

City takes over portion of Highland Avenue

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
STAFF WRITER

The city of Hermiston approved a request by Umatilla County on Monday to take over jurisdiction of West Highland Avenue between Southwest 11th Street and Southwest 15th Place.

City manager Byron Smith said the city already sweeps that portion of road, and most of the property on either side is within city limits. The county made the request after the city approved a conditional use permit for a mini-storage project along that stretch of roads, which the county said would cause problems in its permitting process if storm drains were required

along their portion of road as part of the development.

"This is a new approach the county is taking, I guess," Smith said.

On Monday the council also authorized Smith to accept federal and state grant funding to hire Century West Engineering to update the master plan for the Hermiston Municipal Airport. Using Oregon Department of Aviation dollars as a match for the Federal Aviation Administration funds, the city's maximum out-of-pocket cost for the \$300,000 project is expected to be no more than \$3,333.

During a work session preceding the regular council meeting Smith shared updates on a number of city projects that councilors and

citizens have inquired about in recent months.

- New play equipment for Greenwood Park is expected to arrive in August.

- The parks and recreation department is ready to start pouring concrete pads for a new disc golf course across from Good Shepherd Medical Center.

- The city is almost done finalizing an agreement with the Department of Fish and Wildlife to take over management of the Steelhead Park area, allowing the planned West Highland Trail project to loop under the Highland Extension bridge there and into Riverfront Park.

- Now that recreational immunity for cities has been restored by the legis-

lature, the city is searching for an architect with experience designing skate parks to move forward on the planned skate park on North First Place across from the fire station.

- Parks and Recreation director Larry Fetter has been working on a plan with the Bureau of Reclamation to manage the dry grasses and weeds along the Oxbow Trail so that they pose less of a fire hazard.

- The Oregon Department of Transportation project to place traffic signals at Northwest 11th Street's intersections with Orchard Avenue and Elm Avenue did not receive any bids from contractors, so the department has postponed the project and hopes to put it

out to bid again in the fall.

- The planning department continues to work on opening the door for increased housing development in Hermiston, including rezoning 40 acres off of Diagonal Road from industrial to residential mixed with some commercial. On Wednesday at 7 p.m. at city hall the planning commission has invited real estate professionals, developers and lot owners to come discuss further ways the city can help clear away barriers to housing development.

- Smith said the city reached out to Hermiston Foods after hearing of its impending closure at the end of the year. The local managers referred the city to the vegetable-process-

ing plant's parent company NORPAC. Smith said the city would like to offer whatever services it can in helping market the building or otherwise clear the way for re-purposing the property. However, he said NORPAC has a history of not being very communicative.

- Smith also noted that the city has been pursuing all legal avenues available to address nuisance complaints against a property owner in the Highway 207/Feedville Road area that has been causing a strong rotting food odor neighbors have complained about. He said within a week or so there should be a form on the city's website for citizens to directly submit complaints that can be used in court.

Power outages hit Hermiston twice in four days

Hermiston customers lost power on Friday and Monday thanks to a bird and a balloon.

About 2,900 Umatilla Electric customers lost power Friday morning when a bird flew into power equipment at the Hermiston Butte substation.

The power failure affected people in Hermiston, Irrigon and Boardman from 9:43 a.m. until 10:41 a.m., with most customers getting power back before noon.

Steve Meyers, a spokesman for Umatilla Electric, said most of the customers affected receive power from the Butte substation. The areas that appeared to be hardest hit were in the

northern part of Hermiston near East Punkin Center Road south of Walls Road, the area around Diagonal Boulevard and in southwest Hermiston south of Highland and west of 11th Street.

On Monday evening a metallic party balloon made contact with power lines at Geer Road and Theater Lane, according to Meyers, starting a fire and knocking out power to 2,950 Umatilla Electric members around north Hermiston from 6:45-7:43 p.m.

Myers cautioned that releasing helium balloons into the atmosphere can cause power outages and fires.

HARVEST TIME



STAFF PHOTO BY GARY L. WEST

A combine off-loads grain while on the move in a wheat field on the Hale family farms on along Butter Creek in rural Echo, south of Hermiston on July 5. Wheat harvest often starts locally around the Fourth of July holiday.

County approves mental health program for Hermiston schools

By **PHIL WRIGHT**
STAFF WRITER

Umatilla County Board of Commissioners approved a program July 5 to provide mental health workers for the Hermiston School District.

The program, however, is contingent upon funding from the Greater Oregon Behavioral Health Initiative.

Amy Ashton-Williams, the county's human services director, in a memo to commissioners explained her department has been negotiating with GOBHI to provide the Hermiston School District's mental health program.

"We are currently working out the exact dollar amount that GOBHI will fund for this program," according to her memo, "knowing it will be a minimum of \$300,000."

The memo stated Life-ways provided the services for the past five years while the school district voiced "concerns about the level of care provided and the consistency of such care." The district wants a program that "emulates the care and consistency" of the county's Community Access for Resource Effectiveness program.

The \$300,000 would pay for a mental health services program manager with an annual salary and benefits of \$93,000 and three mental health associates, with annual salary and benefits of \$68,000-\$74,000.

Human services also wants GOBHI to provide another \$135,000 to buy three vehicles and pay for an additional substance abuse counselor who would split time between the Hermiston School District and county

"We are currently working out the exact dollar amount that GOBHI will fund for this program, knowing it will be a minimum of \$300,000."

Amy Ashton-Williams, Umatilla County's human services director

human services.

The county does not plan to advertise the openings until GOBHI provides the funding. Jennifer Blake, the county's human resources manager, told commissioners during the public meeting Wednesday in Pendleton the county incurs no cost for the program.

Commissioners Larry Givens and Bill Elfering voted in favor of the proposal. Commissioner George Murdock was out of town.

The county also approved the purchase of a 2001 paint truck for \$8,500 for the road department.

County public works director Tom Fellows told the board his department pays \$6,000-\$10,000 a year to use Morrow County's truck. Buying the used vehicle from the state's surplus would save the county money in the long run, he said, and the truck also comes with \$10,000 worth of replacement parts and paint equipment.

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A native of the Columbia Basin since 1973, Darrell brings his passion for the area and a desire to help those find their dream home in our rural communities. Darrell appreciates the slower pace, and sense of community that comes with living in Eastern Oregon. Darrell's background also includes 25 years of accounting experience with much of that in governmental accounting. If you're at the BMCC campus in Pendleton, you are likely to see him there in the business office where he helps with the Grant Accounting.



Darrell enjoys bowling, hiking, biking, kayaking, traveling and pretty much anything outdoors. He enjoys watching the Seahawks, the Tri-City Americans, the Mariners and taking in a Cougar game in the Palouse. Every year he looks forward to catching a play or two, or attending a music concert. To relax, he enjoys gardening, especially tending to flower and vegetable gardens.

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