

City hall decision delayed

Miscommunication between Hermiston, architects pushes vote to Feb. 8

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
East Oregonian

HERMISTON — The Hermiston City Council had planned to award the bid for construction of a new city hall during its Monday, Jan. 25, meeting, but had to delay the vote.

City Manager Byron Smith said state regulations required the city to give seven days of the apparent high bid to all bidders after bidding is closed to allow them to file objections. Due to a miscommunication with the architects on the project, he said, that seven days had not been fulfilled yet by the Jan. 25 meeting.

The vote was moved to the Feb. 8 city council agenda.

The city received five bids on the project, which will include a new three-floor city hall where the old city hall is currently located, a redesign and repaving of the municipal parking lot across the street and replacement of old water and sewer pipes along part of the property. The apparent low bidder for the project was Griffin Construction of The Dalles, at about \$8.6 million.

On Monday the council



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

The Hermiston City Council has delayed a vote to award the bid for construction of a new city hall until Feb. 8, 2021.

did vote to annex 13.8 acres of property at 1307 S.W. Third St. in to the city for a planned single-family subdivision.

The council also discussed a 2021 goal-setting session

tion we’re going in,” he said.

In addition to the council’s annual goal-setting, the city recently began a community outreach effort that will take place during 2021, gathering

“I’M INSPIRED BY THE DIRECTION WE’RE GOING IN.”

— **David Drotzmann**, Hermiston mayor

that city councilors participated in over the weekend. Mayor David Drotzmann said he was proud of the work councilors and city staff did and was looking forward to seeing the full report put together from the 10-hour goal-setting session.

“I’m inspired by the direc-

feedback from a citizen advisory panel and other sources for what goals the city should include in a 20-year plan for the community’s future.

During the meeting the council listened to an update from Parks and Recreation Director Larry Fetter.

Fetter shared a video of

progress on the Funland Playground at Butte Park. He said a new dog park also at Butte Park, on the opposite side of the splash pad from Funland, is now in use. Fences are up to create “big dog” and “little dog” sections of the park, but he said the city will wait to have an official grand opening in March after signs, benches and other amenities have been installed.

Fetter shared designs for a new playground at Riverfront Park. The playground, as well as a new paved parking lot, will both be built on the south end of the park to replace the playground and parking lot destroyed by flooding in 2020 on the north side of the park. The new location may still see some standing water occasionally, Fetter said, but not the deep rushing water that has proved so destructive in the past.

He also shared conceptual art for a new “teen adventure park” the city has been designing. The park will include spaces designed for skateboarding, biking, climbing and other activities on South First Street across from the police station and fire station. Fetter said the city has received one of the state grants needed to build the park, and if it receives the other one it applied for, construction could start later this year.

Four more inmates die of COVID-19

TRCI continues to struggle with surge in cases

By **BRYCE DOLE**
East Oregonian

UMATILLA — Four more inmates who reportedly tested positive for COVID-19 in the ongoing outbreak at Two Rivers Correctional Institution in Umatilla have died, according to press releases from the Oregon Department of Corrections.

Thirteen inmates from TRCI who contracted COVID-19 have died since Jan. 1, according to ODOC press releases.

The newly reported deaths come as the prison continues to face a surge in cases. Since Tuesday, Jan. 19, 65 inmates and eight staff have reportedly tested positive for COVID-19, according to data from ODOC as of Sunday, Jan. 24.

Since the beginning of January, the prison has reported 434 positive cases among adults in custody and 59 cases among staff.

The prison continues to report more active cases

among adults in custody than any prison in Oregon, with 126 as of Jan. 24, according to ODOC.

The Oregon Department of Corrections doesn’t release identifying information about those who die from COVID-19.

But the agency did disclose that the first reported victim was a man between 70 and 80 years old who died at the prison on Thursday, Jan. 21.

The second was between 75 and 85 years old and reportedly died in the prison’s infirmary.

The third and fourth each reportedly died Jan. 26 at a local hospital. One of the men was between 55 and 65 years old, and the other was between 65 and 75.

In all, 39 inmates in Oregon prisons who tested positive for COVID-19 have died, according to ODOC.

And since the prison began reporting COVID-19 cases in April 2020, Two Rivers has reported 704 positive cases among inmates, the most among Oregon prisons. The prison has also reported 120 positive cases among staff, the third most in the state.

LOCAL BRIEFING

Umatilla County announces 30 new COVID-19 cases

UMATILLA COUNTY — Umatilla County Public Health announced 30 new COVID-19 cases for Wednesday, Jan. 27, according to the Region 9 COVID-19 Dashboard.

The Jan. 27 total comes after the county announced 17 new cases on Tuesday, Jan. 26.

The new cases put the county at 7,058 known cases since the pandemic began last year.

The county also announced one new death on Jan. 26 of a person with COVID-19, putting it at 74 deaths.

The victim is a 70-year-old man who tested positive on Dec. 23, 2020, and died on Wednesday, Jan. 15, at Providence Medical Center in Portland. This individual had underlying medical conditions.

Morrow County reported five new cases on Jan. 27 and one new case on Jan. 26 for a total of 973 since the pandemic began. The county has reported 11 deaths.

Hermiston police investigate reported shooting

HERMISTON — Police are investigating a reported shooting after a man was found on the 100 block of East Beech Avenue in Hermiston with what appeared to be a single gunshot wound to his leg on Monday, Jan. 25, according to Hermiston Police Chief Jason Edmiston.

“The case is very much active,” Edmiston said in an email to the *East Oregonian*, “but we are confident this was an isolated incident involving parties that all knew each other.”

Law enforcement responded at around 4:25 p.m. on Jan. 25 to a report that a man had been

shot at. Within minutes, officers located the victim, a 35-year-old man from Umatilla who appeared to have been shot in the leg, Edmiston said.

The man was “subsequently transported to the hospital with a nonlife-threatening injury,” Edmiston said.

Police proceeded to investigate the incident, but all parties were reluctant to tell officers exactly what happened, Edmiston said. Police remained on the scene and executed two search warrants before they left at approximately 10:45 p.m.

The following day, Tuesday, Jan. 26, police responded to a nearby residence on Jennie Avenue on an unrelated reported domestic disturbance, with reports alleging that somebody had a weapon, Edmiston said. Officers remained on-site until additional units arrived, and then entered the residence to ensure that nobody was inside.

HSD shifts online learning schedule

HERMISTON — Some changes to the state’s COVID-19 reopening metrics in schools is leading to changes in the way the Hermiston School District operates.

In a press release, the district announced it was going to shift its online classes to the afternoon to allow for small group in-person classes during the mornings. The district believes this will create an easier transition whenever the district brings in larger class sizes during the hybrid learning stage.

“The excitement of our teachers and building staff is palpable,” Superintendent Tricia Mooney said in a statement. “We are excited for the return of more students to the classroom. We will continue to observe Hermiston’s COVID-19 case counts, and we won’t be satisfied until we can offer in-person instruc-

tion to every student.”

According to the press release, the district will send follow-up information via newsletters or electronic communication.

Three M-F residents hurt in rollover crash

MILTON-FREEWATER — Three Milton-Freewater residents were injured in a rollover crash early on Monday, Jan. 25, according to Oregon State Police.

At about 5:30 a.m., a sport utility vehicle driven by Justin Anderson, 32, rolled on Highway 11 near the exit for Weston and Highway 204 due to icy conditions.

The GMC Jimmy came to rest with its wheels off the roadway.

Petra Sandoval, 49, and Paula Arizmende, 53, were passengers in SUV, according to the report.

East Umatilla Fire & Rescue District responded to the crash and transported all three to Providence St. Mary Medical Center. The nature of their injuries was not reported.

— *EO Media Group*

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