

Editorial...

Move forward with urban renewal grants

Some members of the Sisters City Council have picked an odd time to have second thoughts about the nature and purpose of the City's Urban Renewal District small projects grant program. Funds for the grants come from the tax dollars paid by property owners of the Urban Renewal District, which basically encompasses the downtown commercial district of Sisters.

The City offered this second round of matching grants (up to 50 percent) to encourage property owners to invest in improving the façades of commercial buildings to "achieve visible results that enhance Sisters downtown image, marketability and economic vitality." Applicants sought multiple bids and budgeted for projects. Twenty-one applications were submitted; two were rejected as being ineligible (see related story, page 1).

When the 19 applications came to the Council for approval last Thursday, the Council, with Mayor Chris Frye absent, declined to approve any of the grants. Councilors David Asson and Nancy Connolly expressed reservations about funding projects that might be better considered basic business expenses and concern that funds thus used might take away from other worthy projects. They want to take some time for a further look.

There is a legitimate debate to be had as to whether this kind of tax-increment financing for urban renewal and economic development is appropriate and beneficial to a community

in the long term. There's plenty of room for a philosophical debate over whether local government should be in the business of providing grants to improve the appearance of private businesses.

But the time for that debate in Sisters was *before* the City Council agreed to announce the grants, allocated the funds to make them, and invited applications for them. The councilors had to be aware of the nature of the projects they would be looking at — the City has approved such grants before.

The City has put property owners through a series of hoops, including providing multiple bids for their grant projects, costing time and expense, and has now missed its own timeline for approval, leaving property owners in limbo. As one property owner put it, it's baffling.

If the City Council decides it doesn't want the Urban Renewal Agency to provide such grants, fine. But tabling this round of grants for further study is going back on a deal. If the projects submitted in good faith meet the criteria of the grants, they should be approved. If the Council doesn't like the criteria, they should revise them next time or decide not to offer the small-projects program at all.

Then, at least, everybody knows where they stand — and the City isn't wasting people's time.

Jim Cornelius
News Editor

Letters to the Editor...

The Nugget welcomes contributions from its readers, which must include the writer's name, address and phone number. Letters to the Editor is an open forum for the community and contains unsolicited opinions not necessarily shared by the Editor. The Nugget reserves the right to edit, omit, respond or ask for a response to letters submitted to the Editor. Letters should be no longer than 300 words. Unpublished items are not acknowledged or returned. The deadline for all letters is noon Monday.

To the Editor:

For three years I've not named any individual in any letter, I've purposely kept personalities out of the discussion. However, it is now time for an exception.

If you are curious why some of us can get pretty fired up over the paved-path issue, please read the following completely

contradictory statements that have contributed greatly to feelings of bitterness among the interested parties.

The following excerpt is from the STA's formal objection letter that was submitted to the Forest Service on August 11, 2014. In

See **LETTERS** on page 27

Sisters Weather Forecast

Courtesy of the National Weather Service, Pendleton, Oregon

Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday	Monday
Chance rain/snow 44/25	Mostly sunny 46/23	Partly sunny 53/27	Chance rain 51/25	Chance showers 49/26	Mostly cloudy 52/na

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Start with a dirt trail

By Irv Givot
Guest Columnist

As Carin Baker noted in last week's *Nugget*, building the proposed "paved trail" (which sounds more like a road to me) would be a terribly unwise thing to do to the forest, and I concur. Also there is the concern that beginning the project with a wide paved surface is itself impractical and wasteful. My feeling is that if some people really want a trail there, then start small, like a three-foot-wide dirt track. I might support that. Then, if, after two years or so, the trail proves to be popular, then widen it to four or five feet with a nice surface of bark dust or pea gravel.

If after another two years, it becomes obvious that the trail is being used a lot, then, and only then would there be an argument for paving it. In another words, the common sense approach would be to start small, and demonstrate a need for improvement. Historically, this is the process almost every road you drive on has gone through.

Otherwise, it evokes the analogy of the young couple in their twenties who think they need a McMansion for their first house, or the 16-year-old who wants a brand-new SUV for his/her first vehicle (with their parents' money). If there is no demonstrated use for this trail, which we would only be able to assess years after there is a simple dirt track there, then paving it all at once in the beginning could be a boondoggle, like the infamous "bridge to nowhere" in Alaska. Fortunately in that case people came to their senses before millions of dollars were wasted.

The latter is an example of a bureaucratic/egocentric idea (like back-in parking) where there is no real need, no demand, just someone's bright idea.

As I said, the only way to practically demonstrate a demand is to put a simple dirt trail there and see how much use it gets. Then you would have an argument to improve it.

Another issue is that

most people I know who hike (or ride mountain bikes) in the forest would prefer to stay away from pavement. The only paved trails I know of in rural areas are the ones in state, county or National Parks that go from a parking lot to a scenic attraction, hardly ever more than a half-mile long. The primary reason they're paved is because they get so much use they had to be upgraded. Of course there are many paved trails in urban areas, like on campuses, institutions and parks, but please, our forest is not a theme park and this is not Central Park West or Golden Gate Park North. From my viewpoint, public land — and especially National Forests — are treasures to tread lightly upon and leave no trace.

Unfragmented forests are becoming increasingly rare.

Finally, there is the idea of solitude in the forest vs. walking near someone's property. Like many other long-time Sisters residents, I have spent hours every week for over 20 years walking in the forest, and on trails all around Sisters Country. Walking near someone's property is sometimes necessary for short distances, but in general it is something I avoid if possible. For that reason I would probably never walk or ride on that proposed trail/road. What with barking dogs, people who like their privacy, etc. it is a relief to get way out into the woods where I won't be making any property owner/renter uneasy for whatever reason.

Think about it. Do you really want to walk or ride on a trail where you know some people don't want you to be there? I mean, come on, we have tens of thousands of acres of national forest, just across the road to the south and farther to the west. Why would any local person want to create antagonism and bad feeling along with their walk or ride in the woods? Doesn't make sense. I think the Forest Service made the right decision by withdrawing their support for this project. Let it be.

Opinions expressed in this column are solely those of the writer and are not necessarily shared by the Editor or The Nugget Newspaper.