

Walmart

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video presentations and discussion boards.

Palmer said her cohort of online classmates were from multiple states and represented a diverse array of Walmart positions, from trucking to cashiers to working at corporate headquarters. She said the network she built has given her access to different perspectives, allowing her to bounce ideas off of associates in other locations and jobs.

"I now have friends from all across the country that I've worked on projects with," she said.

Charles Crowson, a spokesman for Walmart, said right now there are more than 12,000 associates taking advantage of Live Better U. After associates finish their degree or certification, there are no strings attached — some are putting their knowledge to use in furthering their career with the company, while others are using it to get a job elsewhere.

"If people pursue (something else), there is no ill will," Crowson said.

He said many of Walmart's future leaders will likely come from Live Better U.

"It's a wonderful opportunity for our associates," he said. "It's really encouraging for our company to see so many people become engaged in it."

Palmer feels the same way, and as a human resources manager, she said she is in a good position to spread the word to other employees about the benefits of pursuing a degree while they are in a position to do so for only \$1 per day. So far, she said, there are a handful of other people in Hermiston who have signed on.

"Any time we invest in ourselves and broaden our thinking, it makes us better," she said.

City Hall

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into a "maker's space."

Smith emphasized Monday evening that by relying on funding from enterprise zone agreements with Lamb Weston, Amazon and a new potential beneficiary of the zone program, the project would not cause new or increased property taxes for residents.

Hermiston shares enterprise zone funding with the county, and Umatilla County Commissioner George Murdock offered comment during the meeting.

He said while he was not advocating for or against a new city hall, he did believe zone funding shouldn't be used for operational expenses but rather long-lasting projects.

"They should be used for some kind of capital improvement that could be used for the well-being of the area," he said. "As a partner, we have great faith in the city of Hermiston. Those particular funds we've pledged to the future of Hermiston."

Multiple people provided public comment at the meeting. Some were concerned that the new building wasn't in the public's best interest, or expressed that the enterprise zone funds should be put toward water and sewer infrastructure.

Former Umatilla County commissioner Dennis Doherty said that after living 40 "good years" in Hermiston, he was in favor of a new structure.

"It doesn't scare me we're stepping up to finance something. This is not unlike how the county funded the Stafford Hansell government building," he said. "It isn't a bad thing to have a nice facility."

Smith said an unnamed governmental agency interested in renting part of the



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan
Hermiston city manager Byron Smith talks to visitors during a tour of the fire damaged Hermiston City Hall Monday night. Smith used the opportunity to highlight accessibility concerns with the building as well as issues caused by the fire.



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan
Members of the public and city officials tour the now empty Hermiston City Hall ahead of Monday night's City Council meeting to vote on the construction of a new City Hall.

new space would reduce the amount of money the city must pour into the library remodel and the construction of the new city hall building by renting some of the space.

Six of the eight councilors were in attendance

Monday. Councilor John Kirwan, who motioned to approve building a new city hall, stipulated that the project should not exceed \$9 million dollars and that the new enterprise zone agreement and the possible tenant be confirmed before

moving forward.

Prior to the city council meeting Monday, Smith initiated a public walk-through tour of the smoke-damaged city hall building. Conversations around accessibility within and around the building

also sat center stage.

"I brought a wheelchair if anyone wants to try making those corners," he said.

People were invited to try the stair lift up the small staircase to the city council chambers. City councilor Roy Barron commented he could only make it halfway up the short staircase to the chambers.

The handful of Hermiston residents in attendance were able to catch a glimpse of the now charred and twisted furnace system that fatefully overheated in December, causing smoke damage in the main part of the building.

Footprints were left in the soot covered carpet and ash lightly dusted some abandoned desks. In the council chambers, bits of ceiling tile lay crumbled on the floor.

Smith said that after the fire, asbestos was discovered in that part of the ceiling and it had to be removed.

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