

COUNCIL: Decision point is near on merchants

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preserve the appearance of remodeled Cascade Avenue; and promote vibrancy of the Sisters community and local economy.

A transient merchant is a person or business who either carries goods, wares, or merchandise from area to area (or city to city) selling or offering them for retail sale; or who offers goods, wares, merchandise or services from a temporary apparatus or temporary location, without making the business permanent and continuous in the city.

An argument supporting limiting transient merchants is that the year-round brick-and-mortar businesses, who provide employment, pay local taxes, and give back to the community in a variety of ways, should be protected from transient merchants who do none of the above.

“When transient vendors come into town for a weekend, reaping the rewards of the town’s hard work, they make sales and take the profit out of the community,” wrote Myrna Dow in a letter to Council. Dow is a longtime Sisters resident and owner

of High Desert Frameworks, a Bend business formerly located on Cascade Avenue.

Some feel they “ride the coat-tails” of the well-established events like the Sisters Outdoor Quilt Show (SOQS), and take earnings away from local businesses who rely on those major event weekends.

“With an average for-sale quilt price of \$700, it takes only 20 quilts purchased from another source to create a \$14,000 loss to quilts sold by SOQS,” pointed out Jeanette Pilak, executive director of the quilt show in a letter to Council.

The SOQS, over the past 40 years, has created an internationally recognized event that draws 10,000 people to Sisters the second Saturday in July, providing an economic impact of \$1.7 million in new money. This is spending by attendees who would not visit the Sisters area if the quilt show did not exist.

In surveying of local residents by all the councilors, Andrea Blum discovered that a prevalent sentiment had to do with other vendors and events coming to town during the four city-wide events.

“They thought that the nonprofits actually putting on those events should be reaping the benefits of all their work,” she reported.

As the discussion began to

bog down in the details, City attorney Steve Bryant clarified a point for Council:

“You do not have to allow transient merchants in the city. What confuses people and frustrates people is when somebody gets a yes here, and somebody else gets a no, and they don’t understand the reason why.”

The outcome of the transient merchant discussion was a consensus (Mayor Chris Frye was not in attendance) that the council allow transient merchants in Sisters. Councilor David Asson wants no restrictions of any kind on number, type, time-frame or locations of the merchants. The other three councilors had varying opinions regarding restrictions such as when and where the transient merchants could sell their wares.

The proposed ordinance regarding transient merchants will say they are allowed in Sisters anytime, except during the four major city-wide events — Sisters Rodeo, Quilt Show, Sisters Folk Festival, and the Harvest Faire. They can also be located anywhere in the city on private or public property, except along Cascade Avenue.

Asson cautioned, “I think you’re looking for trouble by not allowing them on Cascade.”

Council thought that fire

regulations and ADA requirements would adequately manage the number of transient merchants in any one location. The occupancy capacity for fire regulations is designed to maintain adequate pedestrian traffic flow, with appropriate entrances, exits, and aisles.

Council agreed that no public events should be allowed in Sisters during the four city-wide events, due to the fact that two events on those busy weekends create difficulties for the residents in moving around town, it stretches public works staff and City resources thin in trying to accommodate that much activity, and there are safety concerns about fire, medical, and police services being able to respond in a timely manner to emergencies.

Other public events on those four weekends reportedly negatively impact some local businesses.

Rosie Horton, owner of Common Threads in Sisters, stated in a letter, “These city-wide events most definitely contribute to our bottom line and when there are concurrent events/transient merchants, we see the percentage of sales for that weekend decrease.”

Since 2013, she says she has seen a 7 percent decrease during Quilt Show Saturday when a concurrent event is running.

Revisions to the fee schedule for public event permits are also being considered.

“You have the ability to set the fees for people who use your facilities and it doesn’t have to be, unless you want it to be, solely a cost recovery. It can be a fee that’s designed to generate revenue or offset future costs... You can control the market in some respects by what you charge,” said Bryant.

He urged them to adopt the proposed fee schedule, go through a year with those fees, get feedback on them, and then review how it all worked and determine if there need to be adjustments to the schedule.

“That is how to evolve to a place where it meets the needs of the community but balances that with your desire to promote the city,” he said.

The old business license category of temporary business has been eliminated. Staff is proposing adding wording to the business license ordinance that addresses the issue of transient vs. permanent business — including mobile food units.

Depending on the wording, it could allow mobile food units to come and go from their improved sites and still be covered for a full year

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