

Hermiston City Hall demolition begins

By JADE MCDOWELL
NEWS EDITOR

Contractors began tearing down Hermiston's former city hall on Wednesday, March 17, to make way for a new city hall in the same location.

Demolition began briefly on the east side of the building, and then halted and switched to tearing down the Lanham Building next door, which is being removed to make way for additional parking. During the Monday, March 22, city council meeting, City Manager Byron Smith said the contractor located some materials that needed more careful disposal.

"As often happens with an old building like that, as they were getting into city hall they found a few more hazardous materials in there than our original report had shown so we're already going to get a change order on that to take care of those," Smith said.

He said the project supervisor has made introductions



Contractors begin tearing down the former Hermiston City Hall on the morning of Wednesday, March 17, 2021. The building will be replaced with a larger facility in the same location.

with all the businesses surrounding the construction site, and the city is hosting a meeting and distributing flyers with the timeline for the project and how it may affect businesses. Smith said the parking lot behind Ban-

ner Bank and across from city hall will be closed from March 30 to about June 1 in order to renovate the lot to add additional parking.

The city hall building was originally built as a bank in 1965. According to the

Hermiston Herald's archives, the city purchased the building in June 1986 from Benjamin Franklin Western Heritage Bank for \$365,000 before remodeling it and holding a public open house for the new city hall in March



City of Hermiston/Contributed Photo

An aerial shot shows the start of the demolition process for Hermiston City Hall on Wednesday, March 17, 2021.

1987. Since then, the city's population has roughly doubled, and city staff spread to additional buildings when city hall ran out of space.

In December 2019, a fire burned the building's HVAC system and caused smoke damage throughout the building, according to the city, and city councilors voted to push ahead with building a new city hall sooner than expected rather than put money into repairing the old building.

The new city hall, planned for the current space where

the old building is being demolished, will be three stories and include not only space for city staff, but the new home of the municipal court and office space for some Umatilla County departments.

Until construction is complete, most city staff are in the old Carnegie Library or basement of the Hermiston Public Library. More information, and a live video feed of the construction process, can be found at hermistonprojects.com/cityhall.

Umatilla County school board races get competitive

By ANTONIO SIERRA
STAFF WRITER

This May, thousands of Umatilla County residents will get something that isn't supposed to be novel in a democracy — a choice.

Each spring of every odd numbered year, dozens of seats governing services like public education, fire protection, parks and recreation, public libraries and more go up for election. During most of those elections, most candidates either run unopposed or no one runs at all, meaning the election is determined by write-in or appointment.

But after the Thursday, March 18, filing deadline for this year's May 18 election, residents stepped up to run

for office, especially in the Pendleton and Hermiston school districts.

Multiple challengers file against Hermiston incumbents

The Hermiston School Board hit a low in 2017, when no one filed for an open Position 3 seat. In a district that serves well over 5,000 students, Mark Gomolski won the write-in election with a total of 14 votes.

In 2021, only Position 2 incumbent Bryan Medezlez is getting a free pass to a new term.

Gomolski didn't file to run for a second term, and Dain Gardner, a senior trooper with Oregon State Police, and Lili Gomez, a

records specialist with the Hermiston Police Department, are running to take his place.

Karen Sherman, the Hermiston School Board vice-chair and 20-year veteran of the board, is facing a challenge from Caitlin Melhorn, a coder at Good Shepherd Medical Center, for Position 6. Brent Pitney, the incumbent representing Position 4, is facing a challenge of his own from attorney Sally Anderson Hansell.

Jim Green, the executive director of the Oregon School Boards Association and a self-professed "school board elections nerd," said he's seen the same spike in interest for school board seats across the state.

The association has

encouraged Oregon residents to run for their local school board for years, but he said this cycle may have seen a greater interest in educational policy following the extended school shutdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Other races

The races to govern the rest of the county's taxing districts, such as fire districts and ports, are generally noncompetitive, with a few notable exceptions.

With incumbent Heidi Van Kirk retiring from the Blue Mountain Community College board, two candidates are vying for Zone 3, an area that includes south Pendleton and southern Umatilla County. Echo

farmer Kent Madison will compete against Carrie Sampson-Samuels, a project director for the Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board.

Zone 4, which is based around west Hermiston, will see a contest between incumbent Kim Puzey and Kipp Barron, a "global security officer" from Umatilla. Abe Currin, a cider maker for Blue Mountain Cider Co., is running unopposed to succeed Tony Turner in Zone 6, which encompasses the Milton-Freewater area.

The Umatilla County Special Library District, which provides funding to about a dozen public libraries across the county, also has multiple elections. A board member resigning

mid-term means the board will have two at-large elections: one election for one two-year term and another for a four-year term.

For the four-year term, county voters will select two from a field that includes incumbent John Thomas, BMCC instructor Sharone Pettus McCann and Caleb Barron of Umatilla. For the two-year term, voters will only select one candidate from a group that includes Fatima Machado, an assistant professor of library services at Columbia Basin College, Gaby Gonzalez, a Umatilla property manager, and Jubilee Barron of Umatilla.

Ballots will start going out April 28 for the May 18 election.



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