

Food truck pod to stay on Orchard Avenue

By JADE MCDOWELL
NEWS EDITOR

Hermiston's food truck pod will make its permanent home at its current location on the corner of Southwest Third Street and Orchard Avenue.

The Hermiston City Council voted during their July 13 meeting to make improvements to the site rather than try to move it to another location. They had previously studied possible sites at Butte Park and Newport Park, but voted unanimously July 13 that Orchard Avenue was the best option due to its lower cost and prominent location across from the Hermiston Post Office and McKenzie Park.

"Everybody knows where it is right now," councilor Doug Primmer said.

Mayor David Drotzmann expressed concern that the location was hot and unshaded compared to the grassy parks, but councilor Manuel Gutierrez said when he gets tacos there he just walks across the street to McKenzie Park.

The food truck pod, which closes each winter, is in its second year. It began as a pilot program in the summer 2019 with trucks parked in a municipal parking lot. Afterward, councilors agreed that it should continue in the same spot for another season while the city studied possible locations.

Now that the council has decided to keep it there permanently, the city plans to add water and sewer hookups, similar to campsites at an RV park, along with shade and other amenities. City Planner Clint Spencer told the council that Patrick Hunt, who currently manages the pod for the city, had been working with five or six other vendors who had expressed interest in participating in the pod. He said some of them had been held back by the health department not approving new licenses for food trucks during the pandemic, while others had said they would be interested if water and sewer hookups were made available.

On Monday, the city council also voted to join other cities around the country in a lawsuit against the Federal Communications Commission for restrictions it recently placed on cities regard-



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan

The Hermiston City Council voted during their July 13 meeting to keep Hermiston's food truck pod at its current location on the corner of Southwest Third Street and Orchard Avenue and upgrade the site.

ing their ability to control their rights-of-way.

In the past, cities have been able to set fees for telecommunications companies to place devices on power poles, and set rules about how they look. The FCC's change in rules sets a cap on how much cities can charge and restricts them from creating rules about aesthetics.

Drotzmann said the change was meant to pave the way for companies to be able to roll out 5G technology faster, but it would hurt taxpayers.

"Now they've made it a point that we can hardly charge anything, and potentially it will cost us money to engage with these projects, and so the taxpayers will eventually end up paying additional fees rather than these big corporations paying fees," he said.

The council voted to allow the city to participate in the litigation up to \$5,000 in legal fees.

The council also voted to renew its contract with Anderson Perry & Associates as its city engineer for projects, such as new sidewalks, roads and utilities. City Manager Byron Smith said city staff were very pleased with the job the com-

pany had done since they were hired in 2015.

During the time for councilor comments, the council discussed a trip that some of them took on Saturday, July 11, to the shelter in Walla Walla, Washington, run by the Walla Walla Alliance for the Homeless. A Hermiston nonprofit called Stepping Stones is proposing a similar project for Hermiston.

The project would involve small huts, restrooms and a community building behind the Agape House on Harper Road that would be available to homeless residents for use in the evenings if they abide by certain rules.

Councilors brought up some questions and concerns about what they had seen to Cathy Lloyd of Stepping Stones, who was present at the meeting. Primmer, for example, said the Stepping Stones plan involved having volunteers work to check people in during the evenings, which is how the Walla Walla site usually works, but after COVID-19 hit, the state of Washington has mandated that homeless shelters be available around the clock while everyone was required to stay at home.

"If you have 24/7 people,

you've got to have 24/7 people keeping an eye on it, and where's that money going to come from?" he asked.

He also brought up concerns that the proposed site in Hermiston was so close to Theater Sports Park.

Lloyd said that the Walla Walla shelter had received grant money to staff the shelter 24 hours a day, and said that Stepping Stones would make it clear to guests that they would be barred from using the shelter if they got in trouble for trespassing or loitering at the park.

Drotzmann had questions and concerns of his own about the budget and Stepping Stones' ability to keep the project staffed, but also said that business owners in Walla Walla had expressed appreciation that giving homeless residents their own place to sleep, bathe and use the restroom had reduced problems with them doing those things downtown.

Councilors also discussed their concern about rising COVID-19 numbers in Hermiston during the time for councilor reports.

Councilor Roy Barron made an impassioned plea for all Hermiston residents to wear masks. While

councilors and staff were masked at the meeting, a few attendees were not.

Barron said people who care about their neighbors, and who care about the Latino community and agricultural workers that have experienced especially high rates of COVID-19, will wear a mask.

"If you want school to be open in the fall and for there to be no hiccups whatsoever for kids returning back to school, you'll wear a mask," he said. "If you want businesses to remain open, and for them not to suffer any longer, you'll wear a mask."

Hermiston School District Superintendent Tricia Mooney backed up Barron's message by saying that with COVID-19 numbers as high as they are in Umatilla County, school won't be able to reopen completely with all children back to school every day in the fall.

She said the district keeps having to refine its plans to tailor to specific rules, grade levels and building layouts, but in the end parents can expect a hybrid version of school with some online learning and some in-person interactions. The district will then be prepared for fully online learning during temporary closures sparked by outbreaks.

She said it won't be ideal, but it is the reality the district is working with.

"I'm heartbroken for our kids that lost what they lost in the spring with an abrupt closure," she said. "I'm heartbroken for the kids that are going to lose what they're going to lose next year when we can't have our kids back the way that we need to have our kids back."

Drotzmann said the city has several large facilities at its disposal, and that he would be interested in seeing the city offer up use of those facilities if it can help provide more socially distanced classroom space for the district to work with. Other councilors said they liked that idea, even if it involved some sacrifices on the city's part.

"The school district has been, in recent years, very good about what we can do with (their facilities), and I think it's time for us to pay it back," councilor Jackie Myers said.

Hermiston makes plans for new parks and trails in next 20 years

By JADE MCDOWELL
NEWS EDITOR

A 20-year parks master plan for the city of Hermiston envisions adding several new parks, trails and an indoor recreation center to Hermiston over the next two decades.

Consultants from the planning firm Cameron McCarthy presented a draft of the plan to the city council during a work session on July 13. They worked with city staff and the Hermiston School District to put the plan together over the past year, using feedback from focus groups, pop-up booths at community events and an online survey that got more than 700 responses.

"I'm very, very pleased with the work they have done for us," parks and recreation director Larry Fetter said. "The quality of this work is exceptional."

Colin McArthur, a principal at the firm, told the council that at 4.6 acres of park land per 1,000 residents Hermiston has a lower than average ratio of parks per capita for a city of its size. Looking at projected growth for Hermiston, the city would need to add 22.5 new acres of parks just to maintain the current



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan, file

People walk the trails at Riverfront Park in Hermiston in early May.

ratio, McArthur said.

The draft plan suggests and prioritizes 22 projects, including a 67,000-square-foot "health and wellness" center that would include an indoor pool. McArthur said that was the highest priority expressed in feedback from residents. The preferred location for the facility would be on the old fairgrounds behind Hermiston High School.

Another major project would be a regional sports park on the corner of

Northwest 11th Street and Elm Avenue, where a disc golf course currently sits across from Good Shepherd Medical Center. McArthur said a first phase would add off-street parking and four fields that could be used for soccer, lacrosse or other sports. A second phase would add four more fields and a third would add nighttime lighting.

"Hermiston does seem ready and primed for a complex of this caliber," he said.

The plan includes adding a dog park to Butte Park and improvements to the soccer fields there, and improving Steelhead Park to add picnic shelters and a boat ramp for small, unmotorized craft. At Riverfront Park, the city plans to move the parking, restrooms and playground equipment to the south side of the park, which doesn't usually flood when the Umatilla River overflows.

The school district allowed the plan to include some planning of possible parks on its property, including adding a playground, lacrosse fields and a trail to the Field of Dreams off of Diagonal Boulevard. The plan proposes a new neighborhood park, tentatively titled Gettman Park, on land the school district owns off Gettman Road near Armand Larive Middle School.

McArthur said the developers of the Cimarron Terrace and Legacy subdivisions in the northeast part of Hermiston plan to add parks to their developments.

A proposed park tentatively titled Baker's Pond would turn property along Elm Avenue east of Walmart into a "natural area park" with a trail winding through the ponds and other natural habitat

already there.

The city hopes to build a "teen adventure park," including a skate park, on North First Place across from the fire station.

In addition to parks, the plan also calls for new trails connecting different parks around Hermiston, such as a trail from Belt Park to Harrison Park that would then connect to the Oxbow Trail.

City councilor Roy Barron asked McArthur why sprucing up the basketball courts across from Newport Park wasn't on the list, when the courts are well-

used and in need of repair. McArthur said smaller projects like that would fall under the "continuing maintenance" category.

Fetter told the council that the plan, which will come back to the council for adoption after some final tweaks, does not allocate money for the projects outlined or set anything in stone. It is merely meant to be a guide, based on the community's priorities.

"It's very comprehensive in its presentation, but there will be other opportunities that will arise," he said.



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