

# City approves \$6.8 million bonds for EOTEC, water projects, festival street

By **JADE MCDOWELL**  
Staff writer

The Hermiston city council approved issuance of up to \$6.8 million in bonds on Monday night, but the city won't create new taxes to pay for them.

The bonds will pay for four separate projects, each with a different revenue stream to pay them off. City manager Byron Smith said that each set of bonds will be accounted for separately, but issuing them at the same time saves tens of thousands of dollars in attorney fees and is expected to get the city a more favorable interest rate.

Between \$1.75 million and \$2.15 million will be directed toward construction at the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center. Smith said local hoteliers had agreed to an additional \$1 per room per

night tourism promotion assessment to be directed toward paying off the bonds. He said the original plan was \$1.75 million over 15 years, but he is in talks to see if they were willing to extend it to 20 years, which would raise an extra \$400,000.

Another \$1.5 million will go toward creation of a festival street on NE Second Street next to city hall. Assistant city manager Mark Morgan said the festival street committee hopes to have a final design to show the council during an April 10 work session. Those bonds will be paid for through the revenue coming into the Urban Renewal District.

Smith said \$1.7 million will go toward "smart" water meters that can be read remotely and alert ratepayers of leaks. \$1.5 million

will help pay for new equipment at the recycled water treatment plant that will save the city the expense of draining solid waste from the lagoons. Bonds for both of those projects will be paid for by a series of three 5 percent water and sewer rate increases starting March 1.

On Monday night the council also approved an updated joint management agreement with Umatilla County for land that is outside city limits but inside the urban growth boundary.

They also approved a resolution joining other Oregon cities in requesting that the legislature create a new law restoring recreational immunity. The law protects landowners who offer up their land for free recreational use from lawsuits arising from injuries, but a recent Oregon Su-

preme Court ruling stated that the injured party can still sue employees. Since cities are obligated to protect their employees, cities such as Pendleton have closed some city parks to protect themselves, while Hermiston has stopped a planned skate park.

Mayor David Drotzmann said he visited Salem for Capital Day, and while he got a wonderful reception from local senators and representatives, he did not leave Salem "overly optimistic" that much movement will be made on the League of Oregon Cities' legislative priorities such as recreational immunity, property tax reform and PERS reform.

"It's an interesting place we're in as a state," he said. "There doesn't seem to be a lot of bipartisan movement for anything."



HH FILE PHOTO

The EOTEC board of directors met Friday to discuss the staffing and operational needs of the new facility.

## EOTEC OKs contract for maintenance, talks event center revenue

By **JADE MCDOWELL**  
Staff writer

The Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center board approved a contract Friday for maintenance and janitorial services.

The contract is with Mabel Largaespa Dean's Services, which will provide janitorial services for \$22 per hour per person, and maintenance/lawn care for \$40 per hour per person. The board previously voted to seek out a contractor to handle those services after concerns that business manager Heather Cannell was devoting time to cleaning bathrooms and setting up tables that she should be spending on marketing the event center.

As members of the EOTEC board continue to work on a marketing and operations plan for the project, Cannell and city of Hermiston finance director Amy Palmer have been working on financial reports that give the board a clearer picture of the costs and revenues associated with each event.

A report presented Friday of event revenue and direct expenses for those events was not a full picture because it only showed revenue that has actually been received, Palmer said. However, the report showed \$26,444 in event revenue since July 1 and \$6,779 in direct costs for those events. It did not include general overhead costs for running the event center or personnel costs.

Money for marketing EOTEC comes from a \$1 per room per night tourism promotion assessment on hotels and RV parks in west Umatilla Coun-

ty, and the hoteliers last year added a second dollar that will be used to pay off construction bonds the city of Hermiston agreed to issue on their behalf. Board chair and city manager Byron Smith said the city council will be asked to approve multiple construction bonds, including \$1.75 million for EOTEC, on Monday.

Board member Vijay Patel noted that TPA revenue is down slightly from the year before. He said hotel revenue in Hermiston has taken a hit in part because an increase in hotel rooms in the Tri-Cities has decreased the amount of overflow to Hermiston hotels.

On the construction side, John Eckhardt of Knerr Construction predicted they will start breaking ground on the barns on Tuesday, although he cautioned that estimate was somewhat dependent on weather since there are some surveying activities they can't do with snow on the ground. In December Eckhardt said they hoped to begin construction by the end of January.

Carl Hendon from Hendon Construction reported that work is going well on the rodeo arena, and he anticipated concrete work would be finished by the end of March so that they can start working on installing things like bleachers and pens.

In January he reported that weather delays had pushed the project's expected completion date from June 1 to June 14, but said Friday that since then "we've probably actually picked up time."

# Hermiston asks for fair share of county transportation funds

By **JADE MCDOWELL**  
Staff writer

Cities that saw their special transportation funds decrease again this year are questioning the fairness of how that money is allocated.

Oregon's special transportation fund gives cigarette tax money to counties, transportation districts and tribes to provide transportation for senior and disabled residents. In Umatilla County, that money is then distributed to cities and nonprofits by recommendation of the Special Transportation Advisory Committee.

Hermiston assistant city manager Mark Morgan said during the committee's Feb. 6 meeting, where the committee considered applications for \$397,000 in funds for the 2017-2019 biennium, the money was not divided based on a formula that takes into consideration factors such as budget or services offered. Instead, the committee gave each applicant the same percentage of their request.

Morgan said it felt like the county's approach to STF funds is to "throw a sack of money on the table" and tell the committee to give it to whoever it wants.

"There's no rhyme or reason," he said.

Linda Carter, finance director for the city of Pendleton, expressed the same frustration with making cuts based on what an agency requested instead of the level of service it provides.

"Those who shot for the moon got the moon, and those of us who asked for our normal request got



STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS

The HART (Hermiston Area Regional Transit) bus run by Kayak Public Transit drives down its route on West Moore Avenue in January in Hermiston.

less," she said.

Carter said she believes there should be a set formula for calculating allotments of STF funds, based on things like the number of clients served and the service area's percentage of senior and disabled residents.

For the 2017-2019 biennium the committee has recommended the city of Pendleton receive \$62,500 per year, the city of Hermiston \$37,500 per year, the city of Milton-Freewater \$37,500 per year, Good Shepherd Health Care System \$26,000 per year, CAPECO \$15,000 per year, Clearview Mediation \$15,000 per year, Hermiston Senior Center \$3,000 per year and Foster Grandparents \$2,000 per year.

In 2015 the committee recommended Pendleton receive \$90,000, Hermiston \$32,000, Milton-Freewater \$50,000, CAPECO \$18,739, Good Shepherd \$28,235, Clearview Mediation \$20,138, Hermiston Senior Center \$3,000

and Foster Grandparents \$6,500.

Carter and Morgan said that in earlier years some of the nonprofits used to ask for — and receive — significantly less.

County finance director Robert Pahl said the county provides guidelines for the Special Transportation Advisory Committee to consider in its decision-making process.

"There is a coordinated plan that the county put together with public input that has some priorities in it that the committee uses as guidance," he said.

Committee chair Darrin Umbarger said with less money coming in from the state, the committee decided it was only fair to make everyone share the burden of cuts by getting less than they requested.

Carter and Morgan expressed concern that two of the three committee members who were present on Monday to vote on how the money would be distributed were also affiliated with

organizations asking for money (Umbarger is CEO of Clearview Mediation and Virginia Beebe is on the Hermiston Senior Center board).

Umbarger said that he and Beebe had someone else give their organization's presentation to the committee and recused themselves when it came time to vote on their organization's application. He said it was important to have people on the committee familiar with programs for transporting senior and disabled residents.

Pendleton uses STF funds for a taxi ticket program that subsidizes rides for senior and disabled residents, van transport to the senior meal program, the Care Ride to St. Anthony Hospital, a dial-a-ride bus and a taxi ticket program for the general public. Hermiston uses the money for subsidized taxi tickets for senior and disabled residents, while Hermiston Senior Center transports seniors to its meal program and Good Shepherd's Care-Van offers rides to medical appointments.

Milton-Freewater also has a taxi ticket program for senior and disabled residents. CAPECO offers a dial-a-ride program for seniors. Clearview Mediation uses wheelchair accessible vans for a dial-a-ride service for seniors and individuals with disabilities in the Pendleton area. And the Foster Grandparents program based in Pendleton reimburses volunteer "grandparents" who mentor elementary school students for their travel.

# Downtown Stanfield building collapse forces out residents

By **JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN**  
Staff writer

Part of a downtown Stanfield building collapsed Friday afternoon, forcing a restaurant and several renters out indefinitely.

The building, at 110 N. Main St., is home to the Blanquita Restaurant and Pupuseria, serving Salvadorian food, as well as four apartments upstairs.

Stanfield City Manager Blair Larsen said Stanfield police and the Umatilla County Fire District 1 re-

sponded to the call, and found the entire back side of the building had collapsed. The back area is used for parties and special events, but is not occupied full time, and no one was in that area at the time of collapse.

Larsen said an inspection has not been conducted on the building yet, but the fire department suspects the collapse was caused by ice and snow on top of the building starting to melt, and leaking into the structure.

"The moisture may have weakened the beams," he

said.

Larsen said the city has attempted to contact the owners, Antonio and Filberto Chavez, but has not yet heard back from them. The building has been shut down and a dangerous building ordinance has been placed on the structure barring entry. In order to lift that ban,

Larsen said, the building must be repaired, and has to pass another safety inspection.

The restaurant's operators, Moises Torres and Blanca Orellana, could not be reached for comment by press time, and the number of people living in the building was not known.

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**STUDENT OF THE WEEK**

**Isabelle Chapman**  
Pendleton High School

Isabelle Chapman is a member of National Honor Society as well as FFA (she is an officer) and has participated in Cross Country and Tennis for 4 years at PHS. Isabelle is also a member of the PHS Jazz Band and Symphonic Band. She volunteers a lot of hours with other member of the National Honor Society.

She is looked at in FFA and band as a leader and a mentor to the younger students. She leads by example in all her classes and has continued to push herself academically each and every year. Her current academic classes include AP Government, AP Literature, Honors Biology 2 and Spanish 4. All of these are Dual Credit Courses. Isabelle is also planning to attend Linfield College next year.

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