

EVENTS: Council approved changes on a 4-1 vote

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story on page 31 for more details on the effects of the ordinances.

According to City Manager Cory Misley, staff and Council have undertaken the task of rebuilding the framework of the City’s codes to tighten up the language for better clarity, remove outdated and irrelevant regulations, and make improvements so that the City codes more realistically reflect what the future of Sisters will need.

“This was a work in process for many months, and staff did an exemplary job researching the issues, engaging the community, and recommending these revisions to Council without bias or opinions or assumptions. Virtually every existing event organizer, except one, applauded the changes and recognized the need for them,” said Mayor Chuck Ryan.

Councilor Richard Esterman voted against the changes. Esterman is an event promoter through his Central Oregon Shows, and holds a number of events throughout the summer in Sisters, most at Creekside Park and one during the Quilt Show.

Esterman declared a conflict of interest during consideration of the ordinances, but participated in the discussions and voted no.

“There was no research done by staff on how events were handled by other cities in Oregon,” Esterman said.

He also claimed that the City had no records of maintenance costs for repair of the parks due to damage from events or for staff time processing permits and regulating events.

“There were no factual reasons on why Creekside Park, the few street closures between Memorial Day and Labor Day needed to be addressed and changed,” said Esterman.

When asked how the changes would impact him as an event coordinator, he replied, “How I would be impacted as an event coordinator has no bearing. It is the manner and methods on the way this ordinance structuring was done.”

The closing of Creekside Park to city-wide, large, and medium events is the result of a number of considerations. The staff and Council concluded that the park doesn’t have the infrastructure to support events with large numbers of people. The only restroom facilities are located across the creek in the campground, which is

busy all season long. There is no electricity, often required by larger events. Because of its limited space, large numbers of tents, vendors, and the public cause considerable damage to the lawn, necessitating restoration efforts by Public Works, taking time and costing money.

Parking at Creekside Park is limited, and it is located adjacent to Highway 20, which carries heavy summer traffic. The proposed roundabout at Highway 20 and Locust will have an impact on the traffic near the park. There is a major restoration project planned for the section of Whychus Creek which runs past the park, with instream improvements, bank restoration, and making the bridge ADA compliant. That work will occur over several years.

“We wanted to address perceived potential public-safety issues for larger events at Creekside Park where parking is extremely limited and road closures along with very busy nearby intersections are not practical for engaging

large events in a safe environment,” said Ryan.

Councilor Andrea Blum said, “The current code updates were, in fact, our latest attempt to get ahead of the curve when recent population growth information has confirmed that we are a fast-growing community and likely to continue to be so. So now is the time to prepare for this growth instead of reacting to it when it inevitably arrives.”

Prior to creation and passage of these ordinances, such matters were governed by chapters in the Sisters Municipal Code, which were full of inconsistencies, lacked clarity, and were difficult to administer.

Councilor Michel Preedin explained, “We aren’t trying to upset the apple cart. There was weakness in the previous language. As a city we need to be able to adjust to changes. These ordinances create a framework for us to grow in. What we are doing is a good start on laying groundwork for the future.”

During the past year, staff has had multiple conversations with the organizations and event promoters who may be impacted by some of the changes. Agendas of relevant meetings where changes would be discussed were sent out to those interested parties. Staff also researched how other cities like Hood River, Ashland, Redmond, and others handled public events and transient merchants.

“What we discovered was

that every city does it differently, catering to their own unique circumstances,” said Misley.

Councilor Nancy Connolly, longest-serving member of the current Council, said, “During the five years I have been on Council, we have reviewed these regulations three times, each time modifying them to reflect the conditions at the time. As the city continues to grow, in number of both residents and tourists, we must address both the safety and livability of our town for the residents who live here and pay taxes, and for the tourists who come to enjoy everything Sisters has to offer.”

All four of the councilors who voted in favor of the ordinances voiced concern about maintaining the quality of life that Sisters residents want protected.

“Since I have been on the City Council, we have regularly worked on the code language for events in Sisters to keep up with the growing demand by promoters to use Sisters as a venue for existing and new events. We are also

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balancing the lifestyle enrichments and economic benefit which these events can bring to Sisters, with the ongoing demand by Sisters Country residents to protect the ‘livability’ of our beautiful, safe, small town,” said Blum.

Ryan said, “Limiting city-wide events to one per month is a very fair and equitable decision in making sure we are encouraging large events for the City’s economy while preserving the quality of life of our existing community and use of our parks during the very busy summer months. It also encourages event organizers to schedule events in the less-busy

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