

Legislators Work to Save City Building Programs

With new state regulations threatening to shut down city building programs, and delaying permits and inspections for months, a bipartisan group of legislators led by Sen. Chuck Thomsen (R-Hood River), Sen. Betsy Johnson (D-Scappoose), and Rep. Caddy McKeown (D-Coos Bay) is building a coalition to fight regulations that could stop many cities from doing inspections and issuing permits after July 1.

"We are in a housing crisis, and we can't lose this building season" Senator Chuck Thomsen, the meeting organizer, told a group that had assembled in Salem for Oregon's Legislative Days.

The current state regulations were issued on an emergency basis by the state. They followed a controversial Attorney General's Opinion, which opined that cities could no longer contract with building officials, and could only use public employees to perform the permit and inspection services. Erin Doyle, a lobbyist for the League of Oregon Cities, said "Cities have been able to contract with building officials for over 40 years. It works well, particularly for small cities with limited resources, and cities in building booms that want to bring down permitting and inspection wait times. Neither the counties or the state have capacity to take on this work."

Since the opinion was released, cities have been scrambling for alternatives. But, with county departments already at capacity, many cities are being

told that lack of staff will likely cause long delays for permits and inspections. Denise Carey, City Manager for the City of Estacada said, "Permits that we could normally process in three to seven days will take four to six weeks, if we lose our current program."

Attorney Peter Watts, who represents multiple impacted cities, added, "The state recently said they would allow the current programs until July of 2019, but then issued emergency regulations saying the cities could only use public employees. It makes it impossible to advise cities with contract building officials on legal risk. We need immediate clarification from the state. We were completely blindsided by these regulations."

The frustration expressed by Watts and others in the meeting was echoed by the legislators. "It is incomprehensible to me that Building Codes Division (BCD) has engaged in a process so completely lacking in transparency or collaboration. BCD actions pose incalculable risks to local government, jeopardize the construction of badly needed housing, create unnecessary confusion, and potential legal liabilities and/or litigation," said Senator Betsy Johnson, adding, "This entire debacle is a clarion call for legislative engagement in the 2019 Session."

Watts spoke for many in the room when he said, "I'm getting calls from people and they

are scared. This impacts large and small jurisdictions across the state, and the end losers are working Oregonians who just want a home for their families. I can't thank them enough for answering our calls. If there are problems with the current program, we can work through them, but we can't do this to people."

Time To Grow

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2018

"Save the Grandstands" Project

continued from front page

stand at the Vernonia School campus.

The proposal notes that the group is unable to seriously pursue potential funding until the Council changes its vote to demolish the grandstands.

Council scheduled a work-

shop for Wednesday, June 6 to discuss the details of the presented Business Plan. They told the group there is no current plan to begin demolition and they will continue to allow the group to work to finalize their plans.

Vernonia's Voice is published on the 1st and 3rd Thursday. Look for our next issue on June 21.

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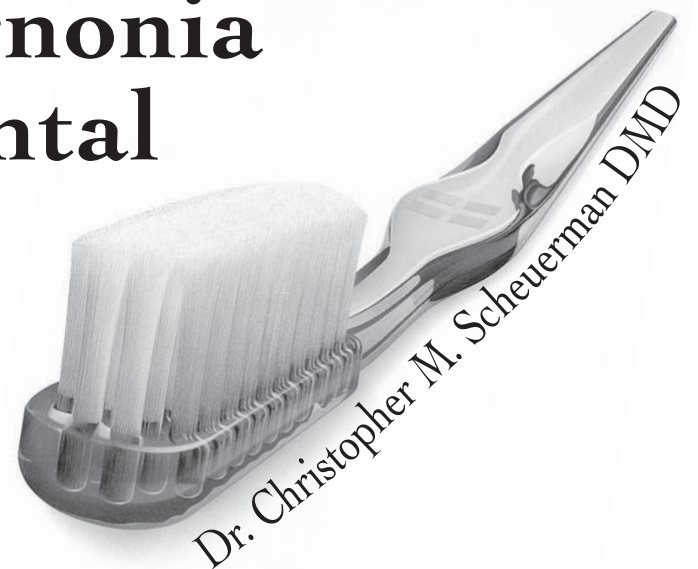
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