

HART ridership increases in its second year

Shelters, schedule changes make bus more user-friendly

There's a misconception that the HART is only for the elderly or disabled, but only 39 percent of riders fall in that category.

HERMISTON HERALD

Ridership for Hermiston's public bus system is on track to rise 75 percent in 2018.

The HART, run by Kayak Public Transit on behalf of the city, began in January 2017.

The fixed-route bus is free to any member of the public and runs Monday through Friday from approximately 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

According to numbers provided by the city, the HART had 168 riders in its first month of existence and 283 riders in November.

Ridership has continued to

climb, with 355 riders in April, 386 in May and 459 in June.

"We knew that this is the type of service that people will have to learn and get used to, but once they do, that ridership would really start to climb," assistant city manager Mark Morgan said in a statement.

During the HART's first year the city and Kayak adopted several changes to the route, eliminating little-used stops and adjusting the schedule to make it more user-friendly and allow for more circuits per day.

The city also installed bus shelters at some locations, and route information is now integrated with mapping systems such as Google Maps.

Morgan said he believes HART is now "a very usable system with no real changes planned."

He said there is still a misconception that the HART is only for the elderly or disabled, but ridership data shows only 39 percent of riders fall in that category.

For more information visit city.org/general-tags/hermiston-hart or call dispatch at 541-429-7519.



STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS

The Hermiston Hart shuttle makes a stop at Fiesta Foods in 2017.

Mabbott named interim city manager; funds dispute continues

Former city manager says \$4 million quarrel with county is still undecided

By JADE MCDOWELL
STAFF WRITER

Tamra Mabbott will serve as Umatilla's interim city manager while the city conducts a nationwide search for Russ Pelleberg's replacement.

Pelleberg resigned last week to become the new city administrator of Newport, Washington. His official last day is July 27 but he will be on vacation after July 13.

Mabbott joined the city of Umatilla in August 2017 in the newly created community development director position, leaving Umatilla County after 15 years as planning director. Her additional duties as interim city manager start July 14 and include a 5 percent pay bump for the duration. According to salary data provided by the city of Umatilla in the fall of 2017, Mabbott's salary was \$96,624 and Pelleberg's salary was \$110,000.

City councilor Mel Ray said during Umatilla's July 3 city council meeting that the decision of who to name as interim city manager was "one of the hardest decisions I've made since I've been a councilor."

"We looked at this from every angle," he said.

The council spent more than two hours in executive session June 28 after Pelleberg's announcement and spent more time behind closed doors last week before Michael Roxbury made a motion to appoint Mabbott as interim city manager. Roxbury, Ray, Mark Keith and Ashley Wheeler voted in favor while Selene Torres-Medrano and Roak TenEyck voted against.

Earlier in the meeting, councilors approved a letter of congratulations and thanks to Pelleberg, and took the time to thank him in front of the audience for fostering new growth and change in the city during his two years as city manager. Roxbury said Umatilla has had many city managers but he was not sure he could point to one who has

"moved the bar as far as you have."

Pelleberg said he would certainly be back to check on Umatilla's progress, and that he had been proud to be able to talk of new housing in Umatilla and revenue growth without raising taxes, while getting together with other city managers whose cities struggled with those things.

"A lot's happened," he said.

SIP agreements

The council also discussed Strategic Investment Program payments that Vadata Inc., a subsidiary of Amazon, will make to the county on three building projects. Two — in the Port of Umatilla and off Lind Road, known as the Bonney property — are in Umatilla city limits, while a third off Westland Road south of Hermiston is in the county.

The Strategic Investment Program is a 15-year incentive that communities can offer to companies looking to expand or build there. State statute dictates the first \$25 million in real market value of the capital project is taxed at the usual rate. A community service fee equal to 25 percent of the project, up to \$500,000, is also assessed, with more flexibility on how it is divided among the districts. Additional "annual improvement payments" can also be negotiated at company and county discretion.

Umatilla County signed a SIP agreement with Vadata in August, and the county and city have been in dispute about it since. The county negotiated a \$4 million annual improvement payment, and Pelleberg claims the city should get at least half of it since two-thirds of the sites are inside city limits.

The county, however, created a formula to split proceeds from just the two projects within city limits, and under that formula Umatilla will get roughly \$1 million per year. Pelleberg has publicly stated that Umatilla has spent \$6 million in staff time, infrastructure improvements, roads, attorney fees and other expenses to accommodate Vadata while the county has spent "nothing." A document the city provided the county in October titled "City of Umatilla investments for Vadata projects" listed \$6 million for the Bonney site alone, mostly for "city share

re-use system expansion" and "city share water system expansion."

The county has questioned that number, however, and in the July 3 agenda packet Pelleberg included a new table titled "City of Umatilla investments for Vadata projects as of 6/28/18" that listed a total of \$3,126,719 in expenses, almost all of which is categorized under a water reuse project at the port site. It only lists \$22,713 in "water and sewer service analysis" for the Bonney site.

Melissa Ince, city finance director, said in an email Friday that was because costs at the Bonney site "will be much lower than anticipated as VADATA has agreed to fund the initial capital improvements necessary to get up and running."

"With more infrastructure development/improvement down the line there is a strong possibility that the City will incur more substantial costs but I cannot put a figure to that at this point," she said.

Doug Olsen, the county's attorney, said in a recent interview that as far as the county is concerned, the \$4 million issue was "finished"

when the city of Umatilla signed onto the main SIP agreement in August.

On Tuesday Pelleberg said the city was still in dispute with the county about the \$4 million annual improvement payments, but recommended that the council sign a resolution supporting the county's plan for the second tier of SIP money: the \$500,000 community service fee.

The county recently approved an agreement to give up its own portion of the community service fee and divide the funds among six special districts, with about 64 percent going to Umatilla County Fire District #1. Mabbott said the city had been "informally approached" about giving up its own portion to the special districts too, but it can't afford to do so.

"We were not part of these discussions, for the record, but the good news is the formula is one that works well," she said.

The council voted unanimously to support the deal but made it clear they only supported the decision on the community service fee, not the annual improvement payments.

Child drowns in pool

HERMISTON HERALD

A 2-year-old girl drowned in a swimming pool on Thursday morning, at a residence in Hermiston.

Hermiston Police reported that at 9:49 a.m. Thursday, they and Umatilla County Fire District were dispatched to East Main Street. A family member of the child was already conducting CPR. Officers said despite efforts by family, emergency personnel and Good Shepherd Medical Center, the child could not be revived.

Hermiston Police Captain Travis Eynon said in a press release that the department

would not release names yet; there did not appear to be anything suspicious, and it appeared to be an accidental drowning.

"Tragedies such as this are obviously painful for the family," he said in a statement. "They are also hard on our first responders as well as our entire community. Our thoughts and prayers go out to the family during this difficult time."

Eynon said the girl was found in the in-ground pool shortly after she went missing from the yard. She and her parents were from Utah, and were in Hermiston visiting family.

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at <http://openhouse.oregondot.org/i-84-safety-improvements>

The site will be active through July 13

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At this on-line Open House site you'll find information about...

- 1. Past Improvement Projects:** Earlier enhancements constructed to help improve safety and operations along the I-84 corridor.
- 2. Corridor Management Plan:** This planning study identifies and prioritizes the next strategies that will improve safety and operations along the interstate system.
- 3. Snow Zone Safety Improvement Project:** A variety of devices along I-84 between Pendleton and La Grande will be installed in 2019-2020 to improve safety and operations during adverse winter weather conditions.
- 4. Ladd Canyon Freight and Culvert Improvement Project:** A third eastbound climbing lane and other upgrades are being added in 2019-2020 through the Ladd Canyon area.
- 5. Meacham Maintenance Station:** This outdated facility is being replaced. The new compound will improve response times, efficiency, and save equipment and energy costs.
- 6. Comments and more information:** Take a short survey and provide feedback. This is your highways system and we greatly appreciate your input.

Questions about the site can be directed to ODOT Project Leader Sean Maloney 541-823-4025, or by email at sean.maloney@odot.state.or.us.