

Bond

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chair, Karen Sherman, and vice chair, Josh Goller, were careful about sharing congratulations.

"We're optimistic and grateful," Goller said after a moment.

When all ballots were tabulated, near 11 p.m., the election showed itself to be a close one.

Of the 14,586 registered Hermiston voters this election, 4,678—including more than 1,200 Democrats and more than 2,200 Republicans—turned in their ballots to voice their approval or disapproval of the bond. Voter turnout across all precincts ranged from 25 to 43%.

There were 2,446 yes votes and 2,220 no votes, which meant a 52.4% win for the district.

While it might seem like a small margin, it was a swing from the district's last bond measure, which lost in 2017 by 59%.

"We've been working



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan
Supporters of the Hermiston School District Bond react to learning of the passing of the bond during an election party at The Gathering Place in Hermiston on Nov. 5.

hard to win the support of the community," Mooney said.

That \$104 million bond also aimed to replace Rocky Heights and construct a new elementary school, but added replacing Highland Hills Elementary School and performing maintenance

such as a new roof for Sandstone Middle School. The bond would have cost 90 cents per \$1,000 assessed value.

"Community feedback was that it wasn't time for Highland Hills yet," Mooney said.

She mentioned that

the district had needed to "tighten its belt," and that the more recent Bond Measure 30-130, which scrapped the proposal for a new Highland Hills Elementary and cut out funding for deferred maintenance, helped with that job.

The 2019 measure was

announced in July, shortly after the district paid off all pre-2008 bond debt, decreasing property taxes by 40 cents per \$1,000. It's projected to preserve that decrease, keeping the tax level at less than \$3.65 per \$1,000 of assessed value.

According to Pac/West, the communication firm the district retained to help with the bond campaign, the key to winning this election may have been one very specific demographic: women who didn't share a household with any registered Republicans.

County data compiled by the firm showed that that demographic made up over 1,000 voters and the majority of them approved the bond, creating a 200 yes-vote surplus from the last bond measure.

Votes among different precincts—or election districts—were varied. According to a map from the Umatilla County Planning Department, Hermiston has nine precincts, eight of which voted on the school bond measure.

In two precincts out-

side of city limits, less than half of voters approved the bond measure. In Precinct 105, which sits northeast of downtown Hermiston and extends from Northeast Tenth Street to North Ott Road, only 43.86% of voters approved the bond measure.

Precinct 126, which houses Rocky Heights Elementary, came up with 52% bond approval. Bond approval peaked at just over 60% in Precinct 127, which houses Hermiston High School and West Park Elementary. That precinct also had the highest voter turnout, according to data from the Umatilla County Elections Department.

Precinct 130, which houses Highland Hills, approved the bond by 54%. While Highland Hills will not be replaced via the new bond, the construction of a new elementary school and a larger version of Rocky Heights will bring boundary changes for the elementary schools, adjusting Highland Hills' student population down to a more manageable level.

Roads

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System Plan and place them in the pipeline to seek funding to complete the project once the data points hit certain benchmarks. Sometimes they adjust the speed limit, reshape an on-ramp, add a traffic signal, change lane configurations, put up new signs or add roundabouts.

"We're open to ideas," Strandberg said. "We talk to counties, talk to cities, receive letters from individuals, and we consider what they have to say."

On the other hand, sometimes what citizens think will be the most safe doesn't turn out to be that way. Strandberg said ODOT has added traffic signals to places that have not seen any decreases

in crashes after the change.

The TSP for the section of highway where Scott died includes future traffic signals at East Airport Road, Ranch & Home and the Walmart Distribution Center. But the highway isn't close to reaching traffic volumes yet that call for addition of the lights.

In 2016, ODOT proposed adding roundabouts to the TSP as a possible alternative to traffic signals in those locations. The agency dropped the idea, however, at the city's request after citizens showed up to a city council meeting to vehemently oppose the idea.

While citizens who testified felt the heavy semitruck volume by the Walmart DC would be hindered by roundabouts, Strandberg said ODOT has plenty of data that shows roundabouts

reduce crashes. A traffic signal might help direct traffic or slow it, but drivers are still vulnerable to being rear-ended or T-boned. Roundabouts, by comparison, make it difficult to create conditions that would lead to a fatal crash.

"Roundabouts save lives," Strandberg said.

Another traffic solution ODOT has been implementing that usually draws resistance from citizens is "road diets," which reduce the number of lanes on a highway as it comes through a town. ODOT put Highway 11 on a diet through Milton-Freewater and now plans to do the same in Stanfield.

While Stanfield's road diet—bringing Highway 395 down from five lanes to three—likely won't extend as far as Edwards Road where Gallegos died

in October, it is expected to make life safer for pedestrians trying to cross the road downtown. Fewer lanes, combined with sidewalk bulb-outs, generally encourage drivers to stick to the speed limit, reduce the amount of distance pedestrians must cross and eliminate blind spots created as cars drive next to tall trucks.

While ODOT controls state highways, cities and counties must also make decisions about how to direct traffic on their own streets.

"We have a lot more control there," Hermiston City Planner Clint Spencer said.

Spencer said Hermiston's planned road projects can be found in the city's Capital Improvement Plan. The plan includes projects, such as repaving North First Place and reconfiguring the

confusing three-way intersection of Geer, Harper and Umatilla River roads.

Smaller projects, such as the addition of flashing lights near West Park Elementary School and Hermiston High School, aren't included in the CIP or TSP but are added as the need arises. Spencer said new development, such as a subdivision, school or large retailer, can warrant new action.

"We determine how this development is changing demand," he said. "With the new school bond, we will have to reevaluate certain areas."

Local jurisdictions often use federal guidelines to make decisions about adding stop signs or other improvements, but they do have discretion to stray from those guidelines. Two years ago, Umatilla County added

stop signs to Feedville Road where it intersects with Edwards Road between Hermiston and Stanfield.

The stop signs made the intersection exceed the recommendations in the federal Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices for the number of trips through the intersection per day. But unusual conditions, such as the miles without a stop sign leading up to the intersection, led to fatal crashes in 2014 and 2016, along with frequent injury crashes caused by people running the stop signs already in place on the Edwards side.

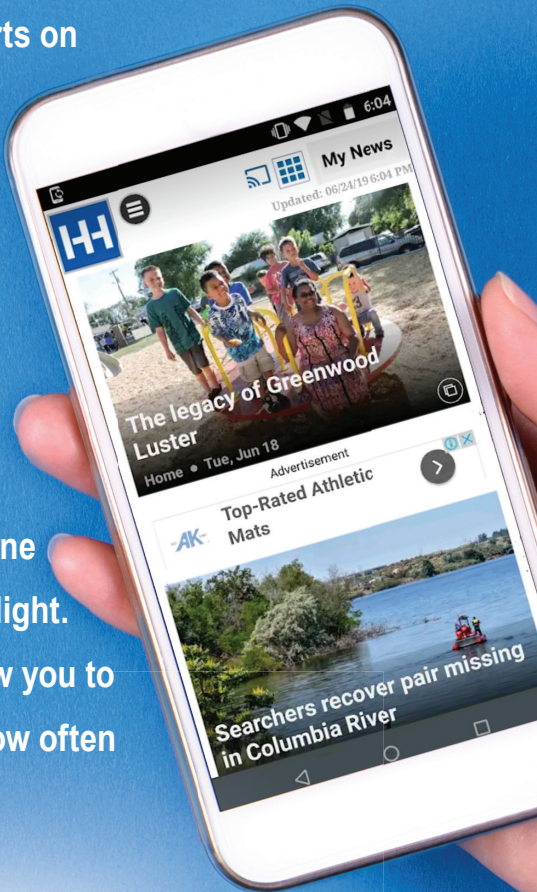
People running stop signs points to an important point in the conversation about road safety:

"The biggest factor in safety is the person behind the wheel," Strandberg said.

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