



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan

Free books sit on the front windowsill of Neighborhood Books & Gifts in Hermiston on Monday afternoon. The sole proprietorship was among those businesses left out of the initial iteration of the Paycheck Protection Program.

Tough

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nonessential businesses, but the Gormleys closed along with neighboring stores on Main Street selling furniture, jewelry and other goods that were named in the order. Gormley said they felt that they fit within the spirit of the order for people to only leave their house for essential reasons, they didn't want to aid in the spread of COVID-19, and she and her husband fall into a senior age category that put them at additional risk.

She said they are lucky to have retirement money to live on, "but as far as the business goes, there's nothing to pay the insurance and utilities and rent."

They'll put their personal stimulus checks into the business to supplement whatever isn't covered by the county's \$1,000 grant, including safety upgrades to reduce contact with customers during transactions when they reopen sometime in the future.

"We're covering that on our own, but we feel it's worth it," she said.

Bonnie and Glenn Greiner have been doing a little bit of work for their upholstery side business at home, but their retail shop, Wild Goose Design in Hermiston, had to close its doors under the March 23 executive order.

Bonnie said she has been posting pictures of items to the Wild Goose Design social media pages, along with a phone number people can call for delivery or curbside pickup, but so far they've only sold two items that way.

"I've been posting on Facebook and Instagram, but I don't have a big following, and when you don't have money it's hard to buy ads on TV or radio or in the paper," she said.

She said it's been "really kind of

a challenge" trying to find grants that business owners without employees can apply for to cover a shop's rent and other costs that still pile up even with the doors closed. Self-employment can also make it difficult for people to qualify for benefits, such as unemployment and health insurance.

Still, she said she was optimistic that "this too shall pass," and she wouldn't want to say that her situation was worse than anyone else's.

"I know it's a challenge for everyone," she said. "Everyone's having to deal with something. I'm glad I don't have small children at home."

Not all small businesses will survive the challenges presented by COVID-19. Cynthia Traner, who runs Her Shabby Shed in Hermiston, said the vintage shop is done for good.

"This was the final cherry on the cupcake for me," she said. "I'm not opening again."

She said she hadn't been making enough money from the business to draw a paycheck before the pandemic hit, and she knew she wasn't going to be a good candidate for loans and other help for the business in that situation. She still has plenty of inventory left over that she hopes to take on the road at some point in the future once big vendor shows like Junk Barn Girls start happening again.

Traner said it was frustrating to see entire families crowding into large stores like Walmart, and yet the hair stylist across the street who serves one customer at a time is ordered to close.

"I see it both ways," she said. "My heart really aches for people who have lost loved ones, and my heart goes out to first responders and hospital workers on the front lines, but it seems (the government) could do something to let these little mom and pop shops reopen."

Housing

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because they would have to be in close quarters with someone they don't like. Those people could stay in the privacy of their own space.

Lloyd said anyone staying in one of the huts would be required to abide by a set of rules to keep their spot. They would be able to be inside the fenced-in camp from 7 p.m. to 7 a.m. and would not be let back in a second time if they left during the night. They would be required to clean out their hut and surrounding area each morning and place all personal items in a locked box for the day.

Volunteers would handle check-ins and morning inspections, and a paid security guard would supervise the site overnight, aided by security cameras.

Once the sleep center is up and running, Lloyd said the second phase would be an "exit homelessness" program that would require people to earn credits to continue staying at the center. Those credits could be earned through efforts, such as working, volunteering, pursuing education, getting counseling or completing a drug rehab program.

Council concerns

In answer to a question from Mayor David Drotzmann about whether the shelter would draw more transient residents to Hermiston, Lloyd said in her study of various shelter projects, the ones that become that "magnet" are the ones that don't place requirements about volunteer work or other efforts.

"Those who want a place to sleep can have one for a short time, but if they're not willing to move on to Phase Two, they will have to move along," she said.

Drotzmann said he has gotten "several earfuls" from neighbors to the site who are concerned about an increase of crime and other problems the project might bring. He said Hermiston definitely needs

more shelter for its homeless residents, but he wants to make sure that any project that goes forward also addresses those concerns.

"I think we want to make sure we're sympathetic to those neighbors, too, and addressing their concerns and alleviating those fears when we're talking about this project," he said.

Atkinson said the center would not be a "24-hour hang-out," and residents would be required to check in and check out each day, which should help.

Drotzmann and several city councilors also voiced concerns about financing for the project. Stepping Stones' proposal on Monday included an \$85,000 initial outlay from the city, and then \$40,000 toward operating costs on an annual basis.

The group said the rest of the funding would be raised by the nonprofit, through grants and fundraising. Lloyd said without advertising the project to the wider public, they had already received private commitments of about \$65,000 in cash and in-kind donations.

Councilor Roy Barron said he had "a few too many concerns" to feel confident about approve the project yet, without the group doing more fundraising and showing exactly how they planned to keep it going.

"I think all of us are very supportive of the general idea, it's just the presentation and sustainability we're having a hard time with," he said.

Councilor Doug Primmer said he would want to see the project have a plan for becoming self-sustainable after a certain number of years. Manuel Gutierrez said he wanted to see the organization pursue grants now. John Kirwan said he thought they were being too optimistic about the cost of hiring a security guard.

Public feedback

Cathy Putnam, interim director of the Agape House, called into the council meeting to express the support of the project. She said the Agape House board had been skepti-

cal at first, but were supportive after "glowing reports" from a board member who made an unannounced visit to the Walla Walla project.

Nathan Crowther, owner of Northwest Farm Supply along with the Lloyds, said since COVID-19 hit he has seen a "major uptick" in shoplifting at the store, indicating economic need in the community.

"I think that the concept is something we all have responsibility for in some form," he said. "I like the idea of having the council consider, make some decisions based on how do we help with the project without it being something that's going to be a long-term burden on the city or on the community collectively."

Dean Hackett, pastor of Living Faith Church, said from a clergy standpoint, he saw a great need for more services for the homeless, but from a community resident standpoint, he worried about an increase in panhandlers and other problems he felt the project had not adequately addressed yet.

City Manager Byron Smith said he thought the group had done a lot of good work on a project the city needs, but he also thought the money they were asking for was "a little bit high." He said the city could more comfortably provide \$60,000 in seed money and \$30,000 per year.

"I think this project is something that our community needs; in my mind the question it's a discussion of how much can we afford to pay," he said.

He did ask if the council would be willing to save the group time and money by having the city initiate the work now to create rules that would allow the project to apply for a conditional use permit later. The zoning change process would also create publicly noticed hearings that would allow people in the community to voice their concerns.

The city council agreed, and asked the group to continue working to find additional funding and other solutions and return with updated information at a later date.

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- Maintain a 10-foot clearance around all utility equipment in all directions.
- Use a spotter and deployed flags to maintain safe distances from power lines and other equipment when doing field work.
- If your equipment makes contact with an energized or downed power line, contact us immediately by phone and remain inside the vehicle until the power line is de-energized. In case of smoke or fire, exit the cab by making a solid jump out of the cab, without touching it at the same time, and hop away to safety.
- Consider equipment and cargo extensions of your vehicle. Lumber, hay, tree limbs, irrigation pipe and even bulk materials can conduct electricity, so keep them out of contact with electrical equipment.

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