

Hermiston Herald

WEDNESDAY, JULY 11, 2018

HermistonHerald.com

\$1.00



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IN TRANSITION

Tamra Mabbot will act as interim Umatilla city manager during a nationwide search to replace Russ Pelleberg.

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LIGHT IT UP

Hermiston, Stanfield residents celebrated the Fourth of July with fireworks and other community events.

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STATE CHAMPS

The Columbia Junior Girls softball team are headed to Arizona July 13-19 for regionals.

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BY THE WAY

City looking for feedback on shipping containers

The city of Hermiston is putting together an ordinance regulating shipping containers used as storage and is looking for feedback from residents.

A survey is available in English and Spanish on the city's website at hermiston.or.us. It asks whether large metal shipping containers, sometimes known as Conex boxes, should be allowed in various zones and whether the city should place restrictions on the number, location and look of the containers if they are allowed.

In June the city's planning commission recommended an ordinance that would limit the shipping containers to industrial and commercial properties only. City councilors had mixed feelings about the proposed ordinance and asked that the public be surveyed before the council voted.

The survey is available until July 22.

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The Umatilla County Fair is gearing up for its second year at the Eastern Oregon Trade and

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FOOD FOR THOUGHT



Customers wait for their orders at Tacos Garcia food truck recently in Hermiston.

STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS

City reconsidering rules that restrict operation and number of licenses

By JADE MCDOWELL
STAFF WRITER

The city council is chewing on the possibility of letting more food trucks into Hermiston.

Hermiston's mobile vendors are currently capped at three, and the limit is pushing some businesses elsewhere.

Patrick Hunt, who operates the Southern Twain BBQ truck in Pendleton, said he would love to bring some more diversity back to Hermiston's food truck scene (all three licenses are currently held by taco trucks) but he can't unless the city council



Alex Benitez, left, helps customers at a Tacos Xavi food cart in Butte Park during the Fourth of July Celebration in Hermiston.

STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS

changes the rules.

Hunt, who lives in Hermiston, said he applied for a license at city hall a couple of years ago but was told that all of the licenses were taken. So he started his business in Pendleton

instead.

"I didn't really want to leave Hermiston, because that's where I'm at and people know me, but I was kind of forced to," he said.

He was one of a few people who testified in front of the city

council Monday after the city opened an online survey about possible amendments to the city's mobile food vending ordinance. To illustrate what Hermiston is missing, Hunt and his wife brought a crock pot full of pulled pork and offered up sandwiches and sliders downstairs after the meeting to anyone who wanted a sample.

City planner Clint Spencer told the city council that so far 625 people who have taken the online survey, which closes July 15, said they were in favor of the city increasing the number of mobile vendor licenses from its current cap, while 110 people said the cap should stay the same.

The ordinance, passed in 2013, placed a cap on its \$500-per-year licenses and set in place design and safety standards. It also stated that trucks

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Hermiston watermelon season is here

By GEORGE PLAVEN
EO MEDIA GROUP

One of Eastern Oregon's most popular — and delicious — crops is back in season.

Famous Hermiston watermelons are nearing harvest as summer temperatures rise into the 90s and triple digits. High heat should help to ripen the fruit quickly, and growers anticipated they would begin picking in earnest between July 10-15.

"I think we're pretty much on schedule," Patrick Walchli, with Walchli Farms, said last week. "Quality-wise, it's by all indications looking pretty good, as far as the fruit set."

Hermiston watermelons may be a niche crop in terms of overall

acres, with about 750 total, but figure prominently in the city's identity and civic pride. Driving north into town on Highway 395, the Hermiston logo emblazoned on the water tower features a watermelon backdrop along with the slogan, "Where Life is Sweet."

And it isn't just the locals who have a sweet tooth for Hermiston melons. Shoppers can find the specially branded fruit in Portland, Seattle and all across the West Coast. Some shipments have even gone as far as Texas and Georgia.

The secret lies in the region's sandy soil and desert climate, which provides a perfect combination of hot, dry days and cool nights. Water-



Watermelons roll by on a conveyor belt on a melon sizing machine in July 2009 before being packed for shipping at Pollock & Sons' production facility outside of Hermiston.

EO FILE PHOTO

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