

# Hermiston Herald

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**INSIDE**

**NEW HOMES**

The Hermiston city council approved annexation of a planned new 100-lot subdivision off East Punkin Center on Monday.  
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**CAP AND TRADE**

Governor Kate Brown is using an executive order to reduce carbon emissions after a walkout by Republicans ended the legislative session over the issue.  
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**MISSING**

A Umatilla High School teacher has been missing since Feb. 27.  
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**BY THE WAY**

**Mayor running unopposed**

Tuesday was the last day for candidates to file for races on the May 2020 ballot, and as of Tuesday afternoon, the only candidate for Hermiston mayor was current **Mayor David Drotzmann**.

Hermiston's four at-large city councilors are not up for re-election until November, and candidates can start filing for those positions in June.

**Judge Thomas Creasing** also filed for re-election as Hermiston's municipal judge, with no opponents.

For more information about what Hermiston residents can see on the May ballot, see next week's *Hermiston Herald*.

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The public is invited to give recommendations on the **City of Hermiston's** parks master plan during an open house on March 19 from 5:30-7 p.m. at the **Hermiston Community Center**, 415 S. Highway 395.

The city is updating its Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Master

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Appraiser Doug Barak takes photos of a bathroom while doing an appraisal on a newly constructed house on East Newport Avenue in Hermiston on Friday morning. Below, he uses a laser measuring device to find the height of the ceiling.

Staff photo by Ben Lonergan

By **JADE MCDOWELL**  
NEWS EDITOR

Umatilla County residents are hungry for housing.

A recent analysis of housing trends in west Umatilla County and north Morrow County by appraiser Doug Barak shows that home values in those areas have gone up each year for the past 10 years, but Hermiston-based real estate agents say that hasn't stopped people from snapping up homes, sometimes making offers within hours of a "for sale" sign going up.

"The right housing flies," said Tami Rebman, president of the Columbia Basin Board of Realtors.

In 2019, according to Barak, housing in the west Umatilla/north Morrow county market had an average price of \$228,523, up 9% from the year before and up \$94,454 from 2010.

Pendleton homes sold for an average of \$212,384 in 2019.

The real estate agents spoke from their experience based out of Hermiston, but said similar trends are happening in Pendleton and other parts of Eastern Oregon.

Rebman said even during the 2008 recession, Umatilla County saw only small decreases and stagnation in



housing prices, unlike some areas of the country where home values plummeted and left millions of Americans owing more on their mortgage than their home was worth.

Right now, in the Hermiston area, there isn't much available under \$250,000, said Tracy Hunter, secretary for the Columbia Basin Board of Realtors. That means people looking for homes in that range need to be ready to compete.

"I've got one coming next week under \$200,000 and I can guarantee there will be

multiple offers," Hunter said. "Buyers have to go in with their strongest offer. There's not room to come in and say, 'I will give you \$10,000 less.'"

Being preapproved by a lender, preferably a local lender, helps buyers be competitive, said Stephanie Hughes, who also serves on the board.

On the other hand, Hughes, Rebman and Hunter all said that sellers can't get too cocky and try to sell their home well over market value. The internet makes it easy for potential buyers to frequently browse

online listings and get a good feel for what's out there, and some will even access tax records online to see what the current owner paid for the property.

"Buyers are more educated than they've ever been," Rebman said. "They're so informed."

Barak provided a chart of "sold to list" ratios each year since 1997, showing what percentage of the list price for which a home actually sold. In

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## Water revenues on track in first year of rate increase

By **JADE MCDOWELL**  
NEWS EDITOR

A restructure of Hermiston's water and sewer rates that angered residents last year finished its first full year on March 1, and revenues have been in line with projections.

"We should hit right at about what we budgeted for the fiscal year," Assistant City Manager Mark Morgan said.

The city's fiscal year runs from July 1 to June 30, while the rate increase took place in March. But running the numbers for the current fiscal year shows that the city budgeted \$9,996,658 for

water and sewer revenue in the 2019-20 fiscal year and earned \$6,512,106 of that by Feb. 28, putting it on track to meet budget by the end of June.

During the 2018-19 fiscal year, the city budgeted \$6,856,938 in revenues and received \$6,862,294. Almost all of the city's revenue for water and sewer — minus \$186,661 in connection fees, interest and other miscellaneous income — came from customers' water and sewer bills.

The additional \$3.1 million earned in 2019-20 will pay for water and sewer projects on the city's capital improvement plan, ranging

from replacing century-old water pipes to upgrading lift stations and pumps.

Morgan said since the city had built its new wastewater treatment plant in 2014, too much of the city's water and sewer revenue had been going toward debt service to afford needed capital projects. What "sealed the deal," he said, was when the city ended up having to take out a loan to pay the \$1.2 million cost of dredging the sewage out of its wastewater lagoons, something that needs to be done about every 15 years to keep them from overflowing.

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The city of Hermiston's wastewater treatment plant, constructed in 2014, was one of several capital projects that resulted in the need to raise water rates.

Staff photo by Ben Lonergan

