

City anticipates \$3.6 million in federal stimulus funds

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
NEWS EDITOR

The Hermiston City Council is holding off on firm decisions about how to spend the \$3.6 million the city anticipates from the American Rescue Plan, but city staff and councilors discussed a list of ideas during their Monday, April 26, meeting.

The latest federal stimulus package, designed to speed recovery from the pandemic, includes direct payments to cities and counties to help make up for lost revenue and spur local recovery programs. On Monday, City Manager Byron Smith said the city expects to get \$3.6 million — half this summer, and half the next.

The city has lost about

\$800,000 in revenue from the pandemic, mostly from the early shutdown of the aquatic center last summer and loss of rental fees at city-owned venues, including park shelters and the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center. City Finance Director Mark Krawczyk said that department heads have done a “yeoman’s job” of only spending on “mission critical” items to try to make up for it, but the losses have still cost the city. Last September and October, the city’s general fund dipped below the minimum reserve level set by council.

“I’m not ready to say we’re gonna be back to normal by the end of the fiscal year or even going into the first part of fiscal 2022 in July, but the signs say, I

think, we have bottomed out on our revenue (losses),” Krawczyk said.

Smith told the council he would recommend a part of the ARP funds go into stabilizing the city’s general fund to make sure the balance doesn’t go below the minimum reserve again.

Another top recommendation by staff was to work with CAPECO to seed a permanent fund to help people pay their utility bills if they are struggling financially. Smith said when the city provided funds to CAPECO last year, using CARES Act dollars, the regional non-profit did a good job of providing thorough reports to the city on who received help.

“I was very pleased with how it went,” he said.

Smith also suggested setting aside some money to assist businesses that were hardest hit by pandemic restrictions.

Beyond that, he said, there are a number of economic development or livability projects the city could put some money into. They could launch the second phase of improvements to the South Hermiston Industrial Park, for example, or start early on a planned project to pave and extend Gettman Road to Highway 395, providing another alternate route across town. The money could also be put toward building another water tank, increasing broadband access or starting on the West Trails Project that west Umatilla County cities have been planning to

stretch along the Umatilla River from the Columbia River to Echo.

With all of those options, however, Smith recommended the council hold off on a decision. The American Rescue Plan has also provided a significant amount of money to various state and federal agencies that will likely be offering up the funds in the form of grants, he said, and grants usually require a local match. Smith said if the city doesn’t rush to spend all of the funds immediately, it may be able to leverage some of those funds into a much larger grant.

City Councilor Roy Barron said he agreed that it is fiscally prudent to hold on to some of the funds, as suggested, to look for oppor-

tunities to apply for large grants. Several councilors, however, said they do want to prioritize a portion of the funds as soon as possible to directly help local residents who have been struggling.

Councilor Nancy Peterson pointed out that the state’s eviction moratorium will expire this year, and suggested looking at a fund to help keep residents in their homes. Councilor Doug Primmer said a key to getting back to normal will be helping local businesses recover. Councilor Jackie Myers said she would like to see money go to the food bank at the Agape House, to make it more visible and accessible. And Councilor Maria Duron suggested a donation to the Warming Station.

Transplant bank recognizes Good Shepherd Health Care System

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
NEWS EDITOR

Organ donations are often born out of a day of deep sorrow for one family and great joy for another.

When a hospital does outstanding work in navigating such a difficult, yet life-saving situation, the Pacific Northwest Transplant Bank awards the Hope Award. Good Shepherd Health Care System was recognized on Thursday, April 22, for the work staff did in facilitating such a gift of life in November 2020.

Barbara Thompson, chair of the PNTB board of directors, said organ donations are rare in hospitals the size of Good Shepherd, as most patients that would be a candidate for donation end up being transferred to a larger hospital for care first. Good Shepherd’s last such donation was in 2008.

In November, however, a Good Shepherd employee recognized that a patient’s organs would be able to be



Jade McDowell/Hermiston Herald

Staff from Good Shepherd Health Care System and Pacific Northwest Transplant Bank show off the teardrop-shaped Hope Award, given to hospitals that show outstanding work in facilitating an organ donation.

donated if the patient’s family agreed to do so before the patient was removed from a ventilator.

“You have to recognize really quickly that, that potential exists,” Thompson explained, noting doing so can be difficult in the midst of trying to save a life.

In an all-hands-on-deck effort, staff from multiple departments worked to make arrangements and to support the family as they made

the decision with a chaplain and other advocates by their side. Once the decision was made, doctors, nurses and other staff lined the hallways in a silent “honor walk” as the patient was wheeled to surgery. Director of Acute Care Services Sara Camden said such honor walks are a way to show respect for the patient and their family.

“We know it takes courage to make those decisions,” she said.

LEARN MORE
For more details about organ donation in Oregon and Washington, or to register to be an organ donor, visit donatelifenw.org.

Some of the staff who participated in the honor walk have a personal connection to organ and tissue donation, and know how it can save or dramatically change a life. Camden said she is a living donor — she gave up one of her kidneys for her stepfather a few years ago. And Vice President of Nursing Brian Patrick was overjoyed his daughter got a call in the middle of the night that there was a kidney for her and she needed to rush to the hospital immediately.

April is Donate Life Month, to bring awareness to the need for organ and tissue donations. Andrea Vandomelen, hospital development manager for Pacific Northwest Transplant

Bank, said there are more than 100,000 people in the United States who are on the waiting list for an organ transplant, which can mean years of waiting — time not everyone on the list has.

Some organs can come from living donors, such as a kidney or a part of one’s liver. Tissues, such as corneas, can be donated in many circumstances after a patient has already died. But other lifesaving organs, such as a heart or lungs, are only available in very specific circumstances — a patient must be declared brain dead by two different doctors but still have healthy organs that continue to work. According to the PNTB website, less than 1% of hospital deaths meet the criteria for organ donation.

The Hope Award presented to Good Shepherd from PNTB is shaped like a teardrop, representing the tears of those who have lost a loved one and doctors who have lost a patient, but

also the tears of joy from transplant recipients and their loved ones. Recipients and donor families are able to make choices about whether they would like to share or receive information about each other, either on an anonymous basis passed through a third party, or with the intent to speak directly and perhaps form an ongoing relationship.

Thompson encouraged everyone who would wish their organs to be donated in the event of their death to register for the Donate Life Northwest Donor Registry, a legally binding authorization. For those who aren’t on the registry, but are a candidate for organ donation, the decision is made by the deceased’s next of kin.

Whether people register or not, Thompson said they should discuss their wishes with their family members now, so that their loved ones are not blindsided or asked to make a decision not knowing what they would want.

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