

# City council discusses wayfinding signs

By JADE MCDOWELL  
NEWS EDITOR

The first time Glen Swantak of the design firm MERJE visited Hermiston, he wasn't sure if he was allowed to park in the parking lot across the street from city hall, or if it was a private lot.

"The first time I came here, I went to city hall and I had no idea, really, where to park," he said during a Monday, Oct. 26, work session with the Hermiston City Council. "I didn't know if I was going to get a ticket; I didn't know if I was going to get towed."

The city of Hermiston hopes to fix that sort of confusion soon with the city's wayfinding sign initiative, which MERJE is designing with the help of a local steering committee. The project will place signs around town helping people find their way to parks, trails, downtown, municipal parking lots, the library and other points of interest around the city. The signs could also include informational kiosks, such as maps of downtown.

The plan is for the signs to have a cohesive, decorative look tying them together and beautifying the city in addition to being useful for visitors. Swantak said those sort of touches help signal to people that the community cares about itself.

"It's 50% getting people from point A to point B, but the other 50% is really marketing. It's really about the brand impression you give people when they're a first-time visitor," he said.

Video of Swantak's presentation, including photos of what the various types of signs will look like and where they would be placed around town, can be found on the city of Hermiston's Youtube channel, at [youtube.com/](https://youtube.com/)



MERJE/Contributed Photo

This drawing from a Monday, Oct. 26, 2020, presentation by MERJE to the Hermiston City Council shows what a new sign welcoming people into Hermiston might look like.

watch?v=oMHOIE3IXJw.

City Manager Byron Smith said the city had not budgeted funds to pay for the entire citywide project all at once, but will start adding signs as money becomes available. Swantak suggested that instead of phasing the project by area of town, the city do it by type of sign — replacing all the park signs, for example, or the "Welcome to Hermiston" ones.

City Councilor Roy Baron said he liked the designs and thinks the new signs will help beautify the city, but he said he would be interested in seeing Spanish included on at least some of the signs. Swantak said for signs along Highway 395 pointing to attractions like the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center, including Spanish would violate the Oregon Department of Transportation's rules. But he said they could look at incorporating Spanish into other signs.

After the city council's 6 p.m. work session, during its regular meeting the council approved annexation of a one-half acre of property at 315 E. Theater Lane at the request of the owner, Humberto Medelez.

Acting in its role as the Hermiston Urban Renewal Agency, the council also approved a façade grant for

145 S.W. Fourth St. The property owner plans to spend \$36,229 to put new siding and other improvements on a house to turn it into a business. The city approved a \$10,000 matching grant.

During his presentation of the city's September financial report, Finance Director Mark Krawczyk noted in September the city's cash reserves had dipped below the minimum reserve balance of \$1,867,650 the city council has set for the city, by about \$253,000. However, Krawczyk noted the city had spent about \$333,000 on support to local businesses in August and September, and the state did not reimburse the city for with CARES Act dollars until October, bringing the reserves back up above that line.

He said revenue is down \$334,000 in the first quarter of the 2020-21 fiscal year, mostly due to COVID-19. But he said city departments have also been very good at cutting back their expenses to make up for the decrease.

"There's any one of a number of municipalities that would kill to have only a 12% drop in their revenue, so we're very lucky relative to a number of our fellow cities around the state and the country," he said.

# Columbia Development Authority rescinds vote on industrial land

By JADE MCDOWELL  
NEWS EDITOR

The Columbia Development Authority board has reversed a previous vote the board took stating its intent to deed industrial land on the former Umatilla Chemical Depot over to the Port of Morrow and Port of Umatilla.

The change was a welcome one to the Umatilla County Board of Commissioners, which had opposed the decision. County board chairman John Shafer said he appreciated the CDA's willingness to spend more time considering the issue.

During a Thursday, Oct. 22, meeting, the CDA board voted unanimously to rescind the original 3-2 vote taken Oct. 8 to "memorialize" the board's intent to deed the industrially zoned portions of the depot on the Umatilla County side to the Port of Umatilla for development, and the portions on the Morrow County side to the Port of Morrow after the depot is transferred from the U.S. Army to the CDA, and then the CDA disbands seven years later.

Umatilla County Commissioner Bill Elfering and Bill Tovey of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation were the dissenting votes during the Oct. 8 meeting, stating the entities they represented were interested in being the ones in control of the lease on at least portions of the Umatilla County side. Afterward, Umatilla County commissioners said they felt "blindsided" and "ambushed" by the decision, which had not been listed on the agenda for the Oct. 8 meeting.

Port of Umatilla Gen-

eral Manager Kim Puzey, who had been the one to propose the Oct. 8 vote, made a new motion during the Oct. 22 meeting that the board's previous action be rescinded, "because it was not on the agenda."

Board members voted unanimously in favor of rescind the previous motion to deed the land to the ports, and did not discuss it further in the meeting.

Prior to the Oct. 22 meeting, however, CDA board members had time to take the discussion back to their own entities they represent.

During its Oct. 21 meeting, the Umatilla County Board of Commissioners discussed adopting an official statement that the industrial land should go to the county instead of the port. But Elfering, who represents the county on the CDA board, said he would prefer a motion merely urging the CDA to rescind their previous action and take more time to study and discuss the issue.

The commissioners adopted Elfering's motion.

Morrow County Commissioner Don Russell represents the county on the CDA board, and on Oct. 8 voted in favor of deeding the land to the ports. At the time, he stated it was his understanding that had "always been the plan" on the Morrow County side, since the Port of Morrow has more expertise and money for industrial development.

Commissioners John Doherty and Melissa Lindsay thought the CDA's vote had been premature, however, and on Oct. 20 the board of commissioners sent a letter to the CDA stating a vote of that sig-

nificance should not have been taken when it was not listed on the agenda ahead of time.

"This topic deserves to be correctly noticed in an agenda and allow all parties to be prepared to discuss the matter," the letter stated.

Zoning maps show 1,872 acres of industrial land in Morrow County and 1,278 acres in Umatilla County, mostly along interstates 84 and 82. Other parts of the roughly 20,000-acre former depot have gone to the Oregon Military Department for a National Guard training center or are slated for a wildlife preserve that will be managed by the Tribes.

Umatilla County Commissioner George Murdock said the county estimates the Umatilla County side to be worth about \$20 million to the residents of Umatilla County.




During the CDA's Oct. 22 meeting, the board also discussed preservation of historical assets on the depot, including portions of the Oregon Trail and the site of a munitions explosion that blew up one of the concrete storage igloos and killed six people in 1944.


The board discussed having Morrow County be in charge of the south portion of the Oregon Trail slated for preservation, and placing Umatilla County in charge of the explosion site.


A collection of Oregon Trail advocates have been pushing for the CDA to adopt a legally binding covenant protecting the portions of the trail on the depot forever, but the CDA has not done so as it works through the process of planning for mitigation or preservation of historical and culturally significant assets.

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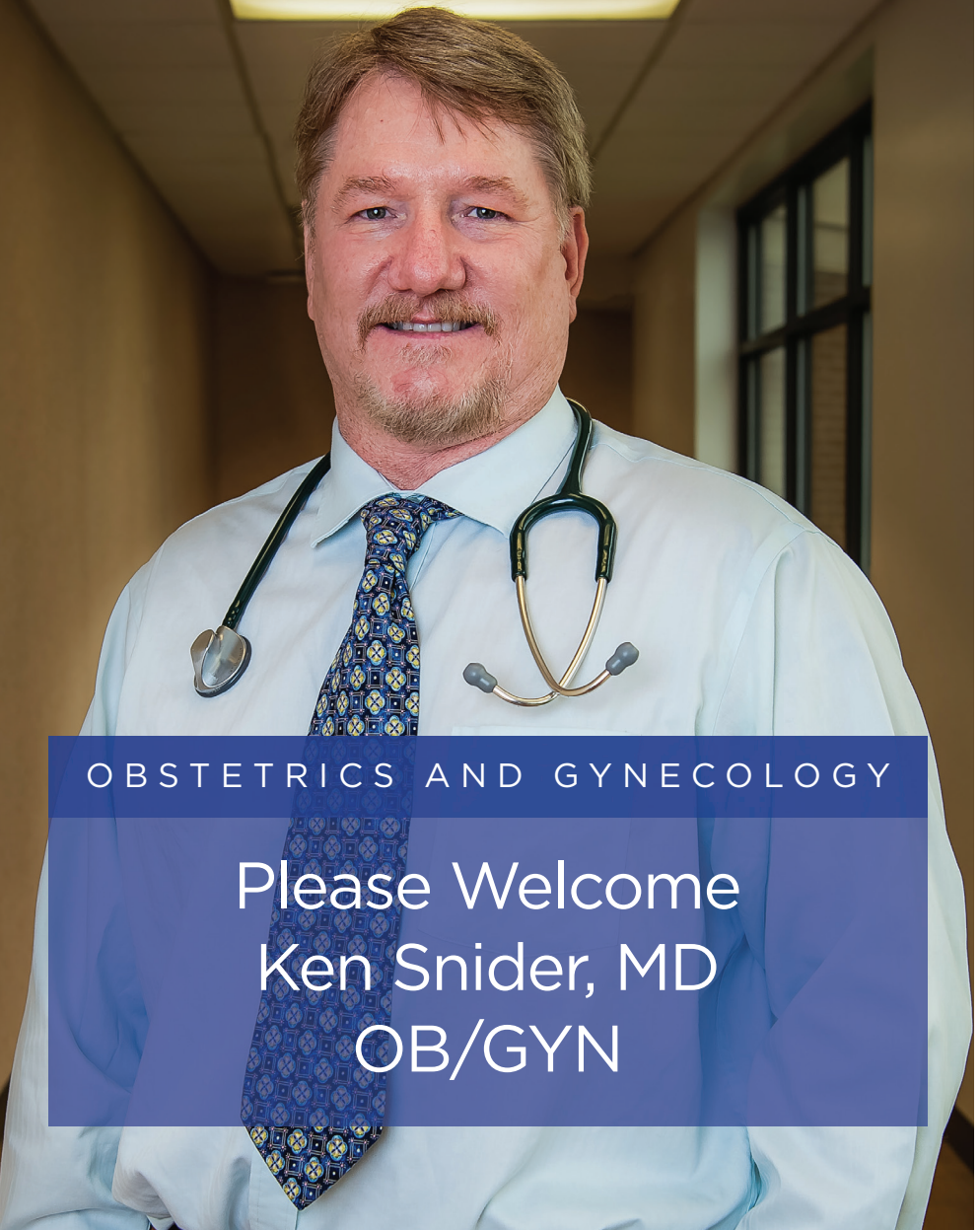




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