

Giant produce arrives for Funland



Staff photos by Ben Lonergan
At left, workers unload giant produce at Hermiston's maintenance facility on Monday, Sept. 28, 2020. The larger-than-life replicas will be part of the new Funland playground when it is completed. Above, a worker guides a replica of a mythical squid-like creature known as a kraken off of a truck. The piece will be used in the adventure area of the new Funland playground.

City council advances industrial park project

A local improvement district will amass funds for paving and utilities

By JADE MCDOWELL
NEWS EDITOR

The Hermiston City Council approved formation of a local improvement district during their Monday, Sept. 28, meeting to make more industrial land on the south side of town “shovel ready” for development.

The LID will assess properties along Campbell Drive and Penney Avenue for funding to pave the remainder of Campbell Drive and install water and sewer mains in the area. It will also create a road connecting East Penney Avenue to Highway 395 across from Bellingers, and create an access road into 40 acres of industrial land owned by the Port of Umatilla.

Half of the project will be paid for by a \$1.46 million federal grant from the Economic Development Administration, which Hermiston qualified for after Hermiston Foods closed its processing plant in that industrial zone. The required 50% match for the grant will be met by \$250,000 from the city of Hermiston, \$50,000 from Umatilla County and money assessed from neighboring property owners.

The Port of Umatilla, which owns a majority of the land in the new LID, will be assessed \$700,000 while the other 18 parcels will split the remaining \$500,000 in costs based on the amount of frontage they have along the project.

Two of those property owners, Jon Patterson and Craig Evans, told the city council that the price tag estimated by city engineers at Anderson Perry seemed high.

“I could do it myself for less,” Patterson said.

Evans said he would be assessed for more than he originally paid for his lot.

Property owners can block the formation of an LID if more than 60% of the affected owners file an official opposition, known as a remonstrance. Assistant City Manager Mark Morgan said four of the 20 affected properties filed remonstrances, for 20%, but two of the remonstrances were determined invalid because the owners had previously signed legal agreements with the city to never oppose an LID there.

Morgan said the city hopes to start utility construction next spring and be paving by September 2021.

He said much of Hermiston’s easily accessible industrial properties have filled up or are too far away from water and sewer to be financially viable for development.

This project will open up new parcels of varying sizes for development.

On Sept. 28, the council also approved a supplemental budget adding more than \$10 million to the 2020-21 budget. About \$9.6 million of that comes from the sale of bonds that will pay for construction of a new city hall and renovation of the basement of the Hermiston Library. Another \$540,000 comes from federal CARES Act stimulus dollars that were awarded to the city, and \$159,890 is the insurance payout for the damage to the old city hall caused by a fire in the HVAC system in December 2019.

City Canager Byron Smith showed councilors designs for the new city hall during the meeting, which he hopes to put out to bid in October so that construction can begin in late 2020 or early 2021.

The plan includes a main level, second story and basement that will allow the city to centralize services currently spread throughout multiple buildings in Hermiston.

That includes the municipal court, which is currently taking up space at the public safety building needed by Hermiston Police Department to accommodate its growth.

While councilors all approved of the floor plan, they did not like some cosmetic aspects of the exterior renderings, including barn wood around the windows. They were split evenly between three other alternatives for exterior materials that Smith showed them, and he said it seemed fair to let city staff who will be working in the building break the tie.

During the portion at the end of the meeting for city councilor comment, councilor Roy Barron said he was feeling “disappointed” about the outcome of the council’s last meeting, which resulted in a vote to adopt an ordinance regulating homeless shelters in the city. One aspect of the ordinance bans shelters from within 1,000 feet of schools or parks, and the Stepping Stones nonprofit which had hoped to build a shelter in Hermiston stated afterward that the rule did not leave them a viable location inside the city.

Barron asked if the planning department could draw up some new maps of what options might be available if that number were changed to 500 feet or 750 feet, so the council could revisit the issue and decide if they wanted to amend the ordinance. City Planner Clint Spencer said he would do so.



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