

COMMUNITY

Olive Street reopening pleases shopkeepers

By Craig Howard
Emerald Contributor

The passage of Measure 20-04, which proposed allowing two-way traffic on Olive Street to pass through the Eugene Mall, has politicians and mall shopkeepers optimistic about the economic future of downtown.

The measure narrowly passed in the May 19 primary, with 52 percent of voters approving the proposal. A total of 17,838 voters supported the re-opening of the section of Olive Street between Eighth and 10th avenues, which has been closed since 1971. A total of 16,190 Eugene voters stood opposed.

The Eugene city council introduced the measure, which was designed to inject renewed economic vitality into an economically depressed downtown. The departure of large retailers such as Sears and the Bon Marche seemed to signal a new low point for downtown business.

Council member Kay Robinette said he believes the measure's approval was critical for the future of downtown.

"This measure symbolizes the city's commitment to renew economic activity in the downtown area," he said. "This is just a piece, but we're trying to get more activity and more traffic will definitely make a vital difference."

Opponents of the measure, led by the group Citizens United for Responsible Budgeting, expressed concern about the increase in taxes and downtown traffic, as well as the effect on downtown residents and senior citizens.

The grass-roots organization helped to nearly topple the proposal, despite spending \$2,332 less than supporters of the plan.

Downtown store owners were pleased with 20-04's passage, believing the opening of Olive Street will help to unclog the flow of retail shoppers.

"This is a good thing for business," said Gloria Godrey, the owner of McKenzie Honey Farm and Gifts on 106 W. Broadway. "To keep vitality in an area you've got to have movement because without people, nobody wants to invest."

"I don't promote cars or traffic," she added. "But for the general health of business, you need access. Hopefully, the opening will also discourage some of the negative groups from milling around the mall area."

Ray Moreland, owner of Rosewater's Deli downtown, said the re-opening will help to spark interest in his restaurant and other businesses.

"Our afternoon business was definitely down after Sears and the Bon closed," he said. "Hopefully, this will encourage retail shoppers to come back downtown."

"The service aspects of the street will encourage people not to drive fast," Moreland said. "Plus the city will finally have to tear down those horrible bathrooms in the middle of the street."

City officials say the new road will have a distinctive design in order to enhance the aesthetic image of downtown.

Sandra Gleason of the Eugene Public Works Department said the official street design includes mention of "generous sidewalks," parallel parking on both sides and a narrow intersection at Olive and Broadway to help slow traffic.

The new road will also be lined by antique streetlights and contain brick accents in the pavement as well as a band of brick through the intersection.

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