

Superintendent: Irrigon schools in need

BY ERICK PETERSON
Hermiston Herald

It's time to go back to the drawing board, according to Dirk Dirksen, Morrow School District superintendent.

A \$138 million bond to modernize and improve the district's schools was on the May 17 primary ballot, and it failed by roughly 37% to 63% — 884 votes to 1,480.

This loss changes plans throughout the district, Dirksen said. Its impact on Irrigon schools is just part of the disappointment.

"The plan for Irrigon High School was to update safety and security, remodel classrooms and add a competition gymnasium," he said.

According to the superintendent, these improvements would have created separation between junior high and senior high school students.

Not getting those things, the school will continue the status quo, he said — though this means continuing with "safety problems" and buildings that are in "desperate need of repair."

"In Irrigon specifically, the

building that needs the most repair is A.C. Houghton Elementary," he said. He added that it is the oldest building in the district, as a section of it is around 70 years old.

Fortunately, he stated, these Irrigon schools are not growing; enrollment is not surpassing capacity. Other schools within the Morrow School District are growing, however, Dirksen said.

"In Boardman, there is growth," he stated. "And there's a lot of homes that are going in, in Boardman. That's going to become a problem down the road, with overcrowding."

He said that some Boardman schools could be overcrowded as early as the next school year.

Meanwhile, the district will consider next steps. Likely, Dirksen added, there will be "listening sessions" in which the district solicits public opinions.

"We'll see what people are OK with, or not," he said. "We got a pretty clear message. The last bond was too large."

He said he is unsure about the date of the next bond, though he expressed his feelings that one would be necessary.



Erick Peterson/Hermiston Herald

A.C. Houghton Elementary School in Irrigon, photographed Thursday, June 2, 2022, is the oldest building in the Morrow County School District. Dirk Dirksen, MCSD superintendent, said it is in need of upgrades, which would've been made if a recent bond had been passed.

City manager: Irrigon Farmer's Market bodes well for Irrigon



City of Irrigon/Contributed Photo

A picture from the 2021 Irrigon Farmer's Market shows the sorts of produce available late in the season.

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The Irrigon Farmer's Market is open for business.

The market is at the Irrigon Event Plaza, next to the Irrigon Chamber of Commerce building, 420 N.E. Main Ave. Hours of operation are 7-9 p.m. on Tuesdays, though some sellers start a bit early and fizzle out a bit before quitting time.

Vendors and visitors enjoyed the first day of the market on May 31. Aaron Palmquist, Irrigon city manager, said it went pretty well, with seven booths, and a few dozen shoppers.

"The majority of the things that were there were made at home," Palmquist said of the sale items.

Vendors posted pictures of their goods on Facebook. Freeze dried candies, knit bags and handmade toys were among the products in the photos.

Attendees to the event, he said, were treated to many fun and interesting goods.

Also, they had a beautiful, sunny day for their shopping.

He said, there was not much produce, as it is still early in the grow season. In the coming weeks, he added, he expects more and more fruits and vegetables. This is how the market usually unfolds — with larger vendors bringing in squashes, blueberries, potatoes and more as we approach the summer.

Palmquist said that this market will do more than grow throughout the season; it will expand in the coming years. An enclosed gazebo, which is scheduled to be ready for next year's market, is planned to be built with large windows and a rollup door.

Such a structure should be attractive to vendors, who have voiced their preference to operate indoors. If the weather gets too wet or too windy, commerce can continue, Palmquist said.

The gazebo, he said, should house other events, too. According to the city manager, the venue will host movie nights.

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