

Trails

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irrigation canals.

Planners hope the trail system will attract tourists to the western Umatilla County area, increase river access and promote exercise.

One option for the Umatilla to Hermiston portion of the trail system, for instance, would connect the downtown districts of the two cities with a trail between the railroad tracks and Umatilla River Road.

In another, the Hermiston to Stanfield trail would be routed south of downtown Hermiston, and later adjacent to the south side of the Feed Canal where it would open up downtown Stanfield. Others would utilize pre-existing trails like the ones at Hermiston's Riverfront Park.

Railroad right-of-ways are owned by Union Pacific and other areas like the Feed Canal are owned by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamations. Umatilla County planning director, Robert Waldher, said that conversations are ongoing between both entities.

"Cost may weigh on our decision when it comes to preferred route," Waldher said at Thursday's meeting.



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan

Jacob Foutz, an associate planner with the City of Umatilla, follows Kelly Nobles and City of Umatilla Development and Recreation Manager Esmeralda Horn on four-wheelers along a proposed section of trail on Noble's property in Umatilla.

He noted most of the project would take place on public lands.

"There have been some private landowners who have come up to us and expressed an interest in using their land," he said.

Kelly Nobles of Umatilla has offered for the county to develop some of his family's property for the Umatilla to Hermiston portion of the trail. A route plan involving his land would use a bridge to cross the Umatilla River and eventually connect with Hermiston's Oxbow Trail system.

At the meetings last week, people were also invited to suggest what kind of trail material should

line the paths—pavement, gravel, a dual surface or a "natural" unpaved surface—as well as what sort of interpretive opportunities might line the trails. Some people suggested the trail provide information about local history.

Waldher said that the county has also been in conversation with the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation Board of Trustees about the project.

"The Native Americans have had trails throughout our region for thousands of years," he said. "The (confederated tribes) will probably play a role when it comes to permitting if they have environmental con-

cerns. When we get into that phase, a consultation will need to occur with them," he said.

Waldher, Elfering and Stephanie Stroud—a National Park Service technical expert from Seattle, who is helping initiate the project—all emphasized the same idea at Thursday's meeting in Hermiston: it shouldn't cost residents a dime.

"What we don't want to do is raise taxes," Stroud said.

For the planners, this means coming up with different ways to secure grant funding and support. Accentuating the health benefits of a recreational trail, for

instance, or providing interpretive information along it about wildlife and key pollinators, could attract funding.

Waldher noted that maintenance costs could be curbed with the help of area volunteers and other types of grant funding. He said that at some of the open house workshops, people expressed concerns about transient people coming through the trail areas or about people leaving behind trash.

"Our hope would be that by opening these areas up, people would take pride and ownership and not be trespassing," he said. "I think some of the folks in the smaller towns see this as an opportunity to increase business and tourism."

He said that using the input from the four meetings, the county will put together a concept plan by late winter in 2020 or early spring. The county also currently has an online survey available to residents at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/NZFF7RM>.

"My hope is that we use the concept plan to be able to acquire those funds. If we don't access them, other people will," Waldher said.

Tamra Mabbott, community development director at the City of Umatilla, noted

that the city is working on its own city-wide trail project currently, some of which may eventually be utilized in the regional River Trail project.

"Hermiston has a wonderful trail system already," she said. "I would love for people to remember that different trails and parts of this project will be developed over time as funding is available."

She noted that the city has plans to improve other recreational sites, like the marina, and possibly incorporate a new vendor and events, which could be a draw for people traversing the regional trail system.

"I think this could impact the city in a positive way," she said. "It's symbiotic."

In 2018, the county received a technical assistance grant from the National Park Service, administered by the Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance program. The grant is funding Stroud's expertise for the project.

The plan will have to be adopted by all four cities before the county can apply for funding needed to engineer the project.

Race

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Learning Center, Hermiston. He listed multiple past occupations on his candidacy paperwork, including pastor, firefighter/EMT and executive assistant. But he said this is his first foray into seeking public office, and the county commissioner role would allow him to fulfill his desire to help the community.

Lopez said his family has put down its roots in Hermiston and has grown to love the community. He said he is a member of the Apostolic Church and claimed a large

number of Hispanic community members reached out and encouraged him to run. He said he sees the Hispanic and youth communities increasingly tuning into national politics and that is filtering down to the local level.

"They're beginning to see how their vote can make a difference," Lopez said.

Maier is the first woman to enter the contest, and filed Thursday.

She is the owner and operator of the limited liability company 1-A Construction & Fire. According to her filing, she has a background that includes working as an administrator for

Northwest Pipeline, former director of United Way of Umatilla and Morrow Counties and working in Butler County, Kansas, as an assistant to the superintendent of schools.

Elfering, also of Hermiston, said he anticipates the field of candidates will grow by the filing deadline of March 10, 2020. He also said he has no plans to endorse any candidates for the time being. Rather, he said, he and the public should have the opportunity to hear from all the candidates about what they want to do as commissioner.

Umatilla County commissioners make \$94,448 a

year plus benefits. The job is full time. County counsel Doug Olsen said nothing in the county charter prohibits commissioners from serving on outside public boards and committees. State law, however, he said, prohibits elected officials from serving in more than one lucrative office at a time.

Olsen said volunteer positions on school boards, advisory committees and the like probably would not qualify as lucrative.

The charter, however, prohibits county employees from also serving as commissioners. Commissioner John Shafter, for example,

resigned his position with the sheriff's office before stepping onto the board.

Commissioners also cannot serve on the Charter Review Committee. Olsen said that committee has to operate independent of the county board.

Dorran and Gomolski have both served on that committee since 2018. The group recommended county commissioners should focus on policymaking and advocacy and hire a manager for handling the daily administrative duties of county government.

The county commissioners in April considered that recommendation

for the ballot. Elfering and Commissioner John Shafer voted it down, while Commissioner George Murdock voted in favor.

But the three commissioners approved the charter committee's two other proposals for a vote of the people in November—one would simplify the elections of commissioners and the other would update language and duties regarding the sheriff's office.

Recent commissioner races have drawn as many as six candidates. The cutoff for running in the May primary is March 10, 2020, leaving plenty of time for the field to grow.



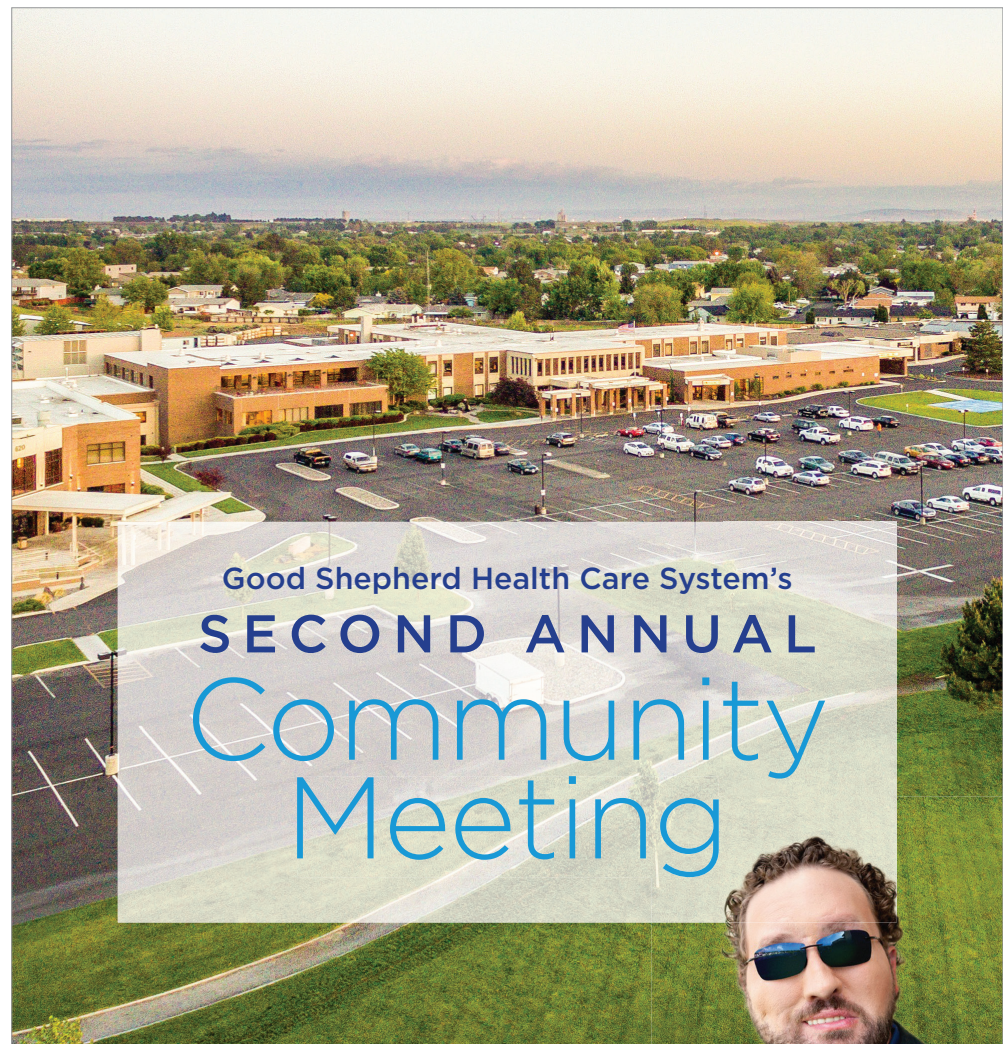
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