

Umatilla County again discusses having a professional manager

By JOHN TILLMAN
East Oregonian

UMATILLA COUNTY — Talk is on the table again for hiring a professional manager to administer the day-to-day operations of Umatilla County. That's a move Commissioner Dan Dorran favors.

Dorran was a member of the Umatilla County Charter Review Committee in 2019 that recommended the county move off having a board of commissioners run the county and bring on a manager.

"After hours of testimony from staff, past staff, past commissioners, local community leaders, outside county administrators and others, the charter review committee brought back a recommendation to put

a county administrator on the ballot along with other recommendations. Although the commissioners at the time did not put the recommendation on the ballot, they did make a commitment to further the discussion. Although four years have passed, we are having those discussions now."

Since Dorran's 2020 election to the county board, he has led the effort to reconsider the issue. He will become commission chair in January.

Dorran convened a meeting on March 22 to revisit the committee's recommendation to employ a county manager. He reminded participants of its conclusion.

Commissioners George Murdock and John Shafer were there, along with county counsel Doug Olsen, who

staffed the charter review process. Two of the original members of the charter review committee, Sally Anderson Hansell and Jerry Baker, also attended, as did Hermiston Mayor David Drotzmann and City Manager Byron Smith.

Looking on as well was Bill Grable, husband of Michele Grable, who chaired the committee.

At the meeting, commissioners agreed to discuss the issue further with a veteran county manager, who has yet to be identified.

"Umatilla County has grown in population, revenue and complexity," Dorran argued. "With this growth and complexity, the commissioners' ability to effectively

and successfully manage, participate and advocate for the best advancement of Umatilla County becomes a challenge." Several others present concurred.

Umatilla County's budget last year was almost \$124 million.

Impending changes in the composition of the commission make this a timely topic. While there were no votes at the meeting, there was a suggestion to hold off hiring a manager until the November election, should the county even decide to go that route.

The makeup of the commission in 2023 will be different. Murdock is retiring, and six candidates are running for his position.



Dorran

Shafer is seeking reelection and has two challengers.

In the meantime, the county plans to hold discussions with an outside expert.

"To further this discussion and decision, it is important for the commissioners to have the ability to listen, question and have a conversation with a professional county administrator consultant to have our options and parameters defined," Dorran said.

Oregon counties employ various administrative systems. Gilliam, Sherman, Wheeler, Crook, Grant, Malheur and Harney still use county courts, with a judge and two part-time commissioners. Such judges serve as chairs of the county boards of commissioner. Their judicial authority extends only to juvenile and probate matters.

These activities are secondary to their primary administrative duties as county heads.

Umatilla is among those with three, full-time, co-equal commissioners. Some counties with far fewer than Umatilla's about 82,000 residents hire professional managers, including Morrow, Hood River and Clatsop.

Umatilla's population ranks 14th among Oregon's 36 counties, but is 14,000 higher than number 15 Klamath's. Number 13 Polk's is only slightly higher.

Administrators are the norm in larger counties, including Washington, Clackamas and Marion. Multnomah County elects an at-large chair and four commissioners from geographical districts.

Gettin' muddy



Kathy Aney/East Oregonian

Members of the Heavy Metal team celebrate on Wednesday, March 30, 2022, after winning Mud Wars at the Happy Canyon arena, Pendleton. After a two-year hiatus, this year's slippery tug-o-war competition featured 16 teams of Pendleton High School girls waging battle on a pudding-like playing field.



Kathy Aney/East Oregonian

A member of the Breast Cancer team slips Wednesday, March 30, 2022, during Mud Wars at the Happy Canyon arena, Pendleton.

Irrigon making one-person police department

East Oregonian

IRRIGON — Irrigon is not renewing its contract with the Morrow County Sheriff's Office for law enforcement services.

The city council at its meeting March 15 voted instead for the city to establish a one-person police department.

City Manager Aaron Palmquist in a memo to the council explained this has been a topic of discussion in the town.

"As Irrigon grows and may

desire to take charge of their destiny, should they continue down the road of contracting or begin the step in moving in the direction of having their own law enforcement," according to the memo.

He said Mayor Margaret Anderson wanted the council to address the issue because "we are at a good time for all parties to make any adjustments if needed and desired."

The Irrigon City Council voted unanimously not to renew.

The small town on the Columbia River has been

paying the Morrow County Sheriff's Office more than \$95,000 a year in a contract for services, plus the purchase of a car for the sheriff's office every three years, which the sheriff's office returned to the city after three years.

Irrigon now is searching for a new chief, who will be the only officer in the department. The city also will purchase a new car and renovate an office in city hall for the new department.

Under the plan, there will not be 24/7 police coverage for the town of more than

1,800 people, but per Oregon law, the county still will have to provide some services. Code enforcement and complaints, however, would be solely the city's responsibility.

"This may be an opportunity for Irrigon as we continue to grow and become more resilient," Palmquist told the council in the memo.

Additionally, he continued, the Irrigon Municipal Court "has been a good addition and is working through to strengthen Irrigon's presence and strength in the region."

LOCAL BRIEFING

Oregon DEQ fines M-F Petco

MILTON-FREEWATER — Petco in Milton-Freewater faces a \$2,700 fine from the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality for performing underground storage tank tests without a license.

DEQ announced this

and seven other penalties in a news release Monday, March 28. The fines ranged from \$600 to \$15,000 for a variety of offenses, from cities not meeting requirements of their wastewater permits to a metal casting company improperly handling hazardous waste.

According to the state environmental regulation

department, Petco in May 2021 conducted a line tightness and a line leak detection test on an underground storage tank without first obtaining a license from the DEQ, which is a violation of Oregon law.

Organizations or individuals must either pay the fines or file an appeal within 20 days of receiving notice

of the penalty. They may be able to offset a portion of a penalty by funding a supplemental environmental project that improves Oregon's environment.

Dylan Darling, DEQ spokesperson, reported Petco is in discussion with the department about the penalty.

—EO Media Group



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian, File

A federal judge on Wednesday, March 30, 2022, warned prison staff at Oregon's Two Rivers Correctional Institution in Umatilla to not retaliate against an adult in their custody who sued corrections officials because they wouldn't follow masking rules.

Federal judge warns prison staff against retaliation at TRCI

By CONRAD WILSON
Oregon Public Broadcasting

amplified that against AIC's [Adult in Custody] by several magnitudes."

UMATILLA — A federal judge is warning prison staff at Oregon's Two Rivers Correctional Institution in Umatilla to not retaliate against an adult in their custody who sued corrections officials because they wouldn't follow masking rules.

Following hearings in federal court this week, U.S. Magistrate Judge Stacie Beckerman issued a new written order Wednesday, March 30, that told employees at the prison to not take actions against Aaron Hanna.

In October, Hanna asked the court to force prison officials and correctional officers at Two Rivers to comply with the Oregon Department of Corrections' policy on wearing masks.

That policy requires correctional officers and staff to wear masks anytime they are in the facility, even as most statewide mandates for mask wearing were lifted in March.

On March 21, Beckerman issued an order that required prison staff follow their own rules and wear masks inside the prison.

"It didn't take long for that to really kind of sour things over at TRCI," said Juan Chavez, Hanna's attorney. He said the guards and leaders at the Two Rivers prison "took the judge's conclusions that they need to enforce their masking orders and

That was not Beckerman's intent, a point she clarified this week, stating the injunction applied only to staff and not to the prison's policy for adults in custody.

Inmates were forced to wear masks while chewing food and only allowed to slip their masks down to take bites, Chavez said. They had to wear masks outside in the yard and while taking showers.

"They ratcheted up mask enforcement against AICs, which made AICs not happy," Chavez said. "Staff were telling people, 'well don't be angry with us, be angry with Hanna.'"

That put Hanna in a vulnerable position.

Chavez said the implication from Two Rivers was clear: "Come against us, come get accountability against us, we're going to make you feel the pain even worse."

Beckerman said any violation of her injunction, or retaliation against Hanna, could result in civil or criminal contempt proceedings.

A spokesperson for the Oregon Department of Corrections said the agency "cannot comment on the specifics of this case, but the DOC makes every effort to comply with court orders and will continue to do so."

A hearing is set for May 10 to discuss the retaliation Hanna faced at Two Rivers.

CONCEALED CARRY PERMIT CLASS

SATURDAY
APRIL 16TH

Hermiston
Ranch & Home

9AM
CLASSES

Multi-State \$80
Oregon Included No Fee

Oregon Only \$45

MULTI-STATE

Valid 35-States, including Washington

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