

Council OKs annexation for subdivision

The 20 acres off Punkin Center Road may see 100 homes, a park

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
NEWS EDITOR

The Hermiston City Council voted unanimously to annex 20 acres of land off East Punkin Center for a new subdivision on Monday, citing the city's need for more affordable homes.

"I think turning away 100 homes in that area when our number one goal is housing — I think that would be a mistake," councilor Roy Barron said.

MonteVista Homes plans to build a 100-lot, single family dwelling subdivision with a public park and walking trail on the property, which connects to Punkin Center on the north, the currently dead-ended Northeast Sixth Street to the south and Bellavista Court to the west.

The annexation was first discussed by the council on Feb. 24, when several neighbors showed up to oppose the project. They asked the city council to turn Northeast Sixth Street into a cul de sac instead of extending it through the new subdivision as planned because they did not want to see more traffic through their neighborhood.

Others opposed the pro-



Residents near a quiet section of Northeast Sixth Street in Hermiston have expressed concerns over the extension of their street to help provide access to a 100-home subdivision off East Punkin Center Road.

Staff photo by Ben Lonergan

posed 5,000-square-foot lot sizes as too small, according to the minutes of the meeting, stating that larger lot sizes would maintain property values in the neighborhood and ensure that children living in the homes would have a yard to play in safely. Some neighbors also expressed concern that adding a public park to the area would also bring additional traffic to their neighborhood.

When the city council voted 4-2 to approve the annexation, however, city attorney Gary Luisi pointed

out that city ordinances must either pass unanimously or pass with at least five votes at two separate meetings.

On Monday night, when the issue was revisited, a neighbor to the property told the council he wasn't opposed to a development there but would like to see larger lots required, even if it meant removing the park and trail from the plan.

Luke Pickerill and Steve Wilson of MonteVista Homes were on hand Monday night to encourage the council to approve the

annexation. They pointed out that 5,000 square foot lots are allowable in the R-3 zone where the property is located. They said the R-3 zone also allows for multi-family apartment complexes, meaning roads in the area were designed to be able handle far more density than they're proposing.

City planner Clint Spencer clarified that the plat for the project, outlining its design, had already been approved by the planning commission, based on the commission's determination

there was adequate access to the subdivision. The city council was merely deciding on whether to annex the land into the city.

The houses are planned for somewhere around \$260,000 — a lower price point than recent subdivisions. Pickerill said families right now are wanting to move to Hermiston but are being forced to settle in a nearby town because they can't find something in their price range.

"Families come through, and I'm hearing all the time that there are not homes they can afford," he said.

Councilor John Kirwan was inclined to agree with Pickerill. He said people want housing "the way it used to be" in Hermiston, with one-acre lots in city limits, but that just isn't financially feasible for developers anymore.

Barron agreed, saying he wanted to see more families in Hermiston be able to find homes they could afford and be proud of. He also said he was bothered by some of the comments at the Feb. 24 meeting, including the "negativity" expressed about having a park in their part of town and allowing extension of Sixth Street to relieve traffic on Punkin Center.

"If Sixth Street is not punched through, that makes it harder for other citizens,"

he said.

Mayor David Drotzmann reminded everyone that a few years earlier, companies were telling the city they didn't want to locate in Hermiston because they were concerned there wasn't enough housing to support the workforce they would need. The city made increasing housing one of its top goals, and had meetings with housing developers and other stakeholders to find out what was holding them back. Developers said the cost of land was the number one barrier, he said, and so the city reduced lot size requirements to help developments pencil out.

"All the work we've done over the last few years is coming to fruition in this project," he said.

Councilors Jackie Myers and Manuel Gutierrez both expressed concern over the safety of increasing traffic on Punkin Center, and said they wanted the city to work with the county on improving safety there. But Myers also said she understood the need for more housing in the area. Although both had voted against the annexation in February, they voted in favor of it on Monday, along with councilor Doug Primmer, who had been absent previously, giving the ordinance the unanimous vote it needed to pass.

Health officials continue to provide COVID-19 updates

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
NEWS EDITOR

After a Umatilla County resident tested positive for COVID-19 last week, positive cases in Oregon have jumped to 15, with five of those cases hospitalized.

All but one of the 15 cases is a "presumptive positive," meaning the sample tested positive in a state lab but under current Centers for Disease Control guidelines aren't official until they have been verified by a second test in a CDC lab.

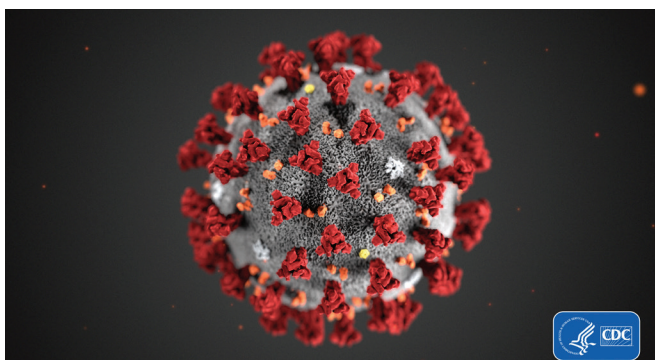
One hundred and sixty five tests have come back negative and 52 results were pending as of Monday. Three of those negative tests were Umatilla County residents who had close contact with the resident who tested positive last week.

On Monday Oregon State Health epidemiologist Dr. Dean Sidelinger said the patients involved had not traveled to a region with COVID-19 recently or had contact with a known case, indicating they contracted the virus from people whose cases have gone undetected.

"We do think that even though we are reporting 14 cases that this disease is much more widespread in our community," he said.

Guidelines outlined by public health professionals at Monday's news conference and by the CDC include:

- If you are sick, do not leave your home until at least 24 hours after all symptoms, including a cough, are gone. If your symptoms are not severe enough that you would have sought medical care for them in the past, there is no need to visit a doctor's office now. If you do decide to seek care, call ahead so that the office can take precautions.
- People over age 60 and



Contributed by CDC

This illustration provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention shows the novel coronavirus.

people with underlying health conditions are most at risk for serious complications from COVID-19. The CDC recommends people in those categories avoid large gatherings such as sporting events for now to minimize their risk of exposure.

- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water, or use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol if you're not able to wash your hands. Take particular care to do so before eating, cooking taking in/out contacts or touching your face. Cough or sneeze into a tissue and wash your hands afterward. Sanitize frequently-touched surfaces regularly. Avoid people who are sick.
- Those who are hosting large gatherings are asked to emphasize in their advertising that no one who is sick should attend, and be prepared to ask people who are sick to leave. Organizers, along with businesses, schools and other gathering places, should do what they can to provide hand washing areas and other sanitary measures.
- Seek information from credible sources such as public health departments.
- Get a flu shot. It won't

protect from coronavirus, but it will help keep the number of people being treated for the flu down as medical providers are using resources to treat COVID-19.

During Monday's news conference, Jennifer Vines, the lead public health officer for Multnomah, Clackamas and Washington counties, said while most COVID-19 patients experience mild to moderate symptoms, precautions such as "social distancing" help protect the more vulnerable populations. It also helps the outbreak spread more slowly, which can help keep resources such as hospital beds and ventilators from becoming overwhelmed during a spike in cases.

"With no vaccine and no treatment, we have two goals right now," she said. "The first is to slow the spread of the virus enough to keep our health systems running, so

that they can offer lifesaving care to those who need it, when they need it. Number two is we need to protect the elderly and the medically fragile because it is increasingly clear that those individuals are at high risk of serious complications and death."

That high risk is illustrated by the death toll so far in the United States — as of Tuesday, 22 of the country's 28 deaths are in Seattle, where the virus spread in a nursing home. Worldwide, about 118,000 cases have been diagnosed, with 4,264 deaths.

While people are asked to be cautious in helping to slow the spread of COVID-19, health officials have emphasized that people should not panic or resort to prejudice.

Joe Fiumara, director of Umatilla County Health Department, said they have been hearing reports of prejudice against people of Asian decent and against members of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation based on unfounded fears they may be more likely to have the virus. He reminded people that COVID-19 does not target people of any certain race, ethnicity or country of origin, and people should not make assumptions about someone's health status based on those factors.

"Viruses don't care where

you live, who you are or where you come from," he said. "They're equal opportunity."

He also reiterated that unlike some diseases such as measles, merely being in the same room as someone carrying the virus is not enough

to infect someone. Respiratory viruses like COVID-19 spread when carried through tiny droplets from an infected person to the nose, mouth, or eyes of someone else. Often that happens while standing within six feet of someone while they sneeze or cough.

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