



ABOUT TOWN

Council approves dispatch contract

By **JADE McDOWELL**
Staff Writer

The Hermiston City Council unanimously approved a contract with Umatilla County for emergency dispatch services on Monday.

The city combined its dispatch services with the county's in 2014, but an advisory committee has since been working out a formula for how much cities pay per year for services.

Previously, Hermiston and Pendleton were paying for services based on population, while smaller cities weren't sharing the cost. Under the new contract, cities will pay based on assessed value.

The new contract will cost Hermiston \$303,487 for the first year — about \$50,000 more than it has been paying — but is still significantly cheaper than having the city run its own dispatch center again.

City Manager Byron Smith said like any change, there have been a few bumps in the road, but overall the combined dispatch has been a benefit to the city.

"I really think it's been a good transition for us," he said.

He said the advisory committee will continue to meet, but can now turn its main focus from finances to improving operations.

If citizens come to the police station to speak with an officer about a non-emergency issue outside of the Monday-Friday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. hours it is open, a phone to the side of the front door will connect them straight to the dispatch office.

Mayor David Drotzmann said he wanted to thank the county and the sheriff's office for taking the time to listen to cities' concerns through the advisory committee.

In other business Monday night, the city council:

- Approved a franchise agreement with Fatbeam LLC to use the city's right of way for its fiber optic equipment in exchange for a 5 percent franchise fee. The company will be providing fiber optic service for Hermiston School District.

- Approved a pair of stop signs on NW 5th Street where it intersects with Madrona Avenue.

- Discussed implementation of the new "Where Life is Sweet" brand. T-shirts and tank tops with the new logo and tagline are for sale at City Hall for \$10 apiece, and Smith said a Portland painting company should start in seven to 10 days on repainting the entire water tower, finishing by mid-October. The tower will be an off-white color with the new "Where Life is Sweet" tagline and logo (which includes a watermelon slice) on both sides of the structure.



FILE PHOTO

NEW RODEO ARENA

EOTEC AWARDS BID

Some details still need to be worked out, like lighting and restrooms at arena

By **JADE McDOWELL**
Staff Writer

The Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center board awarded a contract for construction of the project's rodeo arena Monday, but it doesn't include restrooms or arena lighting.

Hendon Construction of Umatilla was the sole bidder at \$3.9 million. Board chair Byron Smith said the \$3.9 million meets the budget for the project but does not leave any extra money to add restrooms or lighting, which the board had separated out from the base bid after a first round of bidding produced bids well over \$4 million and was rejected.

"My encouragement to the contractor would be to look for some value engineering opportunities," he said.

Smith said at a previous meeting that if the money couldn't be found for arena lighting, a "worst-case scenario" would be that the Farm-City Pro Rodeo becomes a daytime event in 2017. However, he clarified after Monday's meeting that there were other options also being explored, including leasing lights or bringing over lights from the current rodeo arena as an interim measure until more money could be raised.

Despite concerns that the contract was awarded months behind the original schedule, Smith said he felt Hendon Construction would be "aggressive" in trying to meet the 2017 deadline and still had the ability to do so.

During the special meeting the board also made plans to attend a Hermiston Planning Commission meeting at 7 p.m. tonight at City Hall, when the commission will discuss EOTEC's request for a variance on parking requirements.

As things stand now, fair week will be the only time that more than one of



STAFF PHOTO BY GARY L. WEST

Above: Joe Fartta and David Bothum remove a broken fence board at the Farm-City Pro Rodeo Arena prior to the 2016 rodeo in August. The 2017 rodeo is expected to be held at a new arena which will be built at the EOTEC grounds.

Top: The Farm-City Pro Rodeo arena, currently located at the Umatilla County Fairgrounds in central Hermiston, is shown in this Hermiston Herald file photo. A bid has been awarded to build the new arena at the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center.

Left: Board members, volunteers and family members of the Farm-City Pro Rodeo have traditionally spent weeks leading up to the rodeo making repairs and beautifying the grounds to get ready for the big event. The rodeo is scheduled to move to the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center in 2017.



FILE PHOTO

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Hermiston School District growing faster than expected

By **ANTONIO SIERRA**
Staff Writer

As soon as the Hermiston School District sets a new high in enrollment, the next year tops it.

According to a district enrollment report, 5,714 students were attending Hermiston schools on Tuesday, Sept. 6, 318 more students than in September 2015.

That count not only surpasses the most aggressive growth forecast calculated for the 2016-2017 school year (about 5,500 students) in a 2014 Portland State University study, it's just above the middle-growth fore-

cast for the 2017-2018 school year.

Although enrollment figures are shooting past previous expectations, district Executive Director of Operations Mike Kay said the district prepared for the surge by building five modular units over the summer.

Kay said the modulars provided 10 additional classrooms, with eight currently in use, leaving the district with some additional capacity if needed.

In the short term, Kay said the district will have to continue to build more modulars to

provide four to six new classrooms per year

"From a capital construction perspective, it's the most cost-effective way to add classrooms," he said.

In the long term, the district is considering a \$104 million bond proposal for the May 2017 ballot, which would include rebuilding Rocky Heights and Highland Hills elementary schools, adding a new elementary school and an expansion of Hermiston High School.

If the district does put the bond on the ballot, it would come less than a decade after it passed a

\$69.9 million bond replacing Sunset and West Park elementary schools and Armand Larive Middle School.

While the new construction increased capacity, the intervening years since the bond passed in 2008 has seen student enrollment grow by nearly 1,000 students.

In some cases, adding modulars isn't enough.

Tricia Mooney, the assistant superintendent of human resources, said West Park has two "blended classes" for fourth and fifth grade,

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