

Hermiston council discusses city hall plans

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
NEWS EDITOR

A new city hall for Hermiston would come with an approximately \$9 million price tag if the city council approves the idea this year, city manager Byron Smith told the council on Monday night.

The price would include about \$700,000 of renovations to the basement of the Hermiston Public Library so that city staff could use the space during the 18-month construction period, and the rest of the cost would go toward building a new city hall on the same site as the current one.

Preliminary designs show a two-story building with a basement, with each of the three floors about 9,200 square feet in size. The municipal court would move into the new building, freeing up space for the police department in its current building, and would also move the building department and other staff out of the old Carnegie Library.

Marcus Valentine, of Architects West, said the city's current building at 180 N.E. Gladys Ave., a renovated bank building first built in 1965, is not ideal. The building is split between five levels but does not have an elevator, and its restrooms, council dais, counters and some hallways are not conducive to someone in a wheelchair. City staff have also outgrown the building, causing them



The Hermiston City Council is considering tearing down the current city hall and building a \$9 million replacement on the site.

Staff photo by Jade McDowell

to spread to other buildings, and there are security issues. "It's clearly deficient in a lot of respects," he said.

The concept he presented Monday is one that he and Smith said would be much more accessible and more efficient for city staff.

Only two people instead of four would be needed to staff the front counters, for example. There would also be room to grow, and Smith said there was another government agency that had already expressed interest in leasing space in the basement until the city needed it.

Meanwhile, city staff could use the basement of the library, which

Smith described as "very underutilized."

Valentine said architects had been talking with library staff about what would make the basement more usable, and had been told one of the main problems was that the layout made supervision difficult. He proposed a renovation to the basement that would remove or shift many of the walls, making it more ideal for a makeshift city hall, but also creating a space that would be much more usable for the library as a children's section in the future.

"We want to appropriately maximize the space," Valentine said.

The city had conducted an online survey about city hall in preparation for the discussion. Smith said they received 202 responses in English and eight responses to the Spanish survey. Fifty-six percent of the respondents said they came to city hall at least a few times per year. Their top wishes for city hall were disability access, efficiency and timely access.

Smith read several of the written comments left on the survey's open-ended section, which gave mixed support. One person said they were firmly against a new city hall, as it "adds taxes," while another said they get

jealous when they look at the nicer city halls of Boardman and Umatilla.

The city had originally been planning on waiting for a few years to build a new city hall, but a fire in December has given the city a choice to use its approximately \$175,000 insurance payout to repair the old building knowing it might not stay up much longer, or put it toward a new one.

Smith recommended building now.

"There's not going to be a cheaper time to do this," he said. "We have a very good interest rate environment right now, and construction costs are not going to go down."

He said the city could borrow the money via full faith and credit bonds, with either a 15-, 20- or 30-year payment. The 30-year payment would be \$439,000 per year, which Smith said he felt confident the city could handle. He said the city could use enterprise zone payments in lieu of taxes from companies such as Lamb Weston, Amazon and a new large project he hopes to present to the council in May.

Councilor John Kirwan said he felt the timing was right to act now, and there was no reason the city couldn't try to pay off the debt in less than 30 years.

"To me, spending that money smartly is to make the investment sooner rather than later, and pull the trigger," he said.

Councilor Jackie Myers said she believed it was important for the city to send a message about accessibility. Right now, she said, there are people in the community who are hindered from conducting business, working at or serving in city hall.

Councilor Roy Barron said he liked the idea of making the library a more attractive place in the process, and called city hall "the peoples' house."

Mayor David Drotzmann questioned how the city would pay a 30-year debt obligation after the current enterprise zone agreements run out in 15 years, and said he worried about sticking a future generation of city leaders with a difficult debt burden.

"We can always pay it off sooner, but that just doesn't seem to happen very often in government," he said.

However, he supported the overall idea of a new city hall, saying it sent a statement to the outside world that Hermiston "means business and wants to be a player" in the state.

City councilors plan to vote on the proposal for a new city hall during the Feb. 24 meeting.

The survey on the city's website remains active for the rest of the month, and Smith said the city would host a few public open houses on the topic, including one at 6 p.m. next Tuesday at the Hermiston Public Library.

Boardman to pursue bond for water and wastewater projects

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
NEWS EDITOR

The Boardman City Council voted Feb. 4 to ask voters to approve a \$20.3 million general obligation bond for water and wastewater projects.

According to the resolution passed Tuesday night, the question will go on the May 19 ballot. It will ask voters whether the city shall issue the bonds "to improve and expand its water and wastewater facilities" by issuing bonds not to exceed \$20,320,000 that would mature within 25 years.

The ballot language to be submitted to the Morrow County clerk describes the projects the money would be used for — a water booster pump station, an approximately 1 million gallon water reservoir, a new water collector well, a 13-acre

lagoon, and wastewater lift stations. The money would also help pay for acquiring land for the projects, refinancing outstanding debt and covering the cost of issuing the bonds.

If approved, the average annual property tax rate is estimated at \$1.56 per \$1,000 of assessed value and the bonds would mature within 25 years.

City Manager Karen Pettigrew said Thursday that passing the bond will actually save residents money. If the city were to borrow the money to complete the needed projects from a source, such as the U.S. Department of Agriculture, she said, the agency would require the city to raise its water and sewer rates significantly before it considered making the loan. She said her combined water, sewer and garbage bill is

\$59.43 right now.

"We have chosen to keep our rates low," she said.

The minutes from a Jan. 4 work session show the council listened to a presentation by engineering firm Anderson Perry & Associates about the benefits of the projects, including reliability, quality of wastewater treatment and creating room for future growth. It also cited information from David Ulbricht of the Special Districts Association of Oregon, who told city councilors that paying for the projects through water rates instead of bonds would require the city to raise its base water rate by \$60 a month and sewer by \$20.

Pettigrew said the city will provide detailed information about the bond to residents in the coming months.

A Jan. 28 news release

from the city noted that it was "beginning talks" about expanding water and sewer projects.

"The expansion will ensure reliability in the city's water and wastewater systems and improve fire flow," the release stated.

The release also noted the city council had recently extended incentives for developers. The city had previously set in place a temporary waiver for water and sewer system development charges, and city councilors felt it would be beneficial to extend the waiver, which expired at the end of 2019, for another year.

The waivers operate on a sliding scale based on the number of "equivalent dwelling units" a residential or commercial project represents. Developers can call the city at 541-481-9252 for more information.

Columbia Works launches summer intern program

The Port of Morrow, in partnership with regional industries, has launched the new Columbia Works Summer Internship Program.

An industry-led, summer work experience program, Columbia Works features paid internships, free professional development training and application assistance.

Prospective interns can choose from a diverse set of opportunities that range from farming and food processing to education, business, information technology, workforce development and more.

"Our goal is to make connections," Kalie Davis, workforce training manager at the Port of Morrow, said in a statement. "We want to make things as easy as possible for both our industry partners and young adults looking for

internship opportunities."

The program is part of the Oregon Works network that has seen success in different regions across the state. Columbia Works was established to link regional employers with high school and college

students who are looking to gain experience in their prospective career field.

"We believe Columbia Works is a great resource to get students the real-world experience and exposure to our industry and to see the potential career path


they can have," said Kirk Jacobson, Beef Northwest human resources manager and Columbia Works steering committee member.

 Follow us on Facebook!

A heartfelt thank you to everyone who sent cards, food, flowers or donations for **HARRY NOBLE** and for all that came to his celebration of life.

A special thank you to Ken Huber of Burns Mortuary, Marty Campbell, John Wambeke, Tony Lundervold, the Military, Don & Donna Eppenbach, Renate Meakins, the Irrigon Sr. Center & Cowboy Church. With much appreciation to, Dr's Guy & Jonas Oltman, Dr. Jeremy Anderson, Good Shepherd IV Therapy & Vange John Hospice for such compassionate care of him.

Helen Noble, Jerita Belyea, Jody Lafferty & Families


 **GOOD SHEPHERD COMMUNITY HEALTH FOUNDATION**

Interested in a Medical career? Need funds to complete your training?

Good Shepherd Community Health Foundation medical scholarship applications are now being accepted from qualified local students through February 29th.

The Foundation is again pleased to partner with Tualatin Imaging to offer additional scholarships for students who have expressed interest in pursuing a diagnostic imaging career

Please call 541-667-3419 for further information. Applications can be accessed online at www.gshealth.org/foundation/scholarships



eOMEDIA group
The most valuable and respected source of local news, advertising and information for our communities.
eomediagroup.com

CONCEALED CARRY PERMIT CLASS

SATURDAY FEB. 22ND
Ranch & Home
2500 S Hwy 395, Hermiston

1PM CLASS ONLY!



Multi-State \$80
Oregon Included No Fee

Oregon Only \$45

MULTI-STATE

Valid 35-States, including Washington

Shaun Curtain 360-921-2071
or email: ShaunCurtain@gmail.com | www.ShaunCurtain.com

PET OF THE WEEK

Buddy is looking for his forever home. He is approximately 13 years old and has really blossomed. He loves cuddling and rolling in his blanket. He's a silly old man that LOVES attention. He does get jealous of other dogs when they get attention, however, he barely attempts to bite them at all, it's actually pretty funny. He does have a weak back and his rear legs give out sometimes.

MEET BUDDY

OREGON TRAIL VETERINARY CLINIC
Capable Hands. Caring Hearts
Mark Sargent, DVM • Brent Barton, DVM
Eugenio Mannucci, DVM, cVMA • Jana von Borstel, DVM, cVMA

Small and Large Animal Care

Mon: 8-6
Tue - Fri: 8-5
Sat: 8-12
Emergency Service

80499 Hwy 395 N
Hermiston
www.oregontrailvet.com

PLACE YOUR AD HERE!
Contact Audra at 541.564.4538 Today!

If interested please go to fuzzballrescue.com and fill out an application. If you are not able to adopt, but would like to foster or donate, visit fuzzballrescue.com or you can mail in donations to Fuzz Ball Animal Rescue, PO Box 580, Hermiston, OR 97838