

Hermiston Herald



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Sam Roberts, left, shows Umatilla residents a map where they can place stickers to indicate their favorite place in the community.

STAFF PHOTO BY JADE McDOWELL

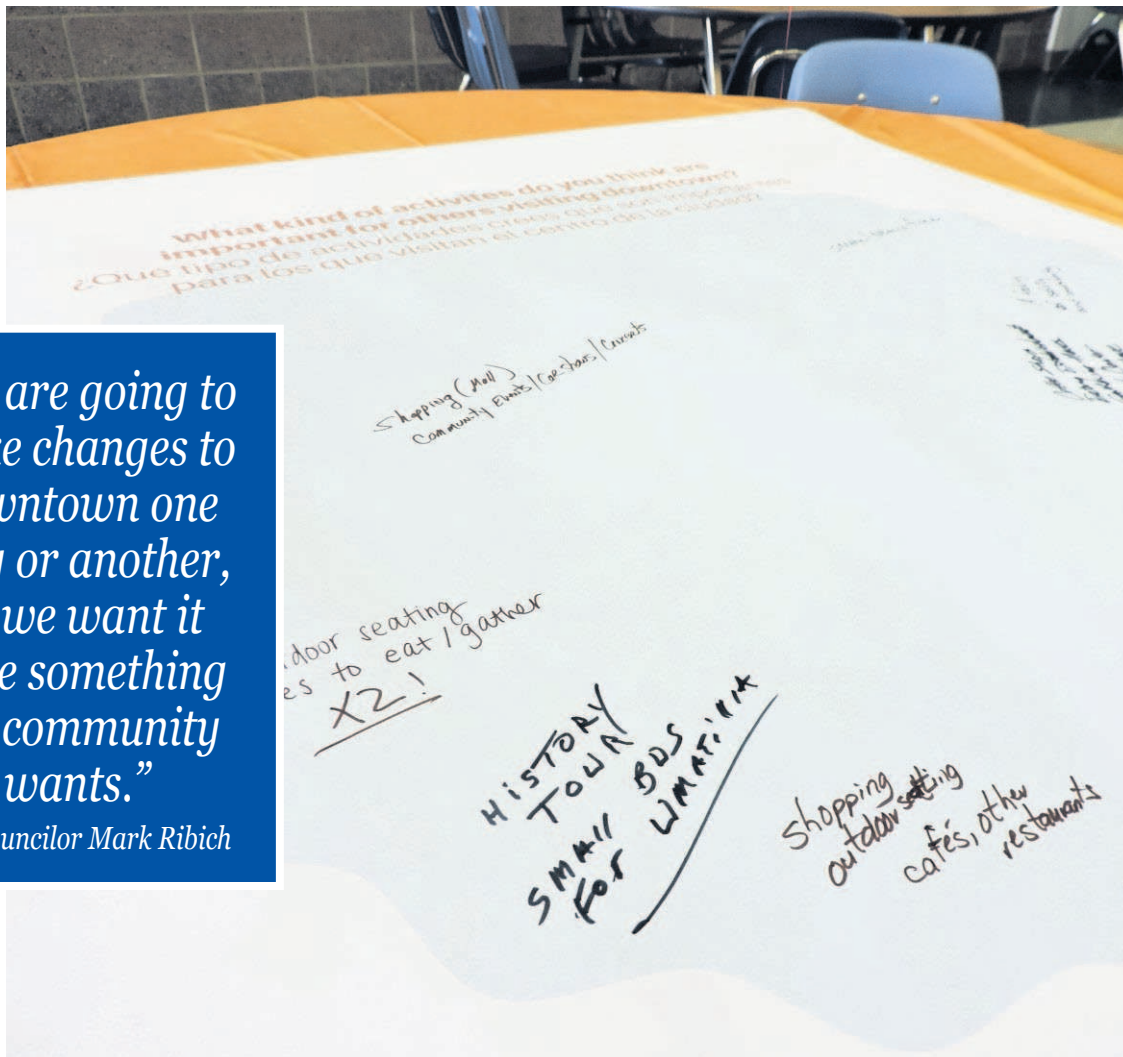
Grad students gather feedback on Umatilla area revitalization

By JADE McDOWELL
Staff Writer

Walking trails along the river, a marina and a nationally recognized robotics team were all strengths listed by Umatilla residents at an open house Friday night.

The event, held at Umatilla High School, encouraged residents to draw pictures, write on posters, put stickers on maps and add to a photo album to show what are their favorite things about Umatilla. The information is being gathered by Portland State University graduate students who are writing a downtown revitalization plan for Umatilla as a final project.

"We're working really hard to create a document by the community, for the community," PSU student Laura Voss said. "We have our own ideas, but we want to hear from people who live here."



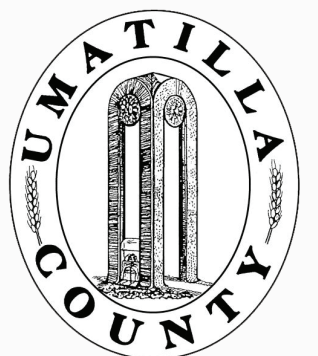
STAFF PHOTO BY JADE McDOWELL

"We are going to make changes to downtown one way or another, so we want it to be something the community wants."

City councilor Mark Ribich

See UMATILLA, A16 Notes written by Umatilla residents make suggestions for what they want to see more of downtown.

BRIEFLY



Plenty of elected positions vacant as filing deadline approaches

Hermiston Herald

With hours remaining before the candidate filing deadline, several seats are available on school boards and taxing districts across Umatilla County.

Out of the 124 seats up for election in May, nearly 40 percent have yet to draw a single candidate. Plenty more feature a single candidate running unopposed.

While many of seats without candidates are from small, rural fire and cemetery districts, more prominent boards have vacancies as well.

The position 3 seat on the Hermiston School Board — currently filled by board member Don Rankin — has drawn no candidates. Incumbents Jason Middleton, Bonnie Luisi and Karen Sherman have all filed for their respective seats.

The Blue Mountain Community College Board of Education Zone 5 seat, which represents Umatilla County, has no incumbent or candidate either. Incumbents Bob Savage, Heidi Van Kirk, Kim Puzey and Tony Turner have filed for re-election.

The filing deadline to run for any of the elected positions is Thursday, March 16. The election is May 16.

Citizens quiz school officials on proposed \$104 million bond

By JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN
Staff Writer

Of those that attended Friday's sessions about the proposed Hermiston school bond, many seemed to feel that the proposed changes are valid, while others are worried that tax increases are getting out of hand.

The \$104 million bond would replace Rocky Heights and Highland Hills elementary schools, expand Hermiston High School and build a new school on district-owned property on Theater Lane. The bond would add 90 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value to the \$4.09 Hermiston residents already pay in education taxes.

Superintendent Fred Maiocco reminded voters that the tax will be shared as Hermiston continues to grow.

"As new businesses are added to the tax rolls, there will be more peo-

ple to help with the tax burden," he said.

The district is currently paying off two other bonds, one started in 2004 to fund the construction of Desert View Elementary School and one in 2008, which built new Sunset and West Park elementary schools and Armand Larive Middle School. That bond was \$69.9 million, and will be paid off in 2029.

Maiocco also said one of the reasons the district wanted to pursue the bond is to qualify for a matching grant, funded by the state of Oregon.

"Oregon is one of the five states without some kind of formal matching program," he said. If the district gets the bond approved, they can then apply to receive \$5.7 million from the matching grant program. Without the bond, they'll be ineligible for that money.

Several other area school districts, like Umatilla, Echo, Pilot Rock and Milton-Freewater, passed their bonds and received matching grants.

Some in the audience were upset at the prospect of more taxes and asked why the district hadn't thought of more creative solutions to some of the issues.

"I haven't seen any out-of-the-box thinking. It's just spend, spend, tax, tax," said Geri Weigum, a longtime Hermiston resident. "In my opinion, we're not utilizing what we have."

Weigum said she wanted to see Hermiston look into a year-round school or four-day per week school calendar to make better use of district resources.

"We're being taxed to death," she said. "I will not vote for it."

See BOND, A16

