

Downtown Umatilla gravel lot converted to park

More small projects planned to improve city's look

BY SEAN HART
HERMISTON HERALD

The gravel lot housing the city of Umatilla reader board got a makeover this week as city crews placed sod and essentially created a small park across from the library on Sixth Street.

Public Works Director Russ Pelleberg said many people stopped and offered positive comments Thursday as the grass was installed at the site called Village Square Park, which city officials have been planning to improve for some time.

"It was just bare gravel," he said. "It looked like a parking lot. They had ideas to have some walking paths in here and some benches and stuff, but it's such a small area with these little pocket parks like this that it's just kind of nice to turn it green. We took something that was just a gravel, ugly parking lot and, in about a week and a half, turned it into a green

space area for the city."

Pelleberg said, except for a curb installed by contractors, city crews completed all of the work at the park to reduce costs. He said he designed the underground irrigation system, and shrubbery and landscaping around the reader board will be installed.

"Once we get the grass established and the rest of the landscaping in here, we'll have some picnic tables out here, and it's totally usable," he said.

Prior to coming to Umatilla, Pelleberg designed parks and civil projects in the Tri-Cities for more than 20 years.

Since he began working for the city about two years ago, he has made several park improvements, including an expansion of Hash Park.

"We're starting to take some of the areas that really don't look that great, and, to do something like this, it's pretty inexpensive, and it's eye-appealing," Pelleberg said. "It's a change. It looks clean. It looks nice, and that goes a long ways in people's perception of how the city looks."

Pelleberg said future



Umatilla Public Works Director Russ Pelleberg, left, and supervisor Jason Barron lay sod in the former gravel lot across from the library and City Hall in downtown Umatilla. Pelleberg said he plans to continue adding more green spaces to make the town more attractive.

plans include working with the state to add more green areas along Highway 730 and Lewis Street in the McNary area.

"This is stuff that citizens want to see, the (City) Council wants to see, the parks commission wants to see," he said. "It's perceived well. You'll be seeing more little projects like this here and there, I'm sure. It's a start. We've got a ways to go, but you've got to start some- where, and this is a good place to start, very visual, good impact, right next to City Hall and right through downtown."

Stanfield officials discuss marijuana regulation

BY MAEGAN MURRAY
HERMISTON HERALD

The Stanfield City Council began discussing possible ways to regulate medical and recreational marijuana operations in the city, although many members would prefer not having any facilities in town at all.

City Manager Blair Larsen said Tuesday at the regular council meeting he wants members' perspectives on regulating medical pot dispensaries or whether they want to ban them in the city. He said discussions on medical marijuana regulations should take place first because recreational marijuana legalization

won't occur until July 1, with retail regulations taking effect Jan. 16.

He said the city does not have the option of enacting another moratorium on medical marijuana after the current one expires in mid-May.

"So we need to determine whether you want to limit such sites to certain areas of the city or if you want to go the way of other cities and try to do an outright ban," Larsen said. "That is all up for discussion."

Many city council members spoke out about how they hoped to either limit it in certain sections of the city where there weren't a lot of people, or banning it altogether.

Council members Lynn Weathermon and Pam McSpadden said they would prefer to keep medical marijuana dispensaries out of town.

Weathermon said, however, if the city can't ban them altogether, he would like them to be limited to certain areas of the city.

Councilman Jack Huxoll agreed. "I would like to see what areas we really don't want it in and then come up with areas they can be in," Huxoll said.

Larsen said he would produce some maps identifying the various zoning areas in the city to begin discussions about where dispensaries can be placed.

Councilman Jason Sperr said, because city officials want to revitalize the town, he would also like updated city building codes in place before any recreational businesses are allowed to open.

"If they come into a building, they have to abide by those regulations, but that doesn't matter what business is coming in — it doesn't matter if it is recreational or medical," he said. "I would like to have all those regulations set for what we want to see as far as the buildings (are concerned)."

Mayor Thomas McCann said he, too, would like facilities banned in Stanfield, but he would like to

know how county commissioners intend to regulate marijuana operations before taking any action, if possible.

"I think if we wait until sometime around the middle of April to see what's transpired, then we can have a better idea of what we can do," he said.

Larsen said he thinks the council should not wait, however, because, at this point, people who want to open a shop in Stanfield are probably making arrangements now.

He said articles about how cities can and can't regulate dispensaries are available at City Hall or online at www.orcities.org.

Hermiston teen jailed for stabbing stepmother

BY PHIL WRIGHT
EO MEDIA GROUP

A Hermiston teen faces a felony assault charge for stabbing her stepmother earlier this week. Umatilla County Sheriff Terry Rowan said the case remains an active investigation.

"It was kind of a family deal," Rowan said, when Danyell Dove Sowell "ended up going off and stabbing her stepmother with a pair of scissors."

The attack happened Tuesday evening on Bridge Road west of Hermiston, and Rowan said Charley Sowell suffered a few stab wounds. An ambulance took her to Good Shepherd Medical Center, Hermiston, and an emergency aircraft flew her to a Portland hospital. Rowan said the last he heard she was recovering well.

Rowan said investigators continue to try and piece together what led to the attack. Hermiston police had an encounter with Danyell Sowell earlier that day, he said, and she may have had "some sort of mental episode."

The Umatilla County District Attorney's Office charged Danyell Sowell with

second-degree assault. That could change after a grand jury hears evidence from the state. Circuit Court Judge

Dan Hill of Hermiston set bail at \$50,000. Sowell has her next court appearance Wednesday.



EO MEDIA GROUP PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS
Officers from Umatilla Police and Oregon State Police respond to a reported stabbing Tuesday at 29064 Bridge Road west of Hermiston.



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