

# ODOT signal project will improve traffic flow

By **JADE McDOWELL**  
Staff Writer

A traffic signal upgrade underway along Highway 395 in Hermiston should result in smarter traffic control.

Tim Rynearson, District 12 assistant manager for the Oregon Department of Transportation, said the new signals being installed will switch traffic control from weight sensors in the pavement at intersections to video sensors, allowing the system to sense the wider traffic picture and automatically adjust to the ebb and flow of vehicles.

“With the new technology, it will be able to sense the amount of traffic queuing up, and the signals will be able to communicate with each other,” he said.

That means the data being fed to a traffic signal’s computer will include not only whether a car is waiting to cross an intersection right then, but whether a line of cars will be waiting to cross during the red light after that.

Rynearson said the new systems have been successful in improving traffic flow for other cities in Oregon, and he expects to see improvements in Hermiston as well.

He said someone won’t be monitor-

ing the video feed 24/7, but engineers will be able to pull up footage or analyze data to see if there are adjustments that need to be made to the system.

“They will be able to connect to those systems remotely,” he said.

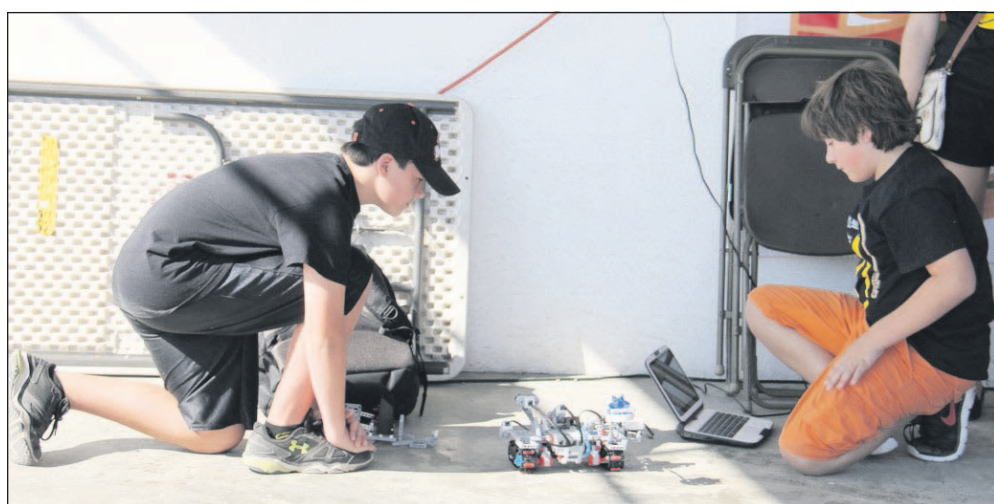
The video footage will not be used by police to issue traffic citations. However, Rynearson said the footage will be stored by ODOT.

He said the new system being installed by ODOT will also give the department more options for signals at every intersection along Highway 395, such as blinking yellow turn arrows where before there was only a solid light. Signals telling pedestrians when to cross are also being improved.

Beyond making room for a “smarter” system, Rynearson said removing the traffic loops embedded in the pavement to sense cars’ weight will make ODOT’s planned repaving project easier.

The department plans to do a full repaving project along Highway 395 in Hermiston next summer.

The current traffic signal project is expected to be completed in another four to six weeks.



STAFF PHOTO BY SEAN HART

Keston Depner, left, and Keagan McCann demonstrate how a robot they created during the robotics day camp at the Umatilla County Fair reverses when it reaches a wall during a demonstration Saturday.

# Participants enthusiastic during fair robotics camp

By **SEAN HART**  
Staff Writer

Area students had the opportunity to build a different set of skills at the Umatilla County Fair this year.

In the first robotics day camp at the fair, students entering grades six through nine spent two days building robots out of LEGOs and programming the computers that controlled them.

Members of Umatilla High School’s FIRST Robotics Club Team 4125 Confidential instructed the class Wednesday and Thursday, and the children gave a demonstration Saturday. Instructor Megan Lorence said the participants were very enthusiastic.

“At lunch, they scarfed down their lunches and went right to work,” she said. “I think they loved it.”

The participants had varying levels of previous experience, Lorence said, but none had worked with LEGO robotics before. The robots could be built with tracks or wheels and used sensors that detected walls.

“We were able to give them that exposure, and they caught on really quickly,” she said. “It was fun to see them get it.”

Keagan McCann, an 11-year-old from Hermiston, came into the camp with no experience, but Lorence said he quickly became one of the best programmers at the camp.

“I’ve always looked at robotics stuff,” he said. “I thought it would be cool to do.”

McCann and Keston Depner, a 12-year-old from Hermiston, created a robotic tank with a variety of accessories.

“Originally, we just were using the instruction manual to create a little car with tank tracks, but we wanted something better because what’s the use of having something called a tank if it’s just tracks?” Depner said. “So we put on the catapult, and later we added the drill, and we put on all the sensors, and we gave it the trailer.”

Depner, who had some experience with robotics, said he learned a lot at the camp about



STAFF PHOTO BY SEAN HART

From left, Keston Depner, a 12-year-old from Hermiston, and Keagan McCann, an 11-year-old from Hermiston, look at the programming for the robot they created at the robotics day camp at the Umatilla County Fair during a demonstration Saturday.

programming and using the “brain” of the robot.

“You gotta have patience because sometimes it doesn’t work,” he said.

Lorence, who also teaches robotics to younger students at the science, technology, engineering and math after school academy in Umatilla, said working on robotics projects teaches students many skills applicable in other areas. Students learn how to complete goals on deadlines and collaborate within a team and with other teams, she said.

“We always say it’s more than just building robots,” she said. “It’s about learning life skills that can get you anywhere.”

# Planning commission suggests changes to landscaping ordinance

By **JADE MCDOWELL**  
Staff Writer

The Hermiston Planning Commission is recommending the City Council make changes to a proposed landscaping ordinance after holding a public hearing.

The City Council will hold its own public hearing during its Aug. 24 meeting, but city planner Clint Spencer said after the commission’s recommended changes the council could decide to continue the hearing to another date and time.

The ordinance as written requires any new development to be landscaped on 15 percent of multi-family residential property, six percent in the C-1 Commercial

Zone, three percent in the C-2 Commercial Zone and three percent or 10,000 square feet of industrial land. It also lists specifications for the type of landscaping that can be used.

Spencer said after taking public comment during its meeting the Planning Commission recommended the following changes: Create incentives for landscaping, bolster enforcement provisions, increase the percentage of non-plant cover allowed to count toward the landscaping requirement and allow xeriscaping (often referred to as zero-scaping because it is meant to survive with no irrigation).

Spencer said about 20 people showed up for the

Planning Commission’s hearing on the topic. Some business owners have complained that the requirements are too much of a burden for businesses and should be relaxed to take into account drought conditions and other special circumstances.

Spencer said the Aug. 24 hearing has already been noticed and legally must continue even though more time will likely be needed to come up with verbiage to implement the planning commission’s proposed changes.

As a result the council could take testimony Monday or could simply open the hearing and then immediately vote to continue the hearing to another date and time.

## Weekly SUDOKU

### Answer

6	9	8	2	7	3	4	5	1
1	3	7	4	9	5	2	8	6
2	4	5	1	6	8	9	3	7
5	1	6	7	4	2	3	9	8
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9	5	3	6	2	1	8	7	4
7	8	2	9	5	4	1	6	3
4	6	1	3	8	7	5	2	9

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