

UMATILLA COUNTY

# Commissioner candidates speak on mandates, Greater Idaho and more

By ERICK PETERSON  
East Oregonian

HERMISTON — John Shafer told a group of people Thursday, April 8, his hope for his future as a Umatilla County commissioner.

“I want to continue being your humble servant,” the incumbent said.

He added there was work left to do, and he wanted people to reelect him into office so he can resume it.

Shafer is running against two challengers, HollyJo Beers and Rick Pullen, who made their appeals to voters, too, at the county commissioner candidates forum at the National Guard Armory in Hermiston before about 50 members of the public. The three are running for commissioner Position 2.

Meanwhile, a field of six candidates is vying for votes in their race for Position 1, which is an open seat in the upcoming election. All six candidates, Bob Barton, Jesse Bonifer, Susan Bower, David Nelson, Cindy Timmons and Alvin Young spoke before the Hermiston audience.

The Umatilla County Republicans organized the forum, and a moderator asked the candidates a variety of questions. The format capped most answer at 30 seconds to a minute. Candidates could say whatever was on their mind, provided there was no unruly behavior and they kept to the time limits.

What followed was a cordial series of talks from candidates who offered little disagreement.

They spoke on the priorities of a county commissioner, solutions for homelessness, plans for spending money given to the county for COVID-19, the Greater Idaho movement and more.



Kathy Aney/East Oregonian

**David Nelson, a former state senator from Pendleton, introduces himself at the Umatilla County commissioner candidates forum Thursday, April 7, 2022, at the National Guard Armory in Hermiston.**

Candidates understood a question about what rights do people have when it comes to what to put in their bodies as asking about whether vaccination mandates were right. They largely agreed they were not.

“No. No. No,” Timmons said.

Beers and Bonifer referenced the Nuremberg trials and a necessary stand against tyranny. Others said it was an issue of choice, with some variation in regards to the need for choices to benefit society.

The other questions were met with the same amount of agreement, most often with each candidate giving opinions that related back to stances of personal freedoms and limited government.

Speaking to their opinion on critical race theory, for example, candidates were unified in their opposition, with Beers saying that it “causes segregation” and Bonifer stating it “causes division.” They all said parents

should have the right to teach on this topic, not schools.

They also sided on individual or local choice when it came to where children would attend school, and whether vouchers should be given to families. Some candidates pointed out that this and the question about critical race theory were not really a county commissioner issue.

Likewise, the Greater Idaho movement, an attempt by some to have parts of Oregon and Washington join their eastern neighbor, is not likely to involve county commissioners, either. Still, candidates answered the question, offering reasons why the proposal was unlikely or impossible, though they argued it was a useful movement.

Pullen said Greater Idaho proponents can “rattle the cages” of people who are ignoring Eastern Oregon. Others agreed, saying Eastern Oregonian need to be heard. But even Bower, who said she once signed a petition

supporting Greater Idaho, said it was “never going to happen.”

More relevant to their campaigns, candidates were asked for their opinions on the most important issue or role for county commissioners.

Bonifer emphasized transparency, speaking on the need for officials to stand up for what is right. Addressing mental health and drug use are two important issues, he said.

Bower spoke on the importance of workforce development, as well as tackling redundancy in government.

Nelson said family was the most important thing, and government needs to promote efforts that will support families.

Timmons said government needs to make sure people are getting the services they require. Elder care and veteran services, for instance, are needed, she said.

Young argued for the need for infrastructure, medical services and better roads.

Beers said there was need for the county to address drug use, mental health, veteran care, homelessness and crime.

Pullen spoke of farmers and the importance of helping ease burdens created by excessive legislation.

Shafer stated there are problems of drug use and homelessness that need to be solved through new and existing services.

Barton said he wished for programs that would encourage youth engagement, giving young people opportunities to learn and stay out of trouble.

At the end, they met each other and visitors to the forum, nodding as candidate Young said, “We have the same agenda” and they all want to do what is best for Umatilla County.

# Pendleton judge suggests reforms on the way out

By ANTONIO SIERRA  
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — The Pendleton City Council gave former Municipal Court Judge Monte Ludington a plaque, and he left the council a report.

At a Tuesday, April 5, city council meeting, Ludington officially stepped down from the bench as he returns to the Umatilla County District Attorney’s Office following several years in private practice.

Ludington also delivered a report that more fully fleshed out his views and provided the council with recommendations on how to improve the court.

Unlike their counterparts on the circuit court, municipal court judges don’t hear felony or even most misdemeanor cases. Instead, Pendleton judges are responsible for presiding over traffic violations, city ordinance violations and other cases that don’t usually lead to jail time. Also unlike circuit court, municipal court is not a “court of record,” meaning no one transcribes records of what happened during hearings.

While the cases in municipal court often contain lower stakes than state court, that doesn’t mean municipal court is free from scrutiny. Ludington referenced a 2018 lawsuit from a Pendleton woman who spent 55 days in jail for owing \$1,000 to Pendleton Municipal Court. The city of Pendleton agreed to pay the woman \$130,000 and changed its policies to ban jail time for the indigent.

“Even though it is not required, making our municipal court a court of record would provide further transparency and should be considered for that reason,” Ludington wrote.

If Pendleton were to make the municipal court a court of record, it would join only six other municipal courts across the state in doing so. Ludington also pointed out other cities avoid the move because of the increase in cost and staffing that comes with it.

Unlike elected state judge positions, the city council appoints the Pendleton municipal judge. While the council has the power to evaluate the judge on a regular basis, Ludington argued the council should evaluate municipal court staff as a whole rather than just focusing on the judge.

“Given their roles, it would be difficult to evaluate the municipal judge without also evaluating the court clerks and pro tem judges,” he wrote. “As discussed above, Court Clerks are the Municipal Judge’s arms, and Pro Tem Judges step into the Municipal Judge’s shoes. It is difficult to discuss or evaluate one without discussing the other.”

Despite the fixes he wants to see in the municipal court, Ludington also defended its continued existence. He wrote the municipal court provided the city with local control and allowed the city to prosecute cases that might fall through the cracks if they were to be referred to an overburdened circuit court.

Ludington wrote that the municipal court is not primarily a mechanism to send people to jail, noting that jail overcrowding often means inmates tied to municipal cases are often released first. Instead, Ludington said he’s used the court’s power to impose probation supervised by the court.

“The goal of any municipal court supervision should not be for defendants to fail and go to jail but for them to succeed,” he wrote. “In this respect, municipal court shares a similar mission as a treatment court.”

During Ludington’s tenure, the municipal court partnered with the Umatilla County CARE Program to help connect them with social services while under court supervision.

While Mayor John Turner said Ludington’s report and recommendations were appreciated, the city council was unlikely to adopt them.

“I’m not saying they’re not good ideas, he said. “I’m just not sure there’s much enthusiasm from the council.”

Turner said the city wasn’t eager to take on the new costs of making the municipal court a court of record. And he also plans to keep the current judge evaluation system in place, which involves Turner and City Manager Robb Corbett gathering input from court staff and then sitting down with the judge to go over it.

But he did like Ludington’s partnership with CARE and planned to meet with the new municipal court judge, Pendleton attorney Blaine Clooten, to discuss how to keep it going.

# EO Rental & Sales moving to former PGG Site

By JOHN TILLMAN  
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — Remodeling the 42,000 square-foot former Pendleton Grain Growers headquarters at 1000 S.W. Dorion Ave., remains a work in progress.

On a rainy Monday morning, March 21, workers were

polishing the floor inside the cavernous structure, while outside, a trackhoe operator dug a trench. When completed, the premises will form the new home of Eastern Oregon Rental & Sales.

Braseth Properties LLC, of La Grande, bought the building and parking lot on July 23, 2021, at auction

for about \$1.8 million. The Pendleton branch of its subsidiary sales business will move from its present location at 338 N.W. 57th Drive to the ex-PGG site later this year.

“We’re moving from up near the airport to downtown at the former PGG site,” general manager Dan Domey said.

The company has not set a grand opening date.

Besides Pendleton, Eastern Oregon Rental & Sales has locations in Baker City, La Grande and is doing business as NW Construction Supply Inc., of Pasco. It offers an extensive line of aerial work platforms and all-terrain forklifts.

HERMISTON

# Council to reinstate cash contribution to SHIP

By ERICK PETERSON  
East Oregonian

HERMISTON — During the previous meeting of the Hermiston City Council, a handful of residents let the city know they were unhappy about a plan for them to pay more for improvement to the South Hermiston Industrial Park. In the council’s upcoming meeting Monday, April 11, the city will present a new plan to give the locals what they want.

The city in 2019 estimated new infrastructure for SHIP would cost about \$3 million. A grant from the U.S. Economic Development Administration would cover half the cost, Umatilla County would pay \$50,000 and property owners at the industrial park would be on the hook for about \$1.4 million.

To ease the burden on property owners, the city offered \$250,000. Total cost to property owners would be closer to \$1.16 million.

Construction, though, proved to be less costly than expected. The final price for the project was under \$2 million.

As the city saved on the project, it extended savings to the property owners. One lot, for example, which would have owed \$39,673, would only be paying \$30,619 under a revised plan. The total cost to all the property owners

would have been \$947,734.

At the March 28 city council meeting, the city proposed removing its \$250,000 contribution. This angered property owners who showed up at the meeting and argued this was an unfair breach of promise.

City councilors agreed with the property owners and voted unanimously for the creation of a plan to reinstate the \$250,000 from the city and reduce costs to the property owners. Councilors

said they would then vote on the new, revised plan at the meeting April 11.

Mark Morgan, assistant city manager, shared the new plan on April 8. The plan reinstates the city’s promised contribution and reduces costs to property owners to a total \$697,734.

The aforementioned lot, which was previously expected to pay \$30,619 will only have to shell out \$22,542 under the latest plan.

The Port of Umatilla is

the largest beneficiary of the latest adjustment; it stands to save \$91,185.

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