

City awards contract for Riverfront Park construction project

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
NEWS EDITOR

Granite Construction will handle a revamp of Riverfront Park after the Hermiston City Council awarded a bid for the project during their Monday, June 14, meeting.

The company was the low bidder of three bids, at \$154,140.

After the park was damaged significantly by flooding in 2019 and 2020, the

city plans to move the parking lot and playground to the south side of the park, out of the path of raging flood waters when the Umatilla River overflows its banks.

City Manager Byron Smith said it was “really kind of scary” to see the power of the river last year, when it ripped the asphalt parking lot into large chunks and carried those heavy pieces away.

The parking lot has since been gravel, but Granite

Construction will add a new parking lot to the south end of the park and the current parking area will be replaced by grass.

The city also plans to build a new, larger playground to replace the one destroyed in 2020, and Granite Construction will do the site preparation for that.

Smith said the city would like to move the restrooms that are also on the north side of the park, but the city doesn't currently have sewer

lines extended to the park, and can't move the restroom away from the septic system there until that changes.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency is covering 75% of the project.

Budget approved

The city council approved the 2021-22 budget during their June 14 meeting, adopting a document that includes millions in new capital projects.

Smith told the council

that after the budget committee had reviewed and recommended the budget for adoption, city staff discovered that some of the transfers between funds were not entered into the right places according to proper fund accounting procedures.

Since the essence of the budget, including the city's planned expenses and revenues, remained the same, Smith said the city's auditors said the council did not need to return the bud-

get to the budget committee for a new approval before voting.

The proposed budget includes a 1% cost of living increase for staff in July 2021 and a 1.5% increase that will take effect in 2022 if revenues come in as expected. The budget includes a one-person increase in staff, from the equivalent of 121.47 full-time employees to 122.47 FTE, with the hiring of an extra water utility worker.



Hermiston Herald, File

Roofers work on a home under construction in the Desert Sky Estates in 2019 in southwest Hermiston.

Hermiston changes rules for homes, building fees

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
NEWS EDITOR

Housing developers will have to adjust to new rules and new prices after the Hermiston City Council adopted several housing-related changes during their Monday, June 14, meeting.

Under mandate from a new statewide housing law, the city had to change its zoning rules to allow duplexes in all residential zones, including those that previously only allowed single-family dwellings. Under House Bill 2001, cities must also treat duplexes and single-family homes the same, requiring Hermiston to amend several chapters of its code of ordinances.

“For the record, the planning commission wanted to make sure that they got it into the record that they very much want to express dissatisfaction with the process taken by the state legislature in mandating these changes — that they represent a change to local land use rules without, really, any local input from the city, and (they) request that future legislative amendments be more considerate of the local character and not one size fits all,” City Planner Clint Spencer said.

One of the more notable changes is that duplexes will now be allowed on smaller lot sizes, matching the 5,000 square feet previously reserved for individual houses. Both single-family and two-family dwellings will be required to provide two parking spaces, and both types of dwellings will now trigger development requirements for public improvements, such as sidewalks.

In a separate action, the city council approved new fees for the building department, raising them 17-33%.

City Manager Byron Smith said the city is required to adopt building permit fees matching the state of Oregon's established fee schedule, in order to use a free building permit program from the state. If the city doesn't use that program, he said, purchase of a different system typically costs about \$35,000.

Smith said some of the fees on the updated schedule had not been updated for 20 years. In one example, a building permit for a project worth more than \$100,000 would go from \$592.15 to \$612.90 plus \$3.25 for each additional \$1,000. Various electrical and plumbing permits increased as well.

In the same ordinance, the council also established a refundable \$100 cleaning deposit for reservations of the Hermiston Public Library's program space.

On Monday the city council added new appendices to its comprehensive plan, as required by House Bill 2003.

The city's planning department worked with Angelo Planning to study housing needs in Hermiston. According to Spencer, the city currently has 5,047 acres of unconstrained residential land and 346 acres that have constraints that would make them unlikely to develop in the future. Of the city's residential land supply, about half of it is developed or already committed for future development, leaving 2,562 acres available for future residential development.

Spencer said those acres could theoretically support 18,075 more housing units in Hermiston, but planners estimate Hermiston will only need 2,030 additional housing units by 2040, with about 38% of those being rentals.

Umatilla County remains in high risk

HERMISTON HERALD

Umatilla County remains in high risk status for COVID-19 restrictions for at least another week, according to updated risk levels released by Gov. Kate Brown on Tuesday, June 15.

The county is one of nine still in high risk as COVID-19 cases trend down and vaccine rates inch up statewide.

Brown has stated that most COVID-19 mandates and the risk level restrictions, including caps on restaurant capacity, will go away when Oregon reaches 70% of adults vaccinated. As of June 15, the state was at 68%.

Umatilla County remains third from the bottom in vaccination rates, according to data from the Oregon Health Authority, with just 39.2% of residents age 16 and older with at least one dose of the vaccine. Brown said counties can automatically drop to low risk status when at least 65% of their residents age 16 and older are vaccinated, but Umatilla County has 16,353 residents to go to meet that benchmark.

Morrow County remains in low risk status for another week, and 41.4% of its population ages 16 and older has had at least one shot of the vaccine.

City summer camps, lessons are half price

HERMISTON HERALD

Hermiston Parks and Recreation summer camps and classes will be more accessible this year thanks to a \$200,000 grant from the Oregon Community Foundation.

The Hermiston City Council approved use of the grant during their Monday, June 14, meeting to temporarily reduce all youth recreation fees by 50% for the remainder of the year, including summer camps, youth sports and swimming lessons. The other 50% will be paid for by the grant from OCF's summer learning fund.

City Manager Byron Smith noted the city also has a scholarship program to cover the full price of those activities for those who can't otherwise afford it. He said the city is partnering with organizations, such as Hermiston School District and Made to Thrive, to help more children receive water safety



Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald, File

Gabriel Montero, 3, leaps from the edge of the pool while playing at the Hermiston Family Aquatic Center on July 7, 2020.

and swimming lessons this summer. If they are able to get more lifeguards hired, they will be able to add more slots.

Councilors applauded

Recreation Director Brandon Artz for pursuing the grant, and said they were thrilled to hear the news.

“You guys did a really wonderful thing here,”

Council President Doug Primmer said. “This is actually one of the most exciting things I've seen (on the agenda) in a long time.”

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