

OUR VIEW

Homeless shelter plan meets an important need

The Umatilla County Board of Commissioners made a good decision last week when it agreed to allow a warming station and temporary living huts to be installed on 10 acres of county land to address the ongoing homeless challenge.

The property, at the intersection of Lind and Bensel roads in Hermiston is a suitable place for the temporary facility.

While the project is mostly spearheaded by a new state law that mandates city codify ordinance that protects people from

finances and fees for sleeping on public lands, the decision by the board was correct.

The homeless shelter plan also is the result of a united effort between the county, Umatilla, Hermiston, Echo and Stanfield. That sends the loud and clear signal that while the new state law is the fuel behind the homeless shelter blueprint, local officials can work together to find a solution that works.

The homeless situation isn't going to go away, and this new plan reflects that reality.

Every winter the same issues regarding the health and safety of those struggling arrives and officials or nonprofits struggle to meet the need.

Ignoring the problem hasn't worked and it isn't a method toward success. We can't simply turn our heads away from the homeless situation. We need to address it through proactive, viable measures that furnish everyone with a solution. Elected officials could have simply kicked the can, so to speak, on this problem down the road. That

they did not shows an admirable degree of foresight and planning.

That's why this decision is such a good one. The key piece of the plan is it will be temporary, not permanent, and that should alleviate at least some concerns by area residents.

The plan, as officials admit, is still in its preliminary stages. Many details still need to be worked out. However, this move to create the temporary shelter and warming stations is a good one and we applaud it.

PETERSON'S POINTS

Confession of a lying letter-to-the-editor writer

I have a confession to make. This is something of which I am both embarrassed and ashamed, but I think of it as a learning opportunity. It could be something you can learn from as well, especially about courage and morality, but also as it concerns writing letters to the editor.



Erick Peterson

Years ago, I served an internship for an entertainment magazine. It was in a big city, it was my first major, full-time media job, and I was willing to do anything I was told.

My first assignment: write letters to the editor. And I did it.

I wrote several letters to the editor and signed fictitious names to them. They ran in the magazine as if they were from our magazine's readers.

At the time, I was even proud of it. Between these letters, bylined articles and numerous uncredited blurbs, I was writing a hefty portion of the publication — as an unpaid intern. Then, as now, I prided myself in the amount I produced.

I even found historical precedent for my actions, as I remember a vague (and possibly false) memory of a university professor once telling me that philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer used to write letters to newspaper editors under different names, using the opportunity to state the errors in his own published works.

Now, I am no Schopenhauer, but I thought this was an interesting idea. So, I wrote my own letters to the editor in which I would attack myself as a writer. For example, one month, I wrote a review of a restaurant. In the following month, I submitted a letter to the editor in which I, writing under a false name, wrote an opposite take on the restaurant and a takedown of the reviewer (who also was me).

I did, though, get a pretty good handle on what made a good letter to the editor.

1) A good letter to the editor should be local. It should reference things seen in a community, recognizable to everyone who might read the letter.

In our community, a good letter might reference graffiti on the Umatilla Bridge, the hardworking Lions Club members volunteering at Hermiston's Butte Park or the lines at our neighborhood Safeway.

2) A good letter to the editor should be productive. It should call people to action, express gratitude or uncover corruption. Rather than be an unproductive rant, it should encourage correct action.

3) A good letter to the editor should be honest. This is obvious (though I was not taking this advice when I was writing my false letters).

4) A good letter to the editor should be short and well-written. This is the most important part. A clear-headed writer can express an opinion in 150 words or less, which is about the length

of a good letter. This letter should be clear, bravely stating a firm opinion.

With these rules in mind, I wrote my letters to the editor. And when people have asked me about writing their editor, I tell them those four things.

Still, when I was writing my false letters, I was not really trying to develop ideas about letter writing. Neither was I merely expressing my ambition or vanity, though this all was part of my work. Rather, I was acting out of cowardice, and this bothers me the most.

Someone told me to lie, so I lied. I was nervous about the job, and I thought that I had to do whatever I was directed.

With some hindsight, though, I know that I could have stood up to the person who made the task. He gave it to me because someone else pressured him about the opinions page. He needed letters to fill out his page.

Instead of lying, we could have asked our readers to send us letters (as I am doing here), or we could have inserted any other legitimate content. Believe me, there is no shortage of people in the world who are willing to get their opinions in print. And I think it is better to print letters from local people than it is to publish letters and editorials from people who could not even find our community on a map.

I look forward to your letters. Let me know what you think.

Erick Peterson is the editor and senior reporter of the Hermiston Herald.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

There are more desirable locations for a homeless shelter

The recent article in the Hermiston Herald highlights the need for a homeless shelter and other services for these at risk people.

The proposed site on part of a 10-acre parcel owned by Umatilla County at the intersection of Lind and Bensel roads is totally unacceptable to any caring person. That site is so far out and away from any needed services that it seems the county has fallen into the mindset of "out of sight then out of mind." Would you want any family member that has fallen on hard times to be temporarily housed way out there? I think not!

There are several more desirable sites in Hermiston to be considered.

1) Former site of High Desert Marina at corner of Bensel Road and Highway 395. Building is now vacant and has full utilities. Property is now for sale and would meet the needs of this planned activity.

2) A large vacant lot just east of Hermiston Veterinary on East Airport Road. This lot has been up for sale for several years. This is the road to Umatilla County Fairgrounds.

3) The most desirable location would be a vacant parcel at the end of Port Drive adjacent to the Oregon National Guard building. This site has a number of important features. Utilities are in and close by. It is close to government services like the Oregon Human Services Office just 100 yards to the east. The Blue Mountain Community College school building close by, as well as Stafford Hansell Government Center.

Groceries and pharmacies are within walking distance. Medical care is close by with easy access by emergency vehicles. Security concerns are manageable at this site. Other social services and churches are close by. This site can be easily reached by visitors and public transportation is available.

The Stepping Stones board last year proposed a shelter modeled after shelters in Walla Walla and elsewhere that use small

Conestoga huts to shelter homeless individuals. Unfortunately the site they proposed was not workable, but we think option three, above, would work nicely.

Walla Walla has a functioning program, why can't Umatilla County put together a similar program? Here is how it can be done right: www.wwallianceforthehomeless.com/sleeping-center.

These services are sorely needed now for the betterment of mankind and the glory of almighty God. Please give serious consideration to the above concerns.

David and Elizabeth Riker Umatilla

Give us an eastern route for I-82

When Interstate 82 was first plotted, the preferred route was east of Hermiston. Studies had indicated most people coming south out of Washington would be heading east after crossing into Oregon. Nothing has changed except there are more of them. Consideration of an east/west bridge route is a desirable goal, but an east route for I-82 is more urgent.

In early 1980, when I-82 was being considered, the business people in Hermiston lobbied for and successfully persuaded the state to build a west alternate and leave Highway 395 to go through Hermiston. Now I have heard there have been potential businesses who have not come into Hermiston because of the traffic problems.

Enough already. Give us an eastern route to I-82.

As for the bridge route, Elm Avenue should be a non-starter. There will be schools on each side of the route. There is a proliferation of housing adjacent to the street. The intersection with Highway 395 has resulted in two truck caused deaths in recent years and there is a potential for more deaths. All of these hazards will dictate a reduction in speed.

The Punkin Center route would lend itself to a roundabout, which traffic planners indicate will move traffic more efficiently.

Carlisle Harrison Hermiston

COLUMN

Stanfield 'road diet' almost makes wallet thinner

If you haven't driven through Stanfield lately, I'm here to provide you with a public service announcement — road construction is taking place on Highway 395 and it wasn't very well marked when I drove through town recently. However, a nice Oregon State Police trooper pointed it out to me.



Tammy Malgesini

I say nice because he didn't give me a ticket. And he could have. I was driving a tad fast coming down the hill. In addition, I couldn't readily find my current insurance card.

As I was driving in what I thought was the right-hand lane, I asked my husband what was in the road? "I don't know, it looks like debris," John said.

The very uniformly placed debris was actually little white tabs that evidently were supposed to alert me that I was driving in a non-lane. I must say, had it been yellow, orange or red it would have been much more obvious.

When the trooper told me I wasn't traveling in a lane of traffic, I was

flooded with memories of newspaper stories and Facebook posts about the Oregon Department of Transportation's recommendations for a "road diet" through Stanfield. The plan, which is now being worked on, is to shrink the five lanes down to three as well as a bike path and additional room for on-street parking.

I'm grateful (and so is my billfold) the officer didn't provide a parting gift in the form of a ticket. I will certainly remember the changes in the road the next time I cruise through Stanfield. In addition, when I was messaging a friend in Pendleton who was planning to come to Hermiston the next day, I told her about the road project — letting her know it's not very clearly marked.

It's been awhile since I received a traffic ticket — more than a decade ago I got stopped for speeding a couple of times within a few months. I challenged one of them and the judge threw it out. However, the other stuck. I was cruising down Old River Road, anticipating getting home to tell John about the great deal I got on a kayak for him at REI. However, the money

I saved was quickly eaten up by the ticket.

And prior to those incidents, I got a speeding ticket in November 1994. After spending a long Thanksgiving weekend at my folks' place in Coos Bay, John and I were driving through Portland when I got pulled over.

I was highly disappointed that my usually ultra protective German shepherd didn't bark at the po-po when he ambled alongside the pickup bed. Gastineau didn't make a peep. Evidently, being a "police dog," he must have felt some sort of camaraderie with the cop. Whatever.

To ensure that wouldn't happen again, I began training our dogs to bark on command to verbal cues in German as well as hand signs. Oh, and to avoid getting pulled over for speeding, I use cruise control as much as possible.

Tammy Malgesini, the Hermiston Herald community writer, enjoys spending time with her husband and two German shepherds, as well as entertaining herself with random musings.

CORRECTIONS

It is the policy of the Hermiston Herald to correct errors as soon as they are discovered. Incorrect information will be corrected on Page 2A. Errors committed on the Opinion page will be corrected on that page. Corrections also are noted in the online versions of our stories.

Please contact the editor at editor@hermistonherald.com or call 541-278-2673 with issues about this policy or to report errors.

SUBMIT A LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Letters Policy: Letters to the Editor is a forum for the Hermiston Herald readers to express themselves on local, state, national or world issues. Brevity is good, but longer letters should be kept to 250 words.

No personal attacks; challenge the opinion, not the person. The Hermiston Herald reserves the right to edit letters for length and for content.

Letters must be original and signed by the writer or writers. Anonymous letters will not be printed. Writers should include a telephone number so they can be reached for questions. Only the letter writer's name and city of residence will be published.

OBITUARY POLICY

The Hermiston Herald publishes paid obituaries. The obituary can include small photos and, for veterans, a flag symbol at no charge. Expanded death notices will be published at no charge. These include information about services. Obituaries may be edited for spelling, proper punctuation and style.

Obituaries and notices may be submitted online at hermistonherald.com/obituaryform, by email to obits@hermistonherald.com, placed via the funeral home or in person at the Hermiston Herald or East Oregonian offices. For more information, call 541-966-0818 or 1-800-522-0255, x221.

