

OUR VIEW

Morrow County needs volunteers to stand up for democracy

Serving on a public body can seem like a daunting endeavor but there is no better way to give back to your community.

Morrow County is searching for people for its planning commission to represent the Boardman and Ione areas. The role is a volunteer one and individuals are appointed for four-year terms ending in December 2025. The planning commission meets once a month.

The board is important for obvious reasons. Volunteer legislators hold hearings on land use applications and issues. Members

also review changes to the county's subdivision and zoning ordinances and the county's comprehensive plans. Commission members also guide county staff on long-term planning linked to land use.

Members of the commission, then, play a pivotal, mostly unseen role. Land use issues are a central part of any rural county and Morrow is no exception.

As a volunteer position, there isn't much in terms of concrete benefits that will go toward an individual who decides to step up and become a commission member. Yet that

really isn't the point. At least not with this board.

The board needs community members who care — care about their county, care about the future and care enough about their neighbors that they want to be there in a crucial position to help them.

No doubt there isn't much instant gratification from working on such a board. And, as with anything connected to democracy, there is always the possibility a decision will spark controversy or push back from voters.

Still, that is the form of government we

live by. Democracy can be messy but that should never be a reason an individual shies away from an important volunteer position.

The work on such a board as the Morrow County Planning Commission isn't going to be a glitzy one, but it will be one where someone can make a real difference. Not just now, but down the road. The key, of course, is finding the right person for the job. We believe there are lots of people out there who could use their expertise for just such a role and we hope they step up.

PETERSON'S POINTS

Following the route of 'Miss Benson's Beetle'

What would you do if you were able to suddenly empty out your desk and walk out of your office, without plans of ever returning?

The main character in my favorite book, "Miss Benson's Beetle," faced this situation, which gives us all something to think about in the age of the pandemic.

In the story, Miss Benson is a middle-aged British woman without adventure, fulfillment or much romance in her life. Ridiculed and belittled by everyone, she longs for a better existence.

One day, she finally reaches the end of her rope, and she walks away from her job to follow a childhood dream. She and a woman she befriends travel to a remote island on the other side of the world. There, they search for a beetle that had yet to be categorized by British scientists at the time.

Fortunately for Miss Benson, she has enough resources to make her trip. She also has no responsibilities, other than ones she made for herself. Not all of us are as fortunate as she. But we should be.

Years ago, I left an OK job to do something different. I spent the next two years emptying my bank account and going back to school to study instrumentation. After I completed my education, I started a new career at which I instantly failed.

If you see me, and you want a laugh, ask me about my two-week employment at a potato plant.

Without savings, and having spent a couple of years out of the newspaper business, I was lost and took the first job available to me.

It was retail, and, though my workmates, managers and many customers were nice, many customers were not. I would come home every day for around two years feeling miserable, and I knew many of my co-workers were feeling the same way.

When the pandemic hit, things got even worse. Customers became combative over mask mandates and others seemed angry without any provocation. A few people regularly greeted me with expletives.

A lot of my co-workers responded productively to

this mood shift, and they had advice for me. I should not take things personally, they said. Rather, I should continue to serve, keeping in mind the value I had to our community. We were essential, they said.

I tried, but was not able to keep their mindset. I was already disappointed about the direction of my life, and the new, angry attitude of others was not sitting well with me. It was also proving infectious. I, too, was getting angrier.

Besides, I had medically fragile family members, whose health concerned me. And I had a stepson who needed my help with his schoolwork.

Quitting my job to care for them was not easy. It involved tightening our belts a bit, but we were able to make it work because of my wife's salaried at-home employment.

I proved to be an excellent caretaker. I cooked, cleaned and cared for my family. By sitting down with one of my stepsons throughout the day, every day, I helped him during a difficult transition to distance learning. He ended one semester of his schooling with a 4.0 GPA.

I did not miss work, but I did apply for available jobs. When a good job, which let me continue caring for my family, became available, I was able to accept it. It is the job I am doing now. Unlike less-filling jobs, the work I am doing now makes me glad. As a response, I put my all into it. I am productive and a better member of our community, which I love more with every passing day.

I know other people who have changed their lives as we all struggle through the pandemic. They have questioned their course, and many of them have charted new ones. They discovered the fragility of life, the brevity of existence. They have reached for more.

For those people who have made brave moves, I applaud you. I also praise those of you who feel demeaned but genuinely have no escape. And I hope for a better world, wherein you have better options. In the meantime, you have my respect, my gratitude and good tips. Thank you.

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



Erick Peterson

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Wolves contribute to elk displacement

Bill Aney's recent column about elk on private property caught my interest. The author seemed to object to property owners charging to hunt elk on private land, even though this is done in every state with big game. The author also noted that projects completed locally have provided the means to keep elk on public land. Why hasn't this been done? The author stated that motorized vehicles were the main reason why elk left public land. Somehow he forgot to mention wolves.

Studies conducted by the Wyoming Game and Fish Department showed a very high correlation between wolf population and elk displacement from winter range and feed-grounds. In a summary of their data from 1995 to 2017, the populations of elk went from a high in 1995 of 51,187, deer population of 62,501, and moose population of 10,000 to populations of 36,839 for elk, 38,088 for deer, and 1,390 for moose. During that time there were no wolves until 1996 and 210 in 2017.

The wolves in Eastern Ore-

gon might well play a huge role in changing elk location. In the same edition of the East Oregonian, two different wolf kills of livestock were reported, one attack near Elgin and the other near Ukiah. Maybe the wolves have learned to drive motorized vehicles.

Mike Mehren
Hermiston

Bi-Mart has let our community down

Bi-Mart has let our community down. With little notice they sold their pharmacies, including the one in Hermiston, to Walgreens, who decided to close it immediately. This has negatively impacted many people, the remaining options are limited. Walmart is already extremely busy and has huge crowds with long waits for service, and difficulty managing complex medication issues.

RiteAid is seriously understaffed. Recently their pharmacy has been closed. People can neither obtain their medications nor have them transferred since other pharmacies can't contact them. That is an unsafe situation for patients.

COLUMN

Collaboration and community give students opportunity to succeed

Look around the Morrow County School District and you'll see more than just our teachers and staff having a positive impact on kids. You'll find an entire community supporting and encouraging our students with their time and resources, making sure they have abundant educational and growth opportunities.

I couldn't be more grateful for this atmosphere of collaboration in Morrow County. It gives our students the opportunity to thrive and sets a model for responsible citizenship and giving back.

This collaboration takes many forms. Sometimes it's a local grant to make a school improvement, like the Boardman Chamber of Commerce's recent funding for new equipment in the Sam Boardman Elementary gymnasium.

Sometimes it's a community partner looking out for the safety of our students, like the City of



Dirk Dirksen

Irrigon's grant-funded walking path along Division Street to give kids a safe path to get to both schools in the community.

Sometimes it's a club like the Riverside FFA Advisory Board raising funds to purchase a greenhouse kit for the high school FFA program or the North Morrow County Arts Foundation staging professional theatrical performances in Irrigon and Boardman to expose younger students to the arts.

And sometimes it's a whole group of generous citizens and businesses donating to a cause, like the countless individuals giving to the Heppner Backpack Food Program to provide take-home weekend meals for kids who need them.

The examples are too numerous to list in full detail here, but in both small ways and large, the community steps up time and again to help. These projects enrich the edu-

cational and development process and wouldn't be possible without collaboration.

I'm particularly grateful for our ongoing partnerships with the Port of Morrow to create the Amazon Web Services Think Big Space at the SAGE Center.

This project brings cutting-edge science, technology, engineering, and mathematics programs to our students. We've been excited to put this space into practice, and this fall our kids have been visiting the labs and had specialist educators come to their classrooms. It's a next-level educational opportunity that not all school districts have.

At the high schools it's supplemented by initiatives like the Student Internship Program, which brings together business partners in Morrow County to allow students to explore career opportunities through paid internships and earn credits all while building their résumés.

After all, the future is what it's all about. We're always keeping in mind the kind of place we hope Morrow County will be decades down the line and how we can help our young people become the leaders they're meant to be.

The COVID-19 pandemic will be far in the rearview by then. But the growth and development opportunities our students are experiencing now will stick with them. I'm extremely proud of our class of 2021 for finishing strong and maintaining a 92% graduation rate, even under difficult circumstances.

Once again, I want to thank all of the community partners who make this possible and give the students of the Morrow County School District the best opportunity to succeed.

Dirk Dirksen is the superintendent of the Morrow County School District.



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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.

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