



STAFF PHOTO BY JADE MCDOWELL

The Department of Motor Vehicles office in Hermiston has moved to the Hermiston Plaza, 810 S Highway 395.

Hermiston assumes control of EOTEC

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
STAFF WRITER

The Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center is officially the city of Hermiston's.

After the Umatilla County board of commissioners voted to withdraw from the joint project last week, the Hermiston city council voted Monday to approve the deal, taking on full ownership and liability for EOTEC in the hopes that the switch will help the center run more efficiently and cut down on the amount of hoops other organizations have to jump through when dealing with EOTEC.

"As my Scottish grandmother used to remind me, too many cooks spoil the broth," said commissioner George Murdock.

Representatives of the city and county alike took pains to stress that the breakup was an amicable one.

"You are part of Umatilla County and own the home of one of our biggest events and so obviously we want you to be successful," Murdock told the council.

As a result, the county is still living up to its share of several costs of EOTEC in the deal, the components of which include:

- The city takes full ownership of EOTEC and the land it is on

- The city takes ownership of Ott and Airport roads after the county improves them to a certain standard, with the help of \$1.5 million from the state's transportation package.

- The city pays half of the cost of building office/storage space for the Umatilla County Fair, up to \$250,000.

- The county pays an annual contribution of \$75,000 per year for operations through 2022 and an additional \$160,574 in 2018 for expected operational losses.

- The county pays \$105,000 to cover its half of construction budget overruns.

- The county pays \$595,000 by June 1 to provide half the cost Venu-Works estimates for fully equipping the facility.

- The county agrees to loan the city up to \$500,000 for EOTEC if needed in the future.

- The fair lease increases from \$10,000 annually to \$100,000 annually for the use of the fairgrounds for six weeks each year.

The lease for the fair was renegotiated, and Smith said there were a few things that were clarified, such as the guarantee that the county can hold the fair appreciation dinner at EOTEC each winter. He said there were no plans to renegotiate the Farm-City Pro Rodeo lease.

Mayor David Drotzmann said the city was aware that the county could have just left the city "holding the bag" and was grateful for the county's willingness to be a good partner even as they dissolved the intergovernmental agreement that first formed EOTEC.

"It was a great partnership and we achieved some awesome things," he said.

Councilor John Kirwan said the deal represented the next chapter for EOTEC and said he was excited to see how it will grow.

When it came time for a vote on the deal, councilor Lori Davis made a motion to delay the decision for one more meeting, but the motion died for a lack of second. Davis did not explain why she wanted to wait. When a second motion was made by Kirwan to approve the deal, it was passed unanimously.

Afterward the council approved the first reading of an amendment to the city's charter, adding an EOTEC advisory committee to the city's list of committees. The committee will be made up of a member of the Umatilla County Fair board, a member of the Farm-City Pro Rodeo board, a member of the hospitality/tourism community and two at-large members who can apply through the city's usual committee application process. The city manager, the general manager of EOTEC hired by Venu-Works and at least one city councilor will also attend meetings as liaisons.

New DMV building opens

HERMISTON — The Hermiston DMV has moved into a new office.

The Department of Motor Vehicles office was closed for part of last week as it moved across the street to 810 S. Highway 395. The new building, next to Shari's Cafe & Pies, is larger and has more parking than the former location, where the

DMV has been since 1981.

David House, a DMV spokesperson, said the department has to relocate two or three of its offices per year that have outgrown their old building, and Hermiston was due for a change. While right now the number of counters, hours and personnel levels will stay the same there is more lobby space

and it gives the office room to grow with Hermiston.

"It was a pretty routine move and from what I understand it went pretty smoothly," he said.

For people who still don't like waiting in line in the larger lobby, House recommended they first visit www.oregondmv.com to see if whatever business they

need to take care of can be handled online, or to print out forms and fill them out before they arrive. He also said that days with no school — particularly spring break and summer vacation — tend to see the heaviest foot traffic because teenagers are coming in to get their learner's permit or first driver's license.

Four contested races for Hermiston council

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
STAFF WRITER

Hermiston will have four contested city council races during the May election, not three.

After the filing deadline passed March 6, a list provided by city hall after a public records request inadvertently left off a candidate. The candidate had filed paperwork on time but it had not made its way to city recorder Lilly Alarcon-Strong yet.

That candidate — Roy Barron — is running for Ward 2 against Shean Fitzgerald, a "semi-retired" construction engineer and husband of current city

councilor Clara Beas Fitzgerald, who has decided not to run again.

Barron moved to Hermiston in 2015 after graduating from college and has worked for the county ever since, first in the district attorney's office and then with drug court and now with the RISE program that provides mental health resources for students in area schools. He said he likes Hermiston and is committed to staying in the community for a while, and would like to help make decisions about important issues such as the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center, economic development and downtown

revitalization.

"Things are getting better and better here and I want to be a part of it," he said.

The addition of Barron means that all four races for city council this year will be competitive ones.

In Ward 1, incumbent Lori Davis is being challenged by school board member Mark Gomolski and resident Jackie Linton, who grew up in Hermiston and returned in 2012 after retiring from the post office in Federal Way, Washington.

In Ward 3, Kyran Miller is challenging incumbent Jackie Myers, who was first elected to the council in 1994. Miller, a retired funeral home director who

moved to Hermiston from Michigan in 2016, said he doesn't think the councilors are doing a bad job but wanted to throw his hat in the ring to provide a small business owner perspective.

The race in Ward 4 is between incumbent Doug Smith, who was elected in 2015 and works as a general contractor after retiring from the Hermiston Police Department, and Michael Engelbrecht. Engelbrecht said he is running for city council because he wanted to be more involved in the community and was concerned about the mental health challenges facing youths and the opioid epidemic.

City, county sign memorandum on \$4.6 million water project

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
STAFF WRITER

A new water project co-funded by the city of Hermiston and Umatilla County could increase housing development in the northeast part of Hermiston and save taxpayers money on a future school bond.

The two entities have approved a memorandum of

understanding to use approximately \$4.6 million of payments in lieu of taxes from Lamb Weston to construct a new 1 million gallon water tower and distribution system in northeast Hermiston. Assistant city manager Mark Morgan said the new storage tank and system would increase the city's water storage capacity beyond its current 18 hours worth, and

would make future development in the northeast part of the city easier and less expensive.

"That area up there holds most of the developable land in the city of Hermiston," he said.

Area employers have noted that Hermiston's housing shortage has made it difficult for them to find a large enough workforce

for their operations. Morgan said in 2015 the U.S. Census Bureau found that 53 percent of jobs inside Hermiston were filled by people living outside Hermiston.

Developers have said that the price of land in Hermiston has gone up so much that it is hard to turn a profit on new housing if any extra expenses come up. Morgan

said developers have come up with expensive "piece-meal" solutions to the water pressure issues. The new water project, the city and county hope, will decrease expenses for developers and for Hermiston School District, which hopes to pass a bond to build a new elementary school on Theater Lane. Starting in 2020 and run-

ning for 15 years, Lamb Weston will pay \$1 million per year split evenly between the county and city instead of property taxes on a \$225 million expansion in Hermiston. The county has agreed to give its first \$2 million to the city for the water project. The city will cover the rest and handle design and construction.

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