

# Hermiston still trying to compensate for COVID-19 losses

Revenues decrease, lowering city's reserves in 2020

By **JADE MCDOWELL**  
NEWS EDITOR

The pandemic continues to disrupt the city of Hermiston's finances, as the city's ending fund balance in October was below the minimum reserve level set by the city council.

The council previously adopted the minimum reserve policy requiring at least \$1,867,650 in its general fund at all times. But in September, the fund dipped below that amount while the city was waiting to be reimbursed by the CARES Act for money it had spent on COVID-19 relief for residents and businesses. During its Monday, Nov. 23, meeting, Finance Director Mark Krawczyk said it happened again in October by \$309,000.

Krawczyk said from March to June the city had about \$750,000 less revenue than projected due to the effects of COVID-19. He said the city was able to spend about \$250,000 less than planned by telling departments to only spend on "mission critical" items, but that still left the city with about \$500,000 less than expected.

Krawczyk said he and City Manager Byron Smith had been putting policies in place to help the city keep its minimum reserve up during the "skinny months" of September and October before property taxes start coming in in November.

"COVID wrecked our plans," he said. "It is not because we weren't pre-

pared. I believe we were. But nobody saw COVID coming."

He said there were things they can do in the coming months to better compensate for the ongoing effects of the pandemic.

Mayor David Drotzmann said the point of the minimum reserve level set by the council was to ensure that if something catastrophic happened, like COVID-19, the city still had plenty of money in its account to pay its bills. That cushion seemed like it worked in the past two months, he said.

"The intent of the minimum reserve is to create a rainy day fund, and it's hard to argue it's not raining this year," he said.

He said the important thing now is to look at how the city will help it not happen going forward, and how the city will rebuild its reserves to a higher level as the economy recovers.

Smith said city staff are working hard to come up with solutions, but if the pandemic causes a significant reduction in property taxes for the year, it could mean a reduction in staff for the city.

"Depending on the impact of property taxes, if we have to look at significant expense reduction we're going to have to start looking at people, and so that will be on the table as we start looking at the budget coming into April, May, June of next year," he said.

In other financial news, the city received a clean financial audit, conducted by Barnett & Moro, with no material weaknesses found.

# Hermiston Kiwanis Club sells Christmas trees



Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald

Mike Henderson, left, measures a tree at the Hermiston Kiwanis Club Christmas tree lot as Diana Henderson supports it on Tuesday, Dec. 1, 2020.

# United Way to distribute emergency food, shelter funds

HERMISTON HERALD

The United Way of the Blue Mountains has been chosen to receive funding for Phase 38 under the Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP) to supplement emergency food and shelter programs.

Umatilla County will receive \$31,679 for Phase 38, according to a news release.

The selection was made by a national board that is chaired by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency and

consists of representatives from American Red Cross; Catholic Charities, USA; National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA; The Jewish Federations of North America; The Salvation Army; and United Way Worldwide. The local board was charged to distribute funds appropriated by Congress to help expand the capacity of food and shelter programs in high-need areas around the country.

The local EFSP board will determine how funds awarded are to be distributed among emergency food and shelter programs run by

local service agencies in the area.

Under the terms of the grant from the national board, local agencies chosen to receive funds must be private voluntary nonprofits or units of government; be eligible to receive federal funds; have an accounting system; practice nondiscrimination; have demonstrated the capability to deliver emergency food and/or shelter programs; and, if they are a private voluntary organization, they must have a voluntary board.

Program funds are used to provide the fol-

lowing, as determined by the local board in funded jurisdictions:

- Food, in the form of served meals or groceries/food boxes
- Lodging in a mass shelter or hotel
- One month's rent or mortgage payment
- One month's utility bill

In keeping with the emergency nature of this award, completed applications must be submitted to [christy@uwbluemt.org](mailto:christy@uwbluemt.org) or completed online at [www.uwbluemt.org/EFSP](http://www.uwbluemt.org/EFSP) no later than 5 p.m. on Thursday, Dec. 10, 2020.

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