

# Funding for Hermiston City Hall hits speed bump

By JADE MCDOWELL  
NEWS EDITOR

A new city hall for Hermiston could take longer than originally planned, after one of the city's funding sources was impacted by COVID-19.

After a heating system fire and smoke damaged Hermiston City Hall in December, the city council agreed in February to pursue a \$9 million project to build a new city hall on the same site and remodel the basement of the Hermiston Public Library.

The council added a caveat that they would only go through with the project if funding was available, however, including money the city expected to have from a "major" but yet-unnamed enterprise zone project being planned for Hermiston.

On Monday, City Manager Byron Smith told the city council that the company involved had put all new capital projects on hold for the time being, in light of COVID-19.

"At this point, the COVID impact on that company has been too severe, so they've put all investment on hold," he said. "But the other company, Amazon, looks to be moving more quickly on their projects, so we're hopeful that will move forward."

He also said the government agency wishing to pay to lease part of the new city hall was still interested, and staff are still working on other sources of funding.

The announcement came at the end of a 2-1/2 hour city council meeting and hourlong work session.

During the lengthy meeting, the council also voted to initiate proceedings to vacate a 526-foot undeveloped portion of East Ridgeway Avenue between Northeast Eighth Street and East Diagonal Boulevard.

The action came at the request of Santiago Communities, the developers for a 199-space manufactured home park there that the city's planning commission approved in December.

The vacation would give them extra space to provide required setbacks for homes.

City Planner Clint Spencer said the property is currently "just a goat trail"



Members of the public and city officials tour the damaged Hermiston City Hall in February. One of the funding sources that was planned to pay for a new city hall on the site has been put on hold.

HH file photo

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Hermiston City Manager Byron Smith

and the city had no plans to ever develop it into a road after traffic engineers determined it would not intersect with Diagonal Boulevard at a safe angle.

On Monday, Smith notified the council that the city had acquired a 0.8 acre parcel of land at the intersection of Geer and Harper roads, where the city plans to create a realignment of where the two roads intersect with Umatilla River Road and the railroad tracks. The council had previously authorized staff to acquire the land, using eminent domain if necessary.

Instead, the owner, listed as Tommy Huxoll on tax records, agreed to sell the land for \$95,000. Smith said the land was appraised at \$65,000 but the city could easily have spent \$30,000 in legal fees going the eminent domain route.

Assistant City Manager Mark Morgan said it will take longer than expected to gather state gas tax revenue to pay for the project, because "no one is driving right now."

Other actions on Monday night included:

- The council passed a \$1.3 million supplemental budget to adjust for unexpected revenue and expenses throughout the 2019-20 fiscal year before the year ends.
- The council approved changes to the code of ordinance, creating a single appeals process for code violation decisions, instead of multiple processes depending on what section of the code is violated.
- They also approved a new chapter creating an "administrative warrant" that allows a code enforcement officer to request a non-criminal warrant from a judge that would allow them to enter a property to inspect a code violation.
- The council authorized staff to apply for money from the Federal Aviation Administration to complete design work to rebuild the Hermiston Municipal Airport's apron, and to pursue the \$69,000 available to the city for airport operations through the CARES Act.
- The council

approved a letter of support for the League of Oregon Cities to create a People of Color Caucus that would "leverage collective strength to inform, educate, and empower people of color to serve as a resource to local government and state leaders and community organizations on issues and polices affecting people of color, and to serve in positions of leadership in local and state government."

# John Kirwan resigns from Hermiston City Council

Seven-year veteran of the council is moving away from Hermiston

By JADE MCDOWELL  
NEWS EDITOR

Hermiston City Councilor John Kirwan tendered his resignation at the end of Monday night's council meeting.

Kirwan, who works for Union Pacific Railroad, said he had accepted a promotion within the company and is leaving Hermiston to take it.



Kirwan

"Serving the city has been one of the pleasures of my life and something I will always cherish for the remainder of my life on this Earth," he said.

Kirwan has lived in Hermiston for 20 years, and served on the city council for more than seven of them. He said he enjoyed being a part of the city's growth during that time period, and encouraged others "willing to step forward and make a difference" to put up their name for consideration as the city council appoints someone to fill the at-large council seat.

Mayor David Drotzmann said he had enjoyed getting to know Kirwan over the past eight years, "however we ran before-

hand in our campaigns." Kirwan and Drotzmann ran against each other for the mayor's seat in the 2012 primaries before each ended up in their current roles.

"You were always a thoughtful person who put a lot of work and effort and education into your research and comments, and that will be missed" he said before leading a standing ovation for Kirwan.

Other councilors were also complimentary of Kirwan on Monday.

Doug Primmer said Kirwan's was a voice he always valued, and Roy Barron said he admired Kirwan's outspokenness.

"From the very get-go I've appreciated and respected your assertiveness in being able to stand for what you believed in no matter what, even if the rest of the council disagreed," Barron said. "I've always known your heart's been in the right spot."

Kirwan's position is one of the four at-large council seats up for reelection in November. All candidates who file will run against each other, with the top four vote-getters taking the four seats. The council will be able to appoint someone to fill Kirwan's seat in the interim.

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