

# City council votes to continue with city hall plans

By JADE MCDOWELL  
NEWS EDITOR

The city of Hermiston will continue to move forward with design work for a new city hall, councilors agreed during their Tuesday, May 26 meeting.

City Manager Byron Smith painted an optimistic picture of Hermiston's economic outlook at the meeting as he made the case to the city council that it was worth continuing down that path for now, while interest rates are low.

"If the bids all come back way too high we could back off," he said.

The pandemic has put one private project on hold that the city hoped would provide enterprise funds for the new city hall, but Smith reminded the council that Amazon is still planning its project that will result in \$40 million in payments to local taxing districts over 15 years. He said there are other companies that continue to express interest in building in Hermiston.

Smith pointed to the recent completion of the West Project, an irrigation project that will open up about 30,000 acres of land for high value irrigated crops, as another boost to the economy that will increase agricultural output. He said he expects the increased production to spur more investments from the food processing industry as well.

He said Umatilla and Morrow counties' diversified economies have resulted in lower unemployment rates from the pandemic than the state as a whole, and state economists predict a similar pattern to the 2008 recession, when unemployment levels in the area stayed lower than the metro areas.

"Our economy is not based on those things that have been most affected by the virus," he said.

Smith also revealed that Umatilla County is "willing to bring \$3 million to the table for this project and also be a partner in ... revitalizing downtown Hermiston."

While Smith had previ-



A sign marks the old Carnegie Library in Hermiston as a temporary city hall, after a fire in the HVAC system and smoke damaged the previous city hall.

Staff photo by Jade McDowell

ously stated that a government entity was willing to lease space in the new city hall to help pay for it, Commissioner George Murdock told the *East Oregonian* that the plan was not for a straight-forward lease, but rather that the county would help fund construction of the building upfront and in return be given use of about 5,000 square feet of space. The potential arrangement would also include the county contributing some money for utilities and janitorial services.

Currently some county staff from departments, such as alcohol and drug or public health, are located at the Cook building at 435 E. Newport Ave. Murdock said they could be moved into the new city hall.

The county and city are getting \$500,000 apiece in enterprise zone funds each year for 15 years from Lamb Weston's 2019 expansion, and they partnered to use the first \$4 million to build a new water tower in Hermiston. Murdock said the county

plans to continue using enterprise zone funds for capital projects in the communities where the funds were generated, and the new city hall fits that plan.

"That's what the money is for, to invest in the communities where we get it from," he said. "We were very pleased with the water tower project. We're already starting to see benefits from that."

The city's estimate for the total city hall project is \$9 million. The money would buy a new three-story building where the current city hall, which was damaged by smoke and a fire in the HVAC system in December 2019, sits. It would also pay for a renovation of the basement of the Hermiston Public Library, which would first serve as a temporary city hall and afterward as an expansion of the library's collections.

"Right now, we're all spread apart, and it's not very efficient," Smith said of the city staff who were moved to other locations after the fire. "We'll still need a place

to operate the city for a year, year and a half probably, for construction."

### New city councilor

During their meeting councilors also approved appointment of David McCarthy to the city council. He will be sworn in at their next meeting.

McCarthy, who was the only applicant, will serve out the remainder of John Kirwan's term during 2020 and said he plans to run for a new term in November. Kirwan resigned his seat in April to pursue a career opportunity.

McCarthy is the sales manager for KOHU/The Q radio station, president of the Hermiston Kiwanis Club, and a foster parent along with his wife. In response to questions from councilors, he said he moved to Hermiston from Spokane in 2016. He said in Spokane he was heavily involved in theater productions, which took up most of his time, but now he is more interested in serving in leadership and volunteer roles.

### IN BRIEF

#### Methodists to resume Open Table meal service

HERMISTON — For almost 40 years, members of the Hermiston First United Methodist Church, 191 E. Gladys Ave., served a meal at the church each Thursday. With the onset of COVID-19, the church suspended the meal in order to protect the guests and workers from spreading the virus.

On Thursdays, the meal, in the form of a sack lunch for now, will once again be available to anyone from 11 a.m. to 12:15 p.m.

More information is available at herfmc@outlook.com or 541-567-3022.



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125 E. Beech Ave. • 567-3232

Pastor David Dever

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Sun. Worship Service.....11:00am

Sun. Evening Worship.....6:00pm

Wed. Prayer & Bible Study.....6:00pm

[www.hermistonlmbc.com](http://www.hermistonlmbc.com)

### Our Lady of Angels Catholic Church

565 W. HERMISTON AVE.  
DAILY MASS: Monday-Friday  
English 7:00 am  
Thursday.....Spanish 6:00 pm  
SATURDAY.....English 5:00 pm  
.....Spanish 7:00 pm  
SUNDAY.....English 9:00 am  
.....Bilingual 11:00 am  
.....Spanish 1:00 pm  
Office.....567-5812

### First Christian Church

"Proclaiming the Message of Hope, Living the Gospel of Love"

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Worship Service...10:30 am  
Children's Church 10:45 am

567-3013

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Sunday School 9:00 AM  
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Children's Church & Nursery Available  
700 West Orchard Avenue  
P.O. Box 933  
Hermiston, Oregon  
541-289-4774

### Seventh-day Adventist Church

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Worship Service.....11:00 a.m.  
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