mentally. To prepare them for a job where inattention to detail could result in lives lost, they learned to treat everything in their life with exactness.

"Every stray string on your clothes needed to be clipped off. Every T-shirt needed to be folded just right," she said. "I remember taking tweezers and pulling each little edge of the T-shirt so it was all flush."

After boot camp, Piercy worked in space system operations. At Schriever Air Force Base in Colorado Springs, Colorado, she worked to launch and operate GPS satellites that the military uses in combat and planning, and the defense satellites used to monitor for missile launches and other threats.

Her next tour was in Australia,

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