

## Hayfields approved for more homes in Hermiston

Development would add more than 1,300 homes

By ERICK PETERSON  
Hermiston Herald

The Hayfields development would add more than 1,300 homes to Hermiston.

The 353-acre site is in the city limits near the intersection of Highway 207 and Feedville Road with Community Park to the east. The Hermiston Urban Renewal Agency — which also is the Hermiston City Council — during its meeting Monday, March 14, approved a resolution directing staff to prepare a plan for a new urban renewal district along Feedville Road.

The move came after a presentation from MonteVista Homes. Luke Pickerill, MonteVista Homes owner, said this is a major step for the city.

“At full buildout, we will have 1,300 housing units, which represents about 15% of the total population in today’s numbers of the city of Hermiston,” he said.

He described The Hayfields as a “master planned community,” which means that it is “designed to offer the very best in home life, from the design of open spaces and the architectural fit within the city to environmentally-friendly technology and sophisticated amenities.”

These are “not like old neighborhoods where houses popped up here and there with less or no regard for the overall community design,” his presentation slide stated. Instead, the MPC provides amenities such as parks and gathering spaces for the enjoyment of the neighborhood and the city.

Pickerill gave the council some history of the area. Around 20 years ago, the land was annexed into Hermiston, he said. Plans at the time were to develop the property into a golf course community. This plan hit a snag during the Great Recession of 2008.

Nearly a decade after the recession, Pickerill said, landowners attempted to start a new housing development, but they lacked the infrastructure and available services.

“They found it wasn’t possible without a public/private partnership,” he said.

Between 2017 and 2021, landowners and the city of Hermiston explored several options to make the best possible use out of the site.

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# ‘We had to do something’



Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald

People gather around a booth for Lamb Weston during a job fair March 16, 2022, at the Hermiston Community Center in Hermiston.

## Employers, chamber and city mobilize for recent Hermiston job fair

ERICK PETERSON  
Hermiston Herald

Meeting employers at the entrance of a recent job fair, Val Hoxie said she felt overwhelmed by the people’s expressions of community and warmth.

“People were looking for ways to help,” she said.

There were 47 companies represented at 52 tables at the job fair Wednesday, March 16, at the Hermiston Community Center.

Hoxie, Hermiston Chamber of Commerce executive director, helped organize the event in response to a massive layoff following the Shearer’s Foods Hermiston plant fire.

The company laid off all 231 of its employees at the facility.



Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald

Companies line the Hermiston Community Center during a job fair March 16, 2022, in Hermiston.

### Companies look to put workers to work

Employers at tables met with an estimated 200 to 300 job seekers. By the end of the fair, which took place between 9 a.m. and 4 p.m., the employ-

ers said they had met with many people, including individuals laid off from Shearer’s. They said it was a successful event, and they hope to begin hiring from the pool of these job seekers soon.

At least one of the company representatives had worked for Shearer’s. Candice Chavez, a rack decommission manager for Amazon, said she worked for Shearer’s in Hermiston for around 10 years, ending in November 2020.

She called her leaving “bittersweet.” She said she enjoyed working for Shearer’s. She grew a lot during that time, she said, and she left only because Amazon gave her even more opportunities to grow.

She said she has seen the Shearer’s site since the fire, and it filled her with “a lot of emotions.” She put in a lot of hard work there, she said, and it felt miserable seeing everything go up in flames, literally.

Still, she said, there is life after Shearer’s. She was able to move on after she ended her job

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## Familiar face promoted to lead Morrow County schools

### Mathew Combe selected as new Morrow County School District Superintendent

By ERICK PETERSON  
Hermiston Herald

Mathew Combe will be the new superintendent as soon as he is approved by the Morrow County School Board. His first official day will be July 1.

The district office announced the decision to hire Combe in a Friday, March 18, press release.

“After an exhaustive search, the Morrow County School District Board of Directors is pleased to announce that Mr. Mathew Combe will become the dis-



Combe

Dirksen

trict’s next superintendent,” the press release states.

This announcement came as good news to the current superintendent, Dirk Dirksen.

“Mat Combe has been a long time Morrow County administrator,” Dirksen said. “He’ll do a real good job.”

The press release also mentions that Combe was among 13 applicants for the position.

The only local candidate among three finalists, he was praised by Becky Kin- dle, Morrow County School

District Board chair. Kin- dle said Combe, and the other two candidates, would “do a good job” if they were to be chosen.

In the past week, Combe and other finalists “spent time in the district meeting with staff, community members and high school students from each of the three high schools,” according to the press release that announced the decision to hire him. Also, the release states that board members “conducted extensive reference checks and final interviews before offering Combe the position.”

Following this decision, the Morrow County School District is negotiating with Combe over his new contract. It will then approve the contract at the April 11 board

meeting.

Combe, currently the Heppner Junior/Senior High School principal serves the school district as the director of maintenance and facilities. The district hired him in January 2005. In more recent years, he has served as elementary school principal and the director of alternative education.

Dirksen said that the selection of Combe will “help in the transition,” as Combe is someone who knows the district well. Also, people know Combe, Dirksen said, and other people within the district will find it easy to work with him.

The step from principal to superintendent is something of which Dirksen is familiar. He said he has already spoken with the incoming super-

intendent about what this promotion will entail.

“I was the building principal at Riverside (Junior/Senior High School) before I started the job 11 years ago, and I went over some of the things that I did to prepare myself,” Dirksen said. Now, he added, he is working together with Combe to ready him to be superintendent.

One of the big things ahead, Dirksen said, is a school bond, which will be on the May 17 ballot. The first of the county’s school bonds in over two decades, it would give an upgrade to the district’s schools. If passed, it would raise \$138 million, to be supplemented with another \$4 million from the Oregon School Capital Improvement Matching Program.

“Combe has been actively

involved in the entire bond process and looks forward to utilizing his knowledge as the district moves forward with hopes of passing their bond,” the press release states.

As important as this bond is, though, Dirksen said it is not the only concern for Combe, who will need to “build background” on the position.

He will need to learn more about the ins and outs of the superintendent’s job, Dirksen said.

“There is a difference between being a building administrator on a day-to-day basis and being a superintendent,” Dirksen said. “I know that was a very important thing for me to learn.”

Dirksen’s last day in the position is June 30, Dirksen said.