



Eastern Oregon starts off year cold, wet and windy

By ANTONIO SIERRA
Hermiston Herald

If the early parts of the cold weather season were relatively mild, winter came back with a vengeance at the end of 2021 and into the early days of 2022.

Significant snowfall was followed by subzero temperatures and gusts as high as 50 mph that created hazardous conditions in some parts of Umatilla County.

Hermiston on Dec. 31 had a low of 19 and a high of 34, but temperatures in the largest town in Eastern Oregon fell Jan. 1 to a high of 24 and a low of minus 8.

Pendleton on Thursday, Dec. 30, had a low of 10 degrees, according to data from the National Weather

Service in Pendleton. But on Dec. 31, the low dropped to minus 7, the coldest temperature of the month and 3 degrees shy of the coldest temperature on that date set back in 1978.

Jan. 1 reached a low minus 5 in Pendleton, but that was 7 degrees warmer than the 1979 record of minus 12. Temperatures warmed on Jan. 3, with the low of 7 and a high of 41.

In a Jan. 3, interview, Umatilla County Sheriff's Office Sgt. Dwight Johnson, the manager of the office's search and rescue team, said he was fatigued after responding to calls all night in the Milton-Freewater area.

Originally from Montana, Johnson said the conditions the night of

Jan. 2 were amongst the worst he's seen in his career. Snowplows and heavy equipment from the Oregon Department of Transportation and Umatilla County Public Works aided the county team, but members still occasionally got stuck as rescue crews attempted to reach county residents.

Out of all the calls, Johnson said they only needed to transport one resident: a woman who got stuck in the snow during a grocery run.

Umatilla County Emergency Manager Tom Roberts said that while the county had responded to snow drifts, mostly on the east side of the county, he hadn't heard reports of major property

See Weather, Page A7



Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald

Steam rises off the surface of the Umatilla River on Saturday, Jan 1, 2022, as it passes through Riverfront Park in Hermiston.



Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald

Revelers watch from their cars as fireworks explode in the early hours of Saturday, Jan. 1, 2022, to celebrate the new year at the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center, Hermiston.

Supply and demand go up in Hermiston's housing market

Housing permits went up in value and number in 2021

By ERICK PETERSON
Hermiston Herald

The Hermiston Building Department approved 139 new housing unit permits in 2021, 14 more than an 2020.

The city touted the numbers in a press release Dec. 28. The total job value for housing and other development permits in 2021 was \$105.6 million. The housing permits for 2021 included 48 income-restricted apartments and 30 manufactured homes.

Hermiston Assistant City Manager Mark Morgan there were 129 site-built homes and 10 manufactured homes. He said the rise in the number of new home construction is evidence of "strong, consistent, sustainable growth" in Hermiston.

That consistency matters, he said. A one-year surge, for example, he said, might indicate "one builder is going hard, but when they finish, we see a drop in activity."

The development also is spread geographically around the city, he said, and across different builders and developers.

"If one builder goes bankrupt,



Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald

A pair of new construction homes near completion Tuesday, Jan. 4, 2022, in a housing development off of East Theater Lane in Hermiston.

or one project runs in to a major unforeseen cost, the community is able to keep adding housing," Morgan said.

He credited historically low interest rates in response to the coronavirus pandemic fueling growth, which helped people afford homes.

"Dropping the interest rate on a 30-year mortgage on a \$250,000 loan just 1% from 4% to 3% ends up saving the borrower nearly \$50,000 in financing costs over the 30-year repayment period," Morgan said. "For context on what that

means as far as the city's tools that we have available to assist in housing affordability, one of the common requests that we get is to offer \$5,000 incentive for home buyers. If you take that same \$250,000 home, and give the borrower \$5,000 to go toward a down payment without touching the interest rate, it ends up only saving the borrower a total of about \$8,000 over 30 years, compared to the previous example where they save almost \$50,000."

The previous example, Morgan said, contrasts the power of city

and national government.

"Simply put, in terms of incentivizing housing and helping with affordability, the city has a peashooter compared to the Federal Reserve's bazooka," Morgan said.

Still, he added, there are actions a city can take, and Hermiston has. The city county approved reducing minimum lot sizes in development. He said that allowed builders "to fit more homes in to a development, and helps tip the scales on a lot of projects."

Morgan also said the city council "increased the maximum lot-coverage allowed, which allows builders to fit larger footprint homes on to lots." This, he said, made a lot of projects more profitable.

In addition, the council rezoned about 40 acres near Diagonal Boulevard from industrial to a mix of residential and commercial.

"Those properties had sat stuck in an undeveloped state for nearly 50 years as industrial land," Morgan said, "and now, almost immediately, there is a 200-unit manufactured home park actively developing in it, and there continues to be significant interest in developing the remainder of that land."

The city also built a 1 million-gallon water tower and nearly

2 miles of new water lines in northeast Hermiston through a partnership with Umatilla County to reinvest enterprise zone funding, Morgan said.

"There are active subdivisions under construction right now off of Punkin Center (Road), and off of Theater Lane that are a direct result of that investment," he said. "So far, those developments have started construction on nearly 100 new homes since 2019."

Mike Boylan, principal broker and owner of Boylan Realty, said Hermiston needs more housing.

"We have a shortage, for sure," he said. "It's been short for quite a while now."

He added there has been some improvement lately, as a trickle of houses have entered the market. Still, when they are listed, they sell quickly. For example, he said he recently put a house on the market and within three weeks there was a cash offer for it.

Boylan said the speed at which houses sell shows the demand for homes and the need for new construction. Morgan agreed with the need, and he said there also is a need to maintain affordability, which has been the city council's policy since 2017.

See Housing, Page A7

INSIDE

A2 ▶ 'Hermiston History' looks into the past

A3 ▶ Omicron brings new concerns

A4 ▶ We consider 2022 in light of 2021

A6 ▶ Resolution Run in photos