

MY VOICE

City should better support La Grande Farmers Market

I am writing to express my appreciation to the city of La Grande for reinstating the farmers market permit and allowing the La Grande Farmers Market to be held in Max Square last Saturday.

This permit suspension last week revealed the market's tenuous position at Max Square and with the city — a situation that is not new. Although the market pays rent to use Max Square, its occupancy has been threatened before. A few years ago, the market also was evicted from Max Square with three weeks notice for recon-



NELLA MAE
PARKS
COVE

struction. The market was not considered in the reconstruction schedule although it is

the most frequent user of the space and has been for a decade.

The La Grande Farmers Market draws hundreds of people downtown twice a week to shop. It is one of the only regular tourist attractions, and markets are becoming expected by tourists. The market has dozens of downtown sponsors because of the value it brings to downtown businesses.

My questions are: How can we change this tenuous relationship with the city? When will the city see the value that the market brings to the community, citizens and downtown? What can the city do to start supporting the market in a real way?

As a member of the Oregon Farmers Market Association, I know that many cities in the state either provide staff, funds or other support for their markets. To date, the market receives no money or resources from the city and our use of Max Square is not certain. I know many cities across Oregon would pay big bucks for a market as vibrant and established as ours. In short, I think City Hall takes our market for granted and assumes its permanence.

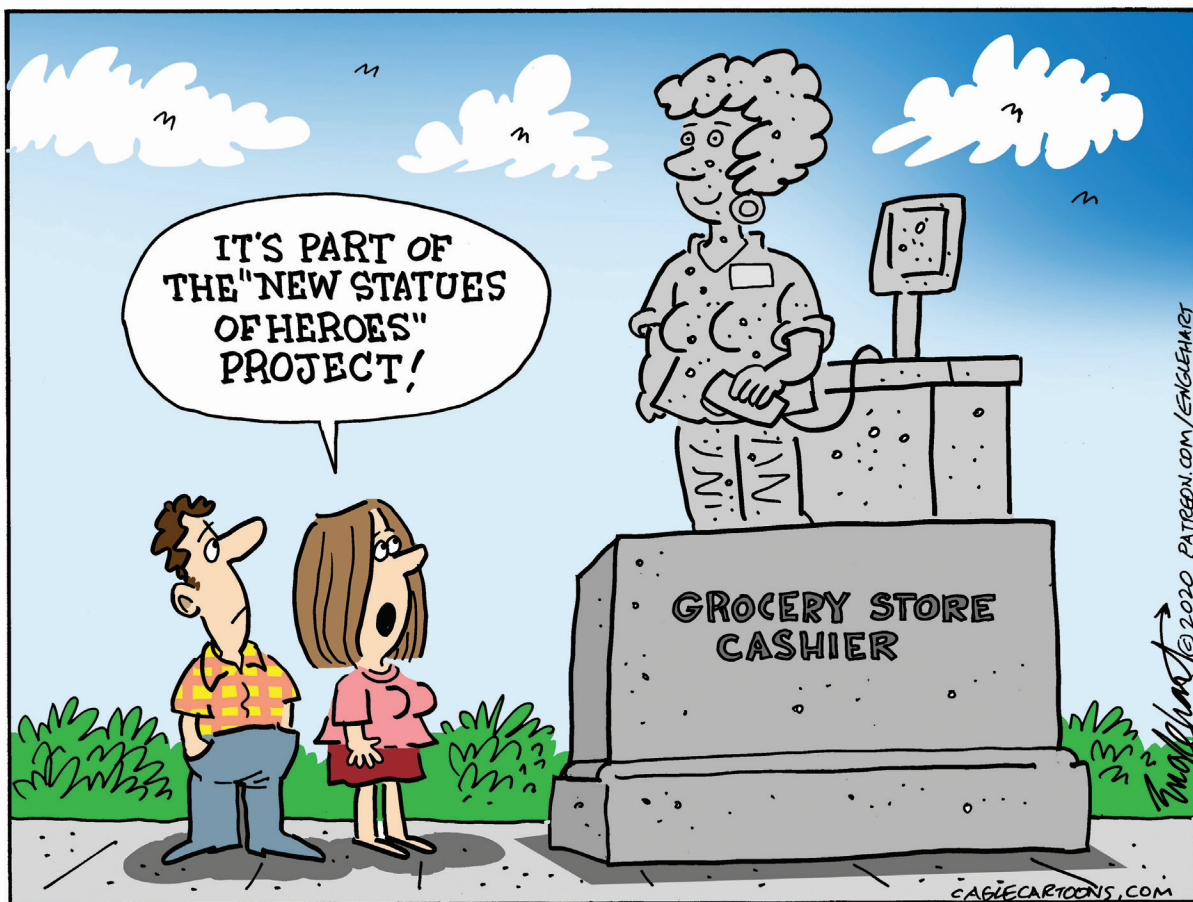
This year, 2020, is the market's 40th year of bootstrapping existence. The community's support for the market is clear. The value the market brings to downtown is clear. This may be the toughest year in the last 40, so perhaps the city could provide some support in words and deeds. Here are a few ideas:

- Establish a city fund supporting the market that could help pay for overhead market costs or the manager position.
- Improve signage for the market.
- Build a bathroom at Max Square to accommodate the market and other events.
- Promote the market with local citizens to help us grow our customer base.
- Develop a long-term agreement with the market to ensure our ongoing use of Max Square.
- Waive the annual rental fee during this difficult year.
- Establish a working group between the city and market to create a firm relationship and come up with other ideas to keep the market strong downtown.

I'm sure the market staff, board members, vendors and shoppers have many more ideas. Let's use this situation to create a better partnership so we can have a successful market for 40 more years.

About the Author

Nella Mae Parks is the owner of Nella Mae's Farm in Cove.



MY VOICE

Why we broke from Northern Blues Forest Collaborative

Recently, our organizations made the difficult decision to withdraw from the Northern Blues Forest Collaborative. As founding members of Northeast Oregon's forest collaboratives, our organizations have spent countless hours working in good faith to guide U.S. Forest Service projects that support our local communities while providing better ecological outcomes for the forests we care so much about.

Unfortunately, like many other stakeholders before us, we have determined the NBFC has devolved to a point where we can no longer lend it credibility with our continued participation.

The premise of collaboration is one we still support. Strongly. As the Forest Service sees its funding continue to dwindle and the public it serves becomes ever more polarized, we need functional collaboration now more than ever.

Good collaboratives provide a platform for representatives from diverse interests to address problems in a landscape we all care about. Good collaborators speak to be understood and listen to understand. We recognize the legitimacy of all interests. We agree on lofty goals of trying to guide willing public agencies toward projects that lead to outcomes that benefit our communities economically, socially and ecologically. We then seek consensus with give-and-take on all sides. Increasingly at the NBFC, when it comes to protecting



Veronica
Warnock



Rob
Klavins

About the Authors

Veronica Warnock is the conservation director for Greater Hells Canyon Council. Rob Klavins is the northeast Oregon field coordinator for Oregon Wild. Both are based in Wallowa County.

things like old growth, roadless forests, wildlife and salmon, there is no give.

Respect for one another's values is written into the NBFC's operating principles. Yet fellow collaborators have marginalized conservation groups and others with whom they disagree. This and more egregious violations of collaborative principles makes legitimate collaboration impossible.

The Forest Service is under increasing pressure to log our public lands more aggressively, rush scientific review and reduce public involvement. If it were functioning as intended, the NBFC would be an inclusive place where this pressure is balanced by a diversity of viewpoints rather than serving as a platform for advancing one-sided agendas.

Forest management and collaboratives work best when there are

agreed upon rules and sideboards. For 25 years, one such set of rules, commonly known as the "Eastside Screens," have provided a safety net for old-growth forests, large trees and the wildlife that depend on them in Eastern Oregon. Now, over the objections of independent scientists and the conservation community, the Trump administration is rushing through a process to undermine those protections. Unfortunately, some interests have pushed this divisive process into the collaborative arena, not only in Northeast Oregon, but around the state.

We know collaboration can be successful and have found success in the past — even winning awards for our efforts. We know what good collaboration looks like.

The NBFC has been devolving for years, which explains its dwindling participation. There aren't many places in Northeast Oregon where conservation voices are given a fair shake. Sadly, the NBFC has become another such place. Therefore, as the last two conservation advocacy members, we felt our continued participation was lending credibility to a dysfunctional collaborative.

While our groups have withdrawn from the NBFC, we remain ready and willing to work in good faith with stakeholders and agency staff to protect and restore the public lands and other places we care so deeply about.

Your views

Pastor Parker misses the mark

I have contained myself as long as I can in regard to pastor James Parker of the Lighthouse Pentecostal Church in Island City. Most all of us are trying our best to follow the governor's orders during this virus pandemic. We happen to be one of the states with the lowest number of cases, but now Union County has its first COVID-19 related death.

Parker, your large gatherings could eventually bring more death to a lot of us older folks as well as younger ones.

When you say, "It's the right thing to do" and you will continue doing it, by whose standards is that, and just what does that mean?

If you really want to do the right thing, Parker, have all your people stay home. God can hear their prayers from home very well.

If it's the absence of the collection plate you missed, brother Parker, I'm sure your congregation will be happy to mail their contributions to you. Please show some consideration and compassion for the rest of us and do the really right thing.

Etta Ruberg
Union

Don't seek payback, seek to pay it forward

Like many in our community, I am saddened and dismayed by the outbreak in Union County. Sometimes I, too, am angry that decisions by the leaders at Light-

house Church have led congregation members to make unsafe choices, and have thus put the wider community at risk. Yet, as a Christian, I cannot condone boycotting Lighthouse member businesses, nor the petition to shut the church permanently.

As Christians, we are to love our neighbors, not vilify them. Lighthouse Church members need our compassion, not our desire for revenge.

Those with COVID-19, and those who've been in contact with them, whether from Lighthouse

Church or not, need our support so they can self-isolate to keep this virus from spreading further.

This outbreak has made us all too aware that our community is not in a bubble of safety from the rest of the state.

Yet we are a community, and we can choose to band together to help one another so we will emerge from this experience stronger and wiser, not splintered by our anger and differences.

If you want to help others, first be on your own best behavior: wash your hands,

stay home except for essential trips and, when you're out, wear a mask and maintain social distancing.

If you want to do more, contact your church, join #LaGrande-Strong Coronavirus Neighborhood Watch on Facebook, or reach out to Community Connection or Neighbors Together to learn how you can help those in need.

Roberta Smythe
Pastor of Zion Lutheran and
St. Peter's Episcopal churches
La Grande

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Email: news@lagrandeobserver.com

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Phone:
541-963-3161

Toll free (Oregon):
1-800-781-3214
Fax: 541-963-7804
Email:
news@lagrandeobserver.com
Website:
www.lagrandeobserver.com
Street address:
911 Jefferson Ave., La Grande

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