
Hermiston Futures Task Force

Report to the Hermiston City Council

May 21, 2012

TABLE OF CONTENTS:

- 1. Introduction**
- 2. City Manager idea solicitation letter**
- 3. Task Force Membership**
- 4. Guiding Principles and Vision of the Task Force**
- 5. Task Force Process for gathering ideas**
- 6. Main Themes**
- 7. Task Force Top Priorities**
- 8. Task Force Recommendations**

INTRODUCTION:

Since the City of Hermiston and the region are constantly growing and changing, since Hermiston is one of the large economic hubs in the region, since Hermiston is now the largest city in Eastern Oregon, and since Hermiston is a leader in our area, it is immensely appropriate to begin to look to and plan for the future. If we are to be successful as a city, proactive planning and thinking ahead is imperative. Therefore, in the late summer of 2011 the City Manager, Ed Brookshier, initiated conversations with area leaders about what they believed were essential components and projects to be undertaken to further develop the city's viability and success. These conversations evolved into what soon became known as the "Hermiston Futures Task Force". This task force has met several times a month each month since early Fall and has had many discussions about what courses of action to take for the best interests of the city, area, and region. During these conversations, it became apparent that obtaining detailed and significant information from the citizens and various groups within our region was beneficial. To that end, the group has had individual conversations, met with civic and humanitarian groups, had focus group meetings, conducted a large community forum for all interested parties, met with all of our elected officials representing our region, met with all media professionals, and conducted a community survey. All of this information has led to the formulation of what the Task Force believes is the identity of what needs to be done in the future to ensure a livable, vital and safe community where people are included, educated and employed. Simply put, it defines "the road map for Hermiston's future".



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July 8, 2011

Dear (Prospective Task Force Member):

Hermiston attained something of a milestone this year when 2010 Census data showed us to now be the largest town in Eastern Oregon. This bit of demography attracted a surprising amount of attention from around the state—I continue to have people from the west side bring it up in conversation.

Still, while we may all take this “achievement” with a bit of tongue-in-cheek, there is probably, at some level, a certain amount of psychological shift from being number two and “trying harder” to being “number one”. And, if this “milestone” is properly seen as a point on a continuum, then the question is begged—a continuum toward what?

I’ve had some conversations around this question with the Mayor, City Councilors and staff. The question has been posed, “If we wish to become a city of 30,000 what will it take to get there and what would it look like?”

The up-shot of these discussions is that I’d like to sit down with you (and a half-dozen or so other business and civic leaders from different sectors of the community) and have a very preliminary discussion around the following questions:

What two or three things most need to happen in the next ten years or so that are critical to insuring the continued success of your business/service in Hermiston?

Probably many of the things we might identify here would be externalities, but some will be more idiosyncratic to our community, area and demography.

I would think our initial conversations on this shouldn’t take more than fifteen or twenty minutes. From there we could see if further dialogue would be of interest and appropriate.

I’ll call you in the next few days to see if I can set a time to drop by your office to discuss this, but wanted to send this letter as a preface.

Thanks for your help on this.

Sincerely,

Ed Brookshier
City Manager

cc: Mayor and Council

Hermiston "FUTURES" Task Force Members

1. Donna Bellinger
2. Ed Brookshier
3. Dennis Burke
4. Don Daggett
5. Jason Edmiston
6. Maria Duron
7. Steve Eldrige
8. Phil Hamm
9. Jer Pratton
10. Chet Prior
11. Kim Puzey
12. Margaret Saylor
13. Bob Severson
14. Wade Smith
15. Fred Ziari

HERMISTON “FUTURES” TASK FORCE

.....A group committed to defining THE ROAD MAP for the Hermiston area’s future

I. THE VISION:

To develop a livable, safe and vital community where people are included, educated and employed

II. THE MISSION:

As the largest city in Eastern Oregon, the City of Hermiston, in order to ensure a progressive and promising future, has engaged in a process for planning for the future in an open manner.

III. THE TASK FORCE

- The Task Force will be comprised of approximately twenty of the area’s prominent and influential leaders from a variety of disciplines, businesses and community groups.
- The proposals and the plans of the Task Force will be presented to the community for input and review and will be transparent.
- The Task Force intends to work cooperatively with community groups and interests within our city and area as well as work collectively where appropriate with other cities and outside entities.
- The Task Force will identify community needs, identify proposals to address those needs, and recommend or implement plans for accomplishing goals.

HERMISTON “FUTURES” TASK FORCE - THE PROCESS

A process for establishing goals, projects and priorities for the future is as follows. In order to be true to our goals of being inclusive, transparent, cooperative with community groups and working in an open manner, the following steps are suggested for shaping our final goals:

Step One:

Invite a friend to our meeting. Each of us invites a friend to our next meeting, and we describe what we have been up to and why. Then we ask them their thoughts and ideas about what Hermiston might be doing in the future. After they have had a chance to air theirs, we can also share our thoughts about that and get reactions to our thinking.

Step Two:

Meet with various groups. Basically do the same thing we did in “Step One” except we do it with groups we identify and wish to speak with. The first step here is to figure out what groups we want to chat with and who will conduct those sessions. I suggest that, in order to cover lots of groups as quickly as possible, we have two or three of us from our main group meet with those groups we have identified, gather their thoughts and report back to our “Futures” Task Force group.

Step Three:

Have a work session with the City Council and the City Planning Commission and essentially follow the same patterns in Steps One and Two. They need to be involved and brought up-to-speed on what we are doing as well as a chance to weigh in on their ideas and goals for the future.

Step Four:

Meet with all of the professional media people - newspaper and radio representatives - and share what we are doing and also ask them about their ideas and goals for Hermiston’s future.

Step Five:

Have a public Community Forum at the community center. Invite all interested community members to weigh in on what they see for our future community development. We may get some new ideas, and we will likely get reinforcement for ideas we have already discussed. At the very least, we will create awareness in the community that we are beginning some important work on our future and doing so in an open manner. This would be conducted much like we did the Eastern Oregon Higher Education Center project public conversation.

Step Six:

For those community members who could not attend the Community Forum, we will conduct a community survey.

Step Seven:

Meet with all of our elected officials: County commissioners, state representatives and senators, federal representatives and senator. Share our project and ideas and see where they may have common interests with what we are doing and where we are headed.

Step Eight:

Our "Futures" Task Force will then be able to sit down and determine, after all we have heard, what the best course of action is and what our goals and projects will be. I am assuming we would likely report this to the City Council

When those plans are finalized, we will again begin to get back to all those people we have talked with. Mail them the goals, put it in the paper, go on the radio talk shows, use the internet, etc., and then begin our tasks.

MAIN THEMES:

These are the main themes emerging as we have had our conversations and dialogues with our various groups and citizens.

1. An inclusive approach for project development with all of the citizens in our community
2. Livability and safety
3. Economic, business and job development
4. Housing, infrastructure, natural resource and technology development
5. Education access and education development
6. Political influence
7. Marketing our community and area
8. Area-wide cooperation on mutually beneficial projects

"FUTURES" TOP PRIORITIES

In order of priority with #1 being the top of the list

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1. Promote and attract business for more economic development and jobs. Create job diversity and industrial development. Promote and attract medical facilities and personnel. Create a small business task force. Develop Simplot property. Attract high tech companies. Develop an event and trade center.
2. Embrace our cultural diversity and enhance it by bringing various people into our organizations and institutional systems. Do what we can to actively minimize the cultural gaps.
3. Increase political connections and clout. Share our goals and long-range plans with people in a position to help us. Further develop intercommunity cooperation. Review the tax structure.
4. Brand and Market Hermiston.
5. Create greater livability. Create a committee to identify needs and a plan for such things as housing, retail, the arts, neighborhood safety, curb appeal and beautification, restaurants, create activities and clubs for kids, childcare, etc.
6. Expand, secure and develop water resources for the area as well as agriculture.
7. Evaluate our safety agencies (police and fire, etc.). Thoroughly review such things as the matrix system and accountability in the justice system for criminals.
8. Perform a traffic and transportation study with recommendations for a master plan.
9. Develop more educational opportunities in the area such as vocational and trade schools. Continue to develop and expand the new Higher Education Center programs. Always maintain a good K-12 program.
10. Improve existing infrastructure. (sewer, roads, water, electricity, and internet delivery etc.)

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE FUTURES TASK FORCE:

The Hermiston "Futures" Task Force recommends taking the following steps toward advancement of the ten priority items identified.

1. Since not all ten priorities can be undertaken all at once, we recommend the focus on those most important at this time.
2. As opportunity, funding, and energy emerge, the Task Force will take on or assist other priority projects. We would rather do a few things well rather than do many projects in a mediocre manner.
3. We intend to approach many of these priority items as a regional or area concern and involve other cities, businesses, agencies, groups and personal as appropriate in the development of goals and actions.
4. Resource development, specifically water for municipal, industrial, and agricultural purposes, is an immediate project to undertake.
5. We intend to assist those projects already underway such as the Event and Trade Center. Where appropriate and needed, the Task Force can lend its support, influence, and assistance.
6. We intend to further help Hermiston define its identity and opportunities and help promote Hermiston. Some may call this "branding and marketing". However, we see something far greater here than just a slogan advertising campaign. The intention is to describe and quantify who we are and where we are going in terms of business, diversity and livability.
7. There will be more actions to come in futures years. The Task Force was meant to be a planning group for the next decade. With our diversity and opportunity in our City and region, we will tackle other priorities as we are able. And, more reports to the City will be forthcoming.