

IN THE WORKS:

Planning Commission to meet about homeless shelter

By JADE MCDOWELL
NEWS EDITOR

One of the biggest projects Hermiston has currently “in the works” is a potential new homeless shelter.

I’ve reported on the project, known as Stepping Stones, in the past, but some of that reporting took place before the *Hermiston Herald* greatly expanded our readership, so I thought I would recap some of the basics for our new readers.

The city of Hermiston’s planning commission meets Wednesday, July 8, at 7 p.m. at the Hermiston Community Center, 415 South Highway 395, to discuss new zoning rules

that would be specifically designed to govern Stepping Stones or any other similar projects proposed in the future. The hearing will be one of many opportunities people will have to give feedback, including future city council meetings on the issue.

Stepping Stones, as proposed, would be located on a little under an acre of property behind the Agape House, just north of Theater Sports Park. The newly formed Stepping Stones nonprofit’s board, led by Cathy Lloyd, is proposing a fenced-in encampment of 25 Conestoga huts and a community building.

The small huts would be available for an individual,

couple, or single parent with a child. They do not have running water or electricity, but people living in them could access electricity to charge their phones or for other uses in the community building, and could access the Agape House’s showers during the day (organizers hope sometime in the future to build a shower and restroom facility).

People sleeping in the temporary shelter would be asked to clean out their hut completely each morning at 7 a.m. and leave for the day, and would only be able to return after 7 p.m. after checking in with volunteers. They would have access to a locked bin outside their hut to store belongings during

the day.

Lloyd testified during the April 28 city council meeting where this project was first proposed that after the shelter got up and running, guests would be required to earn credits to continue to hold a spot there. Those credits could be earned through opportunities designed to help them escape homelessness, such as a job or studying for their GED or other education.

The zoning amendments that will be discussed at this week’s planning commission would create rules for temporary emergency shelters, such as a homeless shelter or a shelter set up after a natural disaster. According to the agenda packet for

the meeting, the ordinance’s provisions include:

- The shelter must be sited with an “existing permitted industrial use” instead of taking up a vacant property.
- It must be between one-half acre and 1.5 acres and be behind a sight-obscuring fence at least 6 feet tall.
- The density must not be more than one shelter unit per 1,400 square feet of space.
- Shelters must meet safety standards, such as a smoke detector in each unit
- Showers, restrooms and a pet area must be provided
- It must be at least

1,000 feet from a school or other shelter

The agenda packet notes that the city has received complaints from residents who believe such shelters should also be required to be at least 1,000 feet away from city parks, but that is not currently written into the proposed ordinance.

The full agenda packet for the meeting can be found online at hermiston.or.us/meetings. If you attend a planning commission or city council meeting about the topic, be aware that in keeping with Oregon’s current mask mandate, everyone present at city meetings must now wear a mask, and chairs will be spaced at least 6 feet apart.

Former Walmart DC manager switches jobs

By JADE MCDOWELL
NEWS EDITOR

A familiar face at one of Hermiston’s largest employers has taken on a new role.

Josh Burns, who served as general manager of the Walmart Distribution Center in Hermiston, left that role at the end of May. As of July 1, he now works as an insurance agent for Swanson Insurance Group.

Burns said owner Luke Swanson told him months ago he should join up and thought he was joking when he said, “Sure.” But Burns took the necessary test and applied for a license.

“I’ve been in large-scale



HH file photo

Josh Burns, then manager of the Walmart Distribution Center in Hermiston, speaks as members of his leadership team look on at the Distinguished Citizens Awards in 2018.

leadership for almost my whole career,” Burns said. “Now I get a little bit more say in what my day looks

like.”

He said he had always admired Swanson’s work-life balance and the way he

makes time for coaching sports and volunteering.

One thing that drew him to Swanson Insurance Group is that it doesn’t have an office — everyone works from home, allowing them more time with family, and then visits customers at their business or another public place.

“These are all folks who are really busy, so we don’t want to make them come to us. We can go out and meet them where it works for them,” he said.

Burns spent 14 years in total working for Walmart, after a career in the Air Force before that. He said his position at the distribution center

meant that to move up he would need to move away, and his family had already decided that Hermiston was “home.”

“I’ve only ever worked for the government and for the world’s largest corporation, so this is a big change,” Burns said.

Swanson said he was pleased to be able to work with Burns, who has been prominently involved in the community not only as a business leader but also in roles, such as a Rotarian and former Hermiston Chamber of Commerce board president.

“I’m super excited to have Josh,” Swanson said.

“His reputation in town is second to none.”

Swanson Insurance Group started in 2018 and at first had a partnership with Simmons Insurance Group, but as of July 1 is now independent.

The business deals in several different types of insurance, including personal, commercial and agricultural policies. They currently have a staff of four people.

Swanson said his aim to go beyond selling insurance policies and to help guide businesses.

“We want to be there with them as their business is growing,” he said.



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan

Daren and Paulette Dufloth, owners of the Riverside Sports Bar in Umatilla, recently announced that they would be changing the name of the restaurant to The Bridge in a nod to the nearby bridge spanning the Columbia River.

Riverside Sports Bar changes name

By JADE MCDOWELL
NEWS EDITOR

Since COVID-19 hit, it’s been out with the old and in with the new at Riverside Sports Bar in Umatilla.

Now that includes a name change.

Owners Daren and Paulette Dufloth unveiled the new name in a recent Facebook video, rechristening the restaurant The Bridge.

The name and the new logo, they said, reference the bridge that spans the Umatilla River as it reaches the Columbia River in Umatilla.

“It’s really exciting for

us,” Daren said.

The restaurant at 1501 Sixth St. has undergone major renovations since it closed down in March due to the pandemic. Those renovations included removing the stage and poles that had hosted exotic dancers throughout the business’ 26-year existence.

Now The Bridge will be a family-friendly venue with a new menu. They recently opened for dine-in and take-out, but will officially hold their grand opening on Saturday, July 25, all day, with a ribbon-cutting ceremony at 1 p.m.

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