

## SCHOOL:

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Board members shared what they'd learned in the days since the failure of the bond, which proposed to replace Highland Hills and Rocky Heights elementary schools, upgrade the high school and build a new elementary school on East Theater Lane.

Many said they'd heard from people who couldn't afford the tax increase on a fixed income, as well as those who wanted to see the district try to upgrade the buildings they had instead of building a brand-new Highland Hills.

But others said they were surprised by the responses from community members. Multiple board members said they knew people who claimed they didn't receive ballots. Several also said they heard comments from people who were more interested in seeing the high school developed than focusing on elementary schools.

Another common critique was from the senior citizen community, which was unhappy at having to move from their current senior center location once the school district purchased the property.

Karen Sherman, the board chair, said while it was a difficult transition, she felt some of the blame was unfairly placed on the schools.

"We took that into consideration," she said. "We offered them the land by Armand Larive right up front. Unfortunately, the senior board and city have not been able to get the center built in a timely fashion. Here we are, looking like the people pushing them out, but I don't feel we are totally responsible for that."

"I think it comes down to community trust," said board member Dave Smith. "I had people saying to me that we were asking for more than we really needed — and I took offense at that. I think we've tried to be transparent."

Sherman said while it may not have been a direct reason, she also felt the city's recent decision not to renew the Chamber of Commerce's lease on the Hermiston Conference Center may have set a tone for people in the community.

"I think there's some anxiousness about that," Sherman said. "Hermiston has always been such a supportive place to live. Emotionally, that has been the hardest part of this week. I feel badly because our kids did not get the support they needed from this community."

## Community Response

Many senior citizens at the Hermiston Senior Center lunch last week said they weren't going to vote for a bond that raised the tax burden of people on fixed incomes.

"If they would have just put the repair of Rocky Heights and Highland Hills on there, I probably would have voted for it," said a woman named Chris, who asked that her last name not be used, echoing the comments of several others in the room. "But I'm not voting for a new school."

Others added that they wanted to see the district put more effort into maintaining existing buildings, rather than continue to build.

Still others said they felt the influx of Hispanic families was contributing to the growing population of schools, but felt those populations weren't paying their fair share of taxes, and wouldn't help shoulder the resulting tax increase.

Some seniors also acknowledged the sting they'd felt at being told they had to leave their current location.

"It was harsh," said Virginia Beebe, who doesn't live in Hermiston but is active at the senior center. "They basically told us the building comes down no matter what."

Parents at some of the schools that had been up for replacement said they were disappointed in the bond's failure — but several said

they didn't vote, or failed to turn in their ballots on time.

But others said they were surprised by the outcome.

"I was so sad," said Katie Anderson, a parent at Rocky Heights Elementary. "I think it was just the money."

Liz Sharon, another parent at Rocky Heights, said the school is in great need of the proposed repairs.

"It's 56 years old," she said. "It's just worn down."

Heather Beal, a parent at Rocky Heights, said most parents she knew supported the bond because they see the problems with the facilities on a daily basis.

"It's so crowded," she said.

## Moving forward

Sherman said despite the disappointing loss, it's important to take people's comments seriously.

The school district did two community attitude polls in 2016 before putting the bond before voters. In the first, conducted in April 2016, 47 percent were in favor of the \$104 million bond while 43 percent were against it and 10 percent couldn't decide. When asked about a smaller \$84 million bond that wouldn't replace Highland Hills, 48 percent were in favor and 41 percent were against.

Five months later the district returned with a similar set of questions and found the sentiment had shifted. When asked about the \$104 million bond, 46 percent were in favor and 48 percent were against it, leaving just six percent unsure.

The school board on Monday talked about hiring a consultant for another round of community input as it moves forward.

While there is currently no timeline for when the issue of school construction will go back to the ballot, Sherman said she had already heard some suggestions — re-submitting the bond but not including Highland Hills, or just upgrading the existing buildings for safety issues.

"We need to revisit these again," Sherman said.

## MARKET:

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Second Street between Main Street and Gladys Avenue. The market will open Saturday, June 17 from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. The season runs through Oct. 14.

Active with the market off and on over the past decade, Smith is excited about the change in venue. The visibility off Highway 395, she said, should bring extra traffic to the market.

"What better place to be located, than right in the heart of Hermiston?" she said. "Also, increasing foot traffic on Main Street can only be a good thing for our town and local shops."

People interested in selling goods at the market need to pay a one-time registration fee of \$35, which includes a T-shirt. Also, weekly booth rates are \$20 for homemade/homegrown goods or \$25 for commercial vendors.

Also, Smith said those belonging to the market can participate in the in the



FILE PHOTO

A variety of jewelry is displayed at the Devine Designs vendor booth of Mike and Edi Devine during a past Hermiston Farmers' Market.

small-town Thursdays sale on the first Thursday of each month. All vendor's booth fees are free for those Thursdays, she said.

In addition, Smith is hoping to include some evening markets and introduce a Foodtruck Friday. She's also in contact with area musicians for entertainment and local businesses for possible do-it-yourself projects.

Booth space is still available, Smith said. The success of the market depends on both vendors and the public's response. Smith knows there are many talented

people and locally-sourced products in the community — and hopes to showcase those.

"When you buy local and keep money in your own community, everyone benefits," she said. "I want this to be a farmers' market — to be a place where people travel to see or plan to stop at when coming through out beautiful little town."

For more information, contact Smith at hermistontfarmersmarket@gmail.com or visit www.facebook.com/Hermistonfarmersmarket-1713625582263775.

## BTW:

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Thompson Hall on the old fairgrounds but gaining the Maxwell Event Center downtown as a venue for hosting medium-sized events. Mitch Meyers, owner of Hermiston Brewing Company and Nookies Restaurant, is almost done turning the building at the northeast corner of Locust Avenue and N First Place into a 3,000 square foot event center capable of seating 150 to 160 people indoors and another 75 to 100 outdoors. The center can be booked by calling 541-561-1047.

Four local members of the class of 2017 won Ford Family Foundation scholarships, joining 101 other winners from Oregon out of a pool of 5,883 applicants. Vanessa Am-

briz-Mendoza of Hermiston High School, Jahaayra Garcia-Sandoval of Hermiston High School and Selene Andrade-Bernal of Riverside High School are all headed to University of Portland, while Marlina Serratos of Irrigon High School is headed to George Fox University. The renewable scholarship covers 90 percent of each student's unmet financial need for each academic year.

The new downtown Holiday Inn Express is kicking into nearby projects, bringing in about \$100,000 in additional tax revenue to the urban renewal district. That money is being spent on things like the festival street and wayfinding signs. For more on the budget, see Page A3.

The Umatilla County

Fire District 1 is holding an open house from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. on June 3, at their station 22 on Diagonal and East Punkin Center Road. The district will be hosting a barbecue to show its appreciation for the community's support of the new fire district.

Does anyone remember Hal Block? We found his name as an owner of the current Hermiston Herald office at 333 E. Main and we'd like to know more about the man. Give us a call at 541-567-6457.

And lastly, welcome to new Hermiston residents and newspaper subscribers John and Sherry Christner, who recently moved from California. If you happen to bump into them around town, make sure to share Hermiston's welcoming spirit.

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