

Hermiston no longer considering sale of community center

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
NEWS EDITOR

City Manager Byron Smith announced Monday night that the city of Hermiston is no longer considering the sale of the Hermiston Community Center.

More than six months ago, a private business approached the city about possibly buying the community center and redeveloping it for a different use. At the time, city staff told the developer that they would be willing to take a formalized offer to the city council for a public vote. But the proposal did not materialize within a negotiation timeline set by the city, according to a news release, “so the discussions are considered concluded at this time.”

Smith said in a statement that it is in the best financial

interests of the taxpayers to give careful consideration to potential opportunities that arise.

“However,” he continued, “allowing uncertainty to tie up community assets for too long can inhibit our ability to efficiently manage these resources. We have given ample time for this proposal to develop, and now we are moving on.”

Despite rumors to the contrary, the city never sold the building, and would have had to do so through a public process that would have included opportunity for public comment and a vote by the city council during a city council meeting.

In 1994, the city purchased the building — a former Safeway store — and community members raised the money to remodel the building into a



HH file photo

A business interested in purchasing the Hermiston Community Center has missed the deadline for making an offer.

community center.

The Hermiston Community Center currently houses the city’s parks and recreation department

offices and hosts a variety of events. The *East Oregonian* reported on 28 different events in the center in 2019, including fundraiser

dinners, community meetings, arts performances, job fairs and events hosted by the parks and recreation department. That total does

not include private rentals such as weddings, or smaller meetings to which the general public was not invited.

Residents fear new subdivision would threaten their neighborhood

By **JESSICA POLLARD**
STAFF WRITER

Before the subject of a new city hall took the spotlight at Monday night’s council meeting, talk about another possible building project raised eyebrows for public attendees: a 20-acre land annex that would allow the construction of a 100-home subdivision off East Punkin Center Road.

If approved, Northeast Sixth Street on the southeast corner of the plot, which is currently a dead-end road, would become a through street for the subdivision. It has nearby residents concerned.

“I don’t see any positive coming from this,” said Linda Cummings, who lives nearby where the subdivision would be. “The lot sizes would not allow enough room for families to move

NEW WEBSITE
Residents can check the progress of different projects from the city’s Capital Improvement Plan at the new website: www.hermistonprojects.com.

in with children and have a safe place to play within their homes. It’s pretty nice up there and I don’t want to see that change.”

Several residents of the neighborhood in conversation came to express their worries Monday night.

“I too am concerned about children,” said Kalinda Harris, who also lives nearby. “I’m glad our town’s growing, I’m just concerned about safety.”

She added she was worried that people living in the new two-story homes would be able to see straight into her backyard, and asked if it would be possible to only

allow one-story homes to be built in the southeast part of the plot.

Others feared the addition of 100 new families off East Punkin Center Road would create traffic flow issues, increase crime, and put neighborhood children at risk.

Some residents said they were led to believe that Northeast Sixth Street would always remain a dead end. One woman said that the dead end was a large factor into her family purchasing a home in the neighborhood.

“This (dead end) in particular was always intended to be a through street,” said

city planner Clint Spencer. “We absolutely have to have street access for the water and sewer lines.”

On February 12, the planning commission held a public hearing about the possible annex, and ultimately recommended the city approve the plan. The commission found that a single-family development would “greatly increase” property taxes paid to the city.

According to Spencer, in addition to the 100 homes, MonteVista Homes would construct a new public park and a walking trail in the area.

Construction of the homes would also require that a portion of East Punkin Center Road near the new neighborhood be widened and have a sidewalk added to it.

Councilor Jackie Myers questioned the need for the

subdivision to have access to East Punkin Center Road, expressing concern about speeding cars and traffic.

“It’s a terrible road,” she said. “It’s terrible.”

But Spencer said he wouldn’t recommend that.

Ultimately, the council voted four to two to annex the land (councilors Lori Davis and Doug Primmer were absent), before realizing that they needed five votes to reach a quorum on such a land use decision.

By the time that city council realized the error, many of the interested residents had left the meeting.

“We’ll reconsider the ordinance at the next city council meeting,” said mayor David Drotzmann.

Also at Monday’s meeting, an annual utility rate increase was ratified. A rate restructure the council adopted in 2019 built in

an annual increase based on inflation in construction prices. The combined water and sewer bill increase for 2020 will be 1.8% — an average of \$1.78 per month — effective March 1.

The change is anticipated to bring \$167,000 in additional revenue, on par with inflation.

Assistant city manager Mark Morgan also unveiled the city’s new capital projects website, which catalogues all capital projects happening across Hermiston. The website will be updated multiple times a month to reflect the progress and cost of each project.

“This gives us another transparency tool to make sure we’re sharing with the community,” Drotzmann said of the new site.

The next city council meeting is scheduled for Monday, March 9 at 7 p.m.

Hermiston High School students get taste of financial management

By **JESSICA POLLARD**
STAFF WRITER

It would seem that Hermiston High School’s class of 2020 is thrifty with a keen eye for homeownership.

In partnership with the Hermiston Chamber of Commerce and Simmons Insurance Group, the Hermiston School District hosted a financial simulation for high school seniors called Financial Awareness Basics, or “FAB” Life, this week.

The goal was to teach students about budgeting after graduation.

“It’s been so fun to have students see what adulthood is like,” said Hermiston Chamber CEO Kimberly Nevil.

Each student received a job title, salary and a family assignment. Some people were married, while others had to factor children into their budget as single parents.

The highest paying job title in the simulation was doctor, at \$178,000 a year. The lowest was as a temporary employee, at \$17,280.

Students had to budget everything — from housing, to internet and cell-phone packages to philanthropic donations — on their assigned monthly budget within a single class period.

Whoever had money leftover at the end of the simulation got a PayDay candy bar, and whoever went into debt got a Zero candy bar.

Student Antonio Leonides, 17, chose to be a translator for the simulation with a yearly salary of more than \$45,000. He was also cast as a single parent.

“I chose a translator because I thought I could do that. I speak two languages,” he said.

He’s now considering pursuing the role after high school.

Leonides said his



Staff photo by Jessica Pollard

Deborah Wainwright, right, a branch loan officer with Columbia Bank in Hermiston, assists Hermiston High School senior Antonio Leonides, 17, with financial information during a FAB Life simulation at Hermiston High School on Thursday afternoon.

monthly budgeting was going very well until he received a “Crystal Ball” simulation card that showed that there was an oil disaster near his home.

He had to dish out \$122 he hadn’t anticipated and

headed to the “bank” to reconsider his personal spending for the month and make up the difference.

Not the easiest task as a single parent.

“Parents go through a lot having kids,” he said.

Both Mildred Moreno, 18, and Cynthia Gonzalez, 17, chose to be veterinary technicians because it’s what they want to do after high school graduation.

Now that they know what it’s like to live off of \$2,000 a month, both agreed they’ll probably have to take on second jobs to sustain their passion.

They’re even reconsidering where they’ll go to college in the fall.

“I didn’t realize I’d need two jobs,” Moreno said. “Everything adds up so quickly. It’s a steep hill.”

Both Gonzalez and Moreno chose to rent apartments with roommates for the simulation in order to save money.

But according to Tracy Hunter, a broker at eXp Realty who volunteered to help at FAB Life, choosing to rent was not the overall norm for the high schoolers.

“Most kids are taking this really seriously,” she said. “Students are choosing to own. In the Hermiston market, a mortgage can be more affordable.”

Oregon is experiencing an opioid crisis, involving misuse, abuse, overdose and death.

Naloxone reverses the effect of narcotics in emergency, overdose situations.

COMMUNITY NALOXONE TRAINING

Wednesday, March 11, 2020
1:00-2:00pm

Good Shepherd Medical Center Conference Rooms 1 & 2

FREE training on how to use Naloxone.
Hear from local professionals on the importance of Naloxone.
FREE Naloxone.
FREE snacks and refreshments

Registration required. Capacity: 90
Register via Eventbrite or by contacting 541-667-3509 or healthinfo@gshealth.org

Working every day to promote a healthy community

GOOD SHEPHERD HEALTH CARE SYSTEM
Education and Wellness Services 541.667.3509

UCo HEALTH
Building a Healthy Community

LINKEDIN FACEBOOK INSTAGRAM TWITTER

OPEN HOUSE
Feb. 28th and 29th

THOMPSON RV
Est. 1953

FACTORY REPS ON SITE
LOCALLY BUILT • NO SHIPPING COSTS

1201 Southgate, Pendleton Or 97801
Call 1-800-459-4836 • www.thompsonrvinc.com

Hours: Friday the 28th 8:00 am to 8:00 pm
Saturday 9:00 am - 4:00 pm

OUTDOORS RVMFG **NORTHWOOD** **Keystone RV Company**