

Year in Review

Continued from A1

"The river bank between the bridge abutment and the land on the other side of the street is eroding," City Manager Richard Meyers told the city council at the time. He went on to describe the damage as more of a "sink hole" than a "pot hole."

Cottage Grove had planned to spend \$400,000 to \$500,000 on repairing South 6th St. but councilors noted during the March meeting that the new revelations concerning the bridge would "kill" that project.

The bad bridge luck didn't let up in 2016 with the September closure of the Swinging Bridge between Madison Ave. and River Rd.

In a letter to City Engineer Ron Bradsby, OBEC Consulting Engineers wrote of a, "conversation regarding the critical condition of this bridge and our serious concern for the safety of the public due to the potential collapse of the bridge."

It wasn't the first time issues with the bridge had been brought to the city's attention. According to Brad Larsen of OBEC, the company had inspected the bridge in 2002 and recommended repairs to the towers as soon as possible. He noted at the time that it was to his understanding those repairs

were never completed. The 2002 inspection estimated the decay in the towers to be at approximately 50 percent.

A November report from OBEC stated that while there was no statewide standard for swinging bridges existed, the formula used by the company to evaluate the bridges condition showed that none of the bridges elements scored close to an ideal rating. The company recommended that the bridge remain closed until the proper rehabilitation could be completed.

In December, the city received \$415,000 to begin work on three troubled bridges in Cottage Grove.

MARIJUANA TAX

Earlier this year, Cottage Grove residents joined the rest of Oregon's municipalities in deciding how to handle the financial aspects of recreational marijuana. In Lane County alone Veneta, Westfir, Dunes City, Florence, Eugene, Springfield and Oakridge saw their local governments exploring the possibility of a three-percent tax.

At its May 25 meeting, the

Cottage Grove City Council voted 6-1 to refer the recreational marijuana tax of three-percent to the voters who would decide if the tax would join the statewide tax on marijuana, which would eventually be reduced from 25 to 17 percent in 2017. Voters approved the measure, creating a revenue stream for the city.

BUSTER KEATON

In August, Bohemia Park welcomed crowds to an outdoor screening of the classic Buster Keaton film, "The General." It marked the 90th anniversary since the silent film had been filmed in Cottage Grove and the surrounding countryside. The event captivated the town but according to Oregon Film's Doug White, it was a year in the making. The movie got a new score by an Oregon composer and showed around the state including theatres in Coos Bay where the Oregon Cultural Trust allowed theatres to charge admission for a fundraiser.

PAKTECH

City Manager Richard Meyers announced in July that the city would be filling one of its

largest industrial spaces after a Eugene business purchased the former Kwikkee building.

The 80,000 square-foot building on Davidson Ave. was purchased by PakTech; a company that manufactures injection-molded packaging handles and in-line automated application equipment for food and beverage and consumer goods industries. At the time, the expansion project was expected to create 35 immediate job openings and an additional 100 once the facility was fully operational.

FIRE ON MT. DAVID

South Lane Fire and Rescue Chief John Wooten did not mince words back in August when discussion the impact a helicopter had on the efforts to suppress a fire on Mr. David.

"The helicopter saved our bacon," Wooten told the Sentinel at the time. "There's no question if the helicopter hadn't been used we would have had a much larger, more intense fire. They saved the day," he said.

The first call concerning the fire came in just after 4:30 p.m. with then Cottage Grove Inter-

im Police Chief Scott Shepherd noting he arrived to see the blaze burning 20-30 yards up the hill behind a complex on J St.

At the time, Shepherd attributed the fire to "reckless burning" and noted he had observed a burnt rug in the woods where the fire may have began.

ELECTIONS

The 2016 election cycle came to a close in Cottage Grove with a new mayor emerging from the race. Jeff Gowing, who had served on the city council since 2009, beat out Mike Fleck and Jake Boone for the spot. The election also saw Bob Ehler to the city council dias and several new legislative actions and ballot measures that carried consequences for the city. A three-percent tax on recreational marijuana was approved, creating a revenue stream for the city. However, a ballot measure to increase Cottage Grove's gas tax failed in November, leaving few options when considering the repair of the city's roadways.

The city council has yet to meet in the New Year and no plans to address the failed measure have been announced. The next meeting of the city council is scheduled for Monday, January 10.

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Mayor Q&A continued

If I have to donate a Saturday night to join the community watch to get more people involved then I'm willing to do that.

One of the most frequent complaints around town is the condition of the roads. A proposal to increase the gas tax and use the funds to repair the roads was voted down in November. Where do we go from here?

We do have a gas tax, it's three cents a gallon. We tried to get it to six which is what Eugene and Springfield have but they voted it down. The other option is to get a bond in and that has to go to the voters again. I was against the bond from the start because the people that complain to me, they live out of town but come to town every day. A bond would affect me but not the people out of town. The tax effects everyone so the out-of-town people would contribute the same as in-town people. What I want to do is talk to legislature and see about the trucks because it bothers me the trucks that come

through town, they come down main and turn and make their delivery. That 80,000-pound truck is doing more damage than my car or motorcycle. Their PUC tax doesn't go to the roads, we get no money off of commercial vehicles. Also, a lot of the roads people complain about are out of our hands, the Hwy. 99, the connector over the overpass, passed Walmart, all that is state, it's ODOT that owns it.

One of the proposals that did pass in November was the implementation of a tax on marijuana. How do you think that is going to impact the community?

I think the amount of money is going to be relatively low. It's not going to be the equivalent to the timber tax dollars we were getting in the '70s. It's not going to do that kind of revenue. I think it's a good thing that it did pass. In my lifetime, that's all I heard was to legalize and tax it. They got their wish to legalize it and the chance to tax it. The way it's going, it might be awhile before we see tax dollars

from it because when they put it in place, the state had no plan on how to fund this so they had to borrow money from the liquor pot and now they're paying that back and it has to be paid back before we see any revenue.

What are your plans for your first 100 days?

I plan on doing, in January, a goal setting session weekend. I'm not a sit back and let other people do person. I'm going to lead my way in and see how it goes. I try to be active in the community.

What's your vision for Cottage Grove?

I just want to continue to be a community that people like to live in, they feel safe that they can walk around the streets at all hours and they don't have to worry about walking to the store or someone coming to

their backyard. I just want it to be a nice community. We have a lot of activities in the summertime and it's nice to be able to show off your town when people come in. I was born and raised here and I stayed here by choice.

A last word?

I'm just a regular guy. I'm not a politician. I'm an elected official. We don't get paid and I wouldn't do it if there was money involved. In a town like Cottage Grove you're doing it to better the community, not to make a personal gain or a resume out of. You should be doing it because you love this community. That's why I got involved. I don't plan to go on to any political office after this. I'm going to do my time as mayor and then sit back and relax.

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