



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan

Construction equipment clears ground at the site of MonteVista Homes' Theater Park development on Monday morning.

## Hermiston Housing projects not derailed by pandemic, yet

By **JADE MCDOWELL**  
NEWS EDITOR

COVID-19 has put a halt to many things, but housing development is still going strong.

Steve Wilson, principal broker for MonteVista Homes, said the company is still making good progress on its current developments in Hermiston.

"We've got about 170 homes we anticipate building in the near future, and we're not slowing down," he said.

The company continues to add homes to its long-standing Highland Summit project, and is currently paving the streets for the Theater Park community, which will feature 53 new homes off West Theater Lane near Geer Road. They are also in the engineering phase for Legacy, a 100-lot development off Punkin Center and Northeast Sixth Street.

Construction has been labeled an essential business in Oregon and allowed to continue during the pandemic. Wilson said customers who had prepaid for MonteVista homes were "thrilled" that the company had been able to maintain its construction schedule and finish their houses on time.

The company has had to make some adjustments, such as trading open houses for appointments with one family at a time, and sanitizing everything between each tour. Wilson said while fewer people are touring homes, sales are still steady.

"We've had very few lookers, and mostly people who just want to buy a house," he said.

It might seem surpris-

ing that people are still making such a major purchase during a time of mass layoffs and economic uncertainty. But Wilson said interest rates have dipped so low they have put home ownership into reach for people who had previously felt it was out of their budget.

It has also made upgrading to a larger, newer home more tempting.

"People are being forced to spend a majority of their time at home with their fam-

**"HERMISTON IS A VERY STRONG MARKET RIGHT NOW, IT'S SEEING A LOT OF GROWTH IN THE PRIVATE AND PUBLIC SECTOR"**

— **Tanner Wideriksen**, founder of VestCapital

ily, and are recognizing that their current home doesn't fit their needs," he said.

Another planned development in Hermiston, Cimarón Terrace, is also moving ahead despite the pandemic.

Tanner Wideriksen, founder of VestCapital, said the newest phase of the development has built 38 of the 99 lots so far.

"COVID-19 has been an absolutely game-changer, and everyone has had to be innovative, but it has not precluded us from development of all of our lots as planned," he said.

He doesn't see the need

for more housing in the greater Hermiston area going away any time soon, even with the pandemic.

"Hermiston is a very strong market right now," he said. "It's seeing a lot of growth in the private and public sector."

Lloyd and Lois Piercy received approval from the Hermiston City Council in November for annexation and zoning changes needed for a planned 150-lot development on 36 acres at the intersection of Elm Avenue and Diagonal Road.

They're planning a multi-use, walking-friendly planned neighborhood with single family homes, a few commercial buildings and duplexes and triplexes built to be accessible to senior citizens and others with mobility challenges.

Lloyd Piercy said May 8 that they still plan to proceed with the development, as long as things continue to work out with financing, labor and other pieces.

"These things are hideously expensive, and there are stumbling blocks along the way that can stop any development, but our intent is to go ahead," he said.

He said they are still planning to pursue a housing project targeted more toward low income families in Stanfield, too.

Piercy agreed with other developers that there is still a need for more housing in the greater Hermiston area, and that need is unlikely to let up. He said no one knows for sure exactly how the pandemic and its economic impacts will continue to play out, however.

"I don't have all the answers," he said.

## Second Umatilla County resident dies from COVID-19

HERMISTON HERALD

Umatilla County reported its second death of a confirmed COVID-19 patient on May 10.

According to a news release from Umatilla County Public Health, the patient was a 64-year-old man who tested positive on April 29 and died May 9 at Providence St. Mary Medical Center in Walla Walla, Washington. He had underlying health conditions.

The county's first COVID-19 death was a 76-year-old woman, who tested positive on April 14 and died April 30 at Kadlec Regional Medical Center in Richland, Washington.

Sunday's announcement capped off a week of steeply increasing numbers for Umatilla County, but cases have since slowed. The health department only reported one new confirmed case May 11, a patient who was in close contact with a previous case and is now recovering from home in self-isolation, and none on May 12, leaving Umatilla County's total confirmed case-load at 84.

The two deaths bring the county's fatality rate for confirmed cases to 2.4%.

The county also reported one new presumptive case.

In the early days of the pandemic, when test results in the United States were less reliable than they are now, a person who had tested positive through a state lab but hadn't been confirmed a second time by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention was considered a "presumptive" case.

While Oregon cases no longer need confirmation from the CDC, the Oregon Health Authority and Umatilla County Public Health now define presumptive cases as people who have been in close contact with a confirmed case and are displaying symptoms but have not yet been confirmed through testing. If their test comes back positive, they are added to the number of confirmed cases.

According to the county, there are 26 currently active cases of COVID-19 in Umatilla County, 56 recoveries and two hospitalizations.

Umatilla County has now surpassed 1,000 tests, with 92% coming back negative. Other illnesses, such as strains of influenza, are still circulating, meaning a person with respira-

tory symptoms may not have COVID-19, but anyone who is sick is asked to stay home until they have been symptom-free for 72 hours in order to reduce the number of people they may infect.

In numbers last updated on May 5, the county is reporting that most of the county's confirmed cases are in Hermiston and Umatilla.

Official symptoms of COVID-19 listed by the CDC include cough, shortness of breath, fever, chills, shaking, loss of taste or smell, muscle pain, headache or sore throat. Doctors have reported patients showing other symptoms while infected, however, from nasal congestion to kidney failure. Some people do not show symptoms at all or do not show symptoms until days after infection, but are still contagious.

People experiencing life-threatening symptoms should call 911. Those experiencing non-emergency symptoms should consult with their physician by phone before appearing in person at a clinic or at the hospital. Good Shepherd Health Care System is offering prescription delivery to patients as needed.

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**The stimulus payments from the CARES Act, which can be up to \$1,200 per person or \$500 per child, are not counted as income.**

The LIHEAP/OEAP program is open to the general public. Anyone wishing to apply, please call 541-276-1926 or 1-800-752-1139 for Pendleton office, or 541-289-7755 or 1-800-214-4776 for the Hermiston office. You can also reach us on the CAPECO website [www.capeco-works.org](http://www.capeco-works.org)

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