

MARKETS

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“Our only interest is in ensuring that there will at least be a market this summer, regardless of who operates it,” city manager Byron Smith told the city council. “If that means it’s Mitco and that market appears to be viable, then that’s excellent, and we can step aside again.”

According to Myers, the Maxwell Market will run Thursday evenings from about 4-8 p.m. with live music starting at 5 p.m. The market will be held on property Mitco owns on South First Street, across the street from the Maxwell Event Center located at 145 N. First Place. Myers said it will take place under a temporary shade tent until the Maxwell Pavilion is completed.

He also said he is waiving all vendors’ fees and providing items like tables and security for vendors at no charge. The market is expected to start Thursday, May 24.

According to Myers, Fetter approached him last year on behalf of the city and asked him if Mitco would be willing to take on the event



STAFF PHOTO BY KATHY ANEY

Work has stopped on the Maxwell Pavilion in Hermiston, the planned site for the 2018 farmer’s market.

at the Maxwell Pavilion, a 4,000 square foot shade structure Mitco is building at 255 S First Place. In February, however, Myers claims he had an argument with city building official Chuck Woolsey and that Woolsey immediately shut down work on a separate Mitco project known as the coal

bin building, which Mitco was renovating to turn into a restaurant. In response, Mitco’s attorney sent the city a notice that Mitco intended to sue.

At the beginning of May, Woolsey placed a second stop-work order on the Maxwell Pavilion project and sent Myers a list of requests

for information he calls “unreasonable,” including requiring a plan for door latches and restrooms despite the structure not having doors or restrooms.

During the vendors meeting when Myers announced the cancellation he accused Woolsey of being a bully and holding up his proj-

ects out of personal dislike. In an hour-long, often colorful speech, he said dealing with the city’s building department was like “playing chess with a pigeon” because Woolsey was “full of poop” and others at city hall needed to “grow a pair” and handle the problem.

On Monday, Smith read a memo into the record about the situation, stating that the Maxwell Pavilion project would be an “excellent venue” for the farmers market and other events, and the city was still “very supportive” of Mitco’s vision and projects.

Smith said Mitco applied for a building permit on April 26 and initial plan review comments were returned May 7, approximately seven business days later. He said that the city’s building department has been busy handling a number of other major projects including the data centers, Ranch & Home and the new Lifeways facility. Smith said that Myers’ issue with the city seemed to be that he was not given priority status over those projects.

“The problem with that is that we view everyone’s projects as important; not just ones that we’re a major funding partner on,” Smith wrote. “That’s why we treat

all projects the same. I think seven days to turn around an initial review is perfectly normal, and it was handled the same as all other applications.”

He also addressed other claims Mitco had made, including statements that it was unreasonable to require plans for things like restrooms and door latches when the pavilion wasn’t going to have restrooms or doors. Smith attached a floorplan provided by Mitco to the city in the fall, when the city was making a deal with Mitco to provide \$220,000 in support of the pavilion and parking project. Those drawings do show restrooms and possible doors on the building, and Smith said Woolsey was trying to clear up confusion about “vague and conflicting” documents.

During Monday’s council meeting a few people made statements in support of Myers. The strongest came from Robert Smith, who plans to be a vendor at the market. He called for both Woolsey and Fetter’s resignation or firing.

“For those of you who are here, I suggest you cut ties with the city of Hermiston, as they can no longer be trusted,” he told the audience.

BUDGET

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also being added to the Hermiston Community Center, which the parks department took over operation of in January, and to the Harkenrider Center, which will house the senior center when it is completed in late summer. Smith said the Harkenrider Center employee will work with the senior center board as a liaison and be in the building during activities like mealtimes to offer assistance.

The city is adding a storm water management position in 2018-2019 that will be split between the street department and utility fund. City staff will be given a three percent cost of living increase.

Overall, the \$54.9 million budget is about \$4.7 million smaller than the cur-

rent fiscal year, which Smith said was mostly due to the city finishing up big capital projects like the Harkenrider Center and festival street. The city had expected to take on a re-alignment of the intersection of Harper, Geer and River roads during 2018-2019 but Smith said there are still design issues being worked out that will delay the project into the next year.

The biggest capital project the city has planned for the upcoming fiscal year is a new one-million-gallon water storage tank in the northeast part of town. The roughly \$4.5 million project will be paid for through a short-term loan that will be repaid by enterprise zone payments from Lamb Weston’s factory expansion.

“The project will address a number of challenges for our water system there,” Smith said, noting that low water pressure in the north-

east part of town was discouraging housing development there.

He said if the city keeps growing as projected, in about five years it would not meet state recommendations for water storage capacity without the new tank, which will be the same size as the water tower on North Highway 395.

The city is planning to move forward with a new skate park that will be built on First Place across from the police department and fire station. The department also plans to install the other nine holes of a disc golf course installed last year on 11th Street across from Good Shepherd Medical Center. Smith said the money for the course will be funded through raising private donations.

Bids open next week for contractors to build the West Highland Trail Extension, which will create a trail that

runs parallel to Highland Avenue from 11th Street to Riverfront Park.

The city is keeping an eye on the Hermiston Community Center budget since it took over operation. Every weekend in the center is booked for the year, he said, and so far revenue for the first quarter has tracked with what the center was making under the chamber this time of year.

The city has recently taken over full management of another event venue — the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center. Smith said trying to move the finances from an intergovernmental arrangement with Umatilla

County to being fully under the umbrella of the city’s finances has been quite the accounting challenge. As he went over the budget for EOTEC with the committee he said most operational costs listed were actually covered by the \$9,000 per month the city is paying VenuWorks to run the center, but they were all listed in the budget anyway to be more transparent about how EOTEC is run.

Smith said money the city is contributing to subsidize EOTEC’s operation would come from the Transient Room Tax placed on hotel reservations, not property taxes paid by local res-

idents. While in the past the TRT funds have been self-reported by hoteliers and short-term RV parks, the city plans to audit the affected businesses this year to make sure they are reporting their income accurately.

Overall, Smith said, the city’s finances are in good shape. He said proposed general fund revenues are up \$710,000 over 2017-2018, and 61 percent of that number was due to increased property tax revenue.

The budget will be up for approval by the city council on May 29. The council meeting is being held on a Tuesday due to Memorial Day.



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