

Fate of Green Property back under consideration

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
NEWS EDITOR

An idea to turn an undeveloped piece of city property into a senior living project in Hermiston has hit a significant bump after the developer the city had planned to partner with backed out.

City Manager Byron Smith said during the Hermiston City Council's April 26 council meeting that Paradigm Compass LLC had decided not to build a \$4 million combination assisted living, memory care and independent living complex after all.

The city purchased a 20-acre parcel next to the Recycled Water Treatment Plant, known as the Green Property, in 2005 for



Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald, File

The city of Hermiston is interested in offering 7.18 acres of land, near the city's recycled water treatment plant, for a potential senior living development.

\$420,000, but plans to use it for recycled water cooling did not pan out. In late 2020, Assistant City Manager Mark Morgan proposed giving a 7-acre piece

of the property to a developer for free if they would build housing for seniors on it, which would provide what the city felt was a needed service, and gen-

erate revenue over time through property taxes and utilities. The city put out a request for proposals and selected the proposed project by Paradigm Compass.

When the company presented its plan to the city council during their April 12 meeting, however, representatives of Guardian Angel Homes and Sun Terrace testified that they already had trouble filling their assisted living facilities and Hermiston did not need another such facility. City councilors voted at that meeting to take two weeks to consider the information presented by both sides.

On Monday, Smith said that Paradigm Compass had pulled out after internal discussions and additional due diligence.

"It seemed like maybe they were able to verify at some level some of the information that was provided by the competitors, and that maybe they felt like they needed to relook at their market study," he said.

Mayor David Drotzmann and some other councilors expressed frustration that the project had fallen apart after coming so far. Drotzmann noted the many hours that Morgan and other staff, as well as councilors who served on the selection committee for the proposals, spent on it, and told other councilors that "you are always going to have critics."

Councilor Nancy Peterson, who had been the one to initially propose post-

poning a decision until April 26, pushed back on the idea that the council's decision not to approve the next step in the plan was what caused Paradigm Compass's decision, stating that if the company had been truly committed to going forward, and extra two weeks to consider the information shouldn't have been enough to derail it.

Morgan said there were developers who would still be interested in the property for other purposes. Councilors came to a consensus that they were still interested in offering up the property for a project that would serve the public good, and staff said they would regroup and come back with more information and ideas at a later date.

School Board:

Continued from Page A1

LLC, a farming company. She has past experience on the Hermiston School District Bond Oversight Committee in 2008 and other boards. She graduated from Hermiston High School.

Anderson Hansell has three children in the district, and said she is deeply interested in the success of the school district. She said after such a challenging and "deeply concerning" year during the pandemic, she has devoted a lot of time and energy to understanding the school district's decision-making.

"The amount of time I've spent advocating, as well, I decided I needed to step up and volunteer," she said.

She said she would like to see more transparency and communication from the district, and better oversight of administrators by the school board. She shared a letter she sent to the school board on Feb. 1, stating the district had a "severe public

relations problem" during the pandemic, and said in an interview that although the pandemic was an unprecedented situation no one at the district had signed up for, she thought there were ways the district could have handled the situation better, particularly communication with parents.

"I think there were a lot of missed opportunities," she said.

Brent Pitney

Brent Pitney is running to retain his seat at Position No. 4 after he was appointed to the Board of Education out of five candidates who applied for an open seat in 2018.

Pitney, a lifelong Hermiston resident, is vice president of Knerr Construction and has a child in high school and one who graduated last year. He said he is running again because he has learned a lot during his service on the board so far and would like to continue that work. He also feels his background in construction can be useful to the district

as it begins construction on projects funded by the 2019 bond.

"I feel that our kids are our future and I want to be a part of helping them excel," he said.

He said while the pandemic has been a "terrible time in our lives," in hindsight there are things the district probably could have done better. He said it is also important to keep in mind that often the board's hands were tied by state rules, and the district did achieve its end goal of bringing students back full time.

He touted programs the district has put in place to help different groups of students, and said the numbers for the district show continued improvement in those areas. He also pointed to work the district has put in place to make sure the bond projects run smoothly, from budgeting to hiring Wenaha Group to manage the project.

Karen Sherman

Karen Sherman is running to retain Position No. 6

on the school board. While she does have an opponent on the ballot, Caitlin Melhorn told the *East Oregonian* that she was dropping out of the race due to the time commitments she already has.

Sherman has served on the Board of Education for 20 years and is a retired teacher with several family members also in education, including a daughter who works for Hermiston High School as an instructional coach. She also volunteers in other capacities, including membership in Altrusa International.

Sherman said right now, the school board's number one priority should be the safety of staff and students during the pandemic. Her other top goals if reelected, she said, are boosting academic achievement, maintaining good financial stewardship and doing more community outreach.

She said the past school year has been a difficult one, starting with all the plans the district made in July 2020 for hybrid learn-

ing before being told by the state it wouldn't be allowed.

"All of us were in a situation where the unknowns were incredible," she said.

She said the district spent a lot of time looking at the state regulations and the area's COVID-19 metrics, and she is pleased students have been able to return to full-time school at a time that is safer, from a COVID-19 standpoint, than any other time since school was closed.

Bryan Medelez

Bryan Medelez is running unopposed for Position No. 2, a seat he was first appointed to in 2019.

Medelez is operations manager for Medelez Inc., a Hermiston trucking company, and serves on the Hermiston Chamber of Commerce's board and as vice president of the city's Hispanic Advisory Committee. He was born and raised in Hermiston, and has two children in the school district, with a third who is currently too young.

He said he is running because he has always been dedicated to serving the community, particularly to help Hermiston's youths. He said his goals for the school board include making sure the district has the right superintendent to lead the district in the right direction, seeing students in the classroom full time and helping the district be the best it can be.

"I want to see our school district at the top of the list when it comes to school districts across the state," he said.

He said there was a lot of frustration at the district during comprehensive distance learning, and as a parent himself, he could sympathize with how difficult it has been, even though the district was often under state mandate.

Medelez said he believes district staff are doing the best they can to close achievement gaps for different groups of students, and said he would like to see the district continue to work to hire more bilingual teachers.

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