

County approves digitization project

Jason McMillen
IVN Contributing Writer

Funding has been approved by the county commissioners to comprehensively digitize land use files that have been piling up in eight different locations since 1973. Scanning these files into a database will streamline the process of applying for building permits and inquiring into the history of a given property. This will save both party's time, and therefore money, since manually searching through 44 years of files is enormously time consuming.

The project will be funded via the Economic Strategic Development Plan which accrues its money wholly through lottery dollars. "There wasn't enough money set aside to do a big infrastructure project but there was enough to at least address this," Julie

Schmelzer, community development director, said.

The primary beneficiary of these papers being digitized is the private individual because, according to Schmelzer, "They tend to do more projects on their property." However, contractors of all types will reportedly benefit from this digitization because the amount of time spent waiting on the county before starting a project will be substantially reduced.

Although the planning department put out bid requests to every Oregon scanning company that they could find they unfortunately, and for reasons unknown, didn't receive a single reply. As a result, they were forced to choose a Washington based company. The usage of local temp workers to complete the project was discussed but it was determined that this would be a more

costly and less effective option because of the jobs' high turnover rate. Using a third party company will also allow the county to hold someone accountable if there are errors in the scanning process.

According to Schmelzer, the county has allocated money for the first phase of the project in the past. It was used for online permitting software. The county is now following through with funding the second part of the process. This second part, the scanning of documents, has been approved for two fiscal years. The first year's budget is \$35,500 and the second has been allocated \$12,000. Schmelzer hopes that the project will be completed by fall.

Ideally, the updated system will help Josephine County compete with Jackson County as far as efficiency and development is concerned. Josephine County suffers

from a serious lack of both commercially and industrially zoned land with only about 5 percent of the county's total falling in those two categories. "We barely have any commercial and we barely have any industrial," Schmelzer summarized, "Years ago, our forefathers had to cut the county into zoning districts and they left very little for commercial." Schmelzer believes that this is because at the time, forestry was such a booming industry that they didn't see the need for other types of economic development.

As it stands right now, Jackson County has more industrial space available as well as having shorter time lines to process applications. However, the county is working toward increasing commercially available land and the completion of this project will give business owners more incentive to set up shop.

Fire District and local businessman at impasse over equipment

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Gary Seitz, owner of Seitz Restoration & Collision, has been given his 30 days' notice to cease operations. The notice, served after years of heated legal controversy, has already, according to Fire Chief Dennis Hoke, expired a few weeks ago. Seitz is still operating despite this and feels strongly that he is receiving unfair treatment.

The controversy surrounds Seitz's spray booth or, more specifically, its fire suppression system. The spray booth model is no longer being made and therefore, in the eyes of the law, nobody can technically be certified to inspect it. When the I.V. Fire District found out that the licensed and bonded serviceman inspecting Seitz's system every six months, as required by law, is technically not certified with the brand, they pressed the issue.

"Essentially he has a fire suppression system from a company that no longer is in business," Hoke said, "The code requires that a fire suppression system has to be

serviced and certified by a private manufacturer or a company that has been certified by that manufacturer for that system."

In summary, Seitz said that he is being forced to buy and install another \$10,000 system despite the current one being perfectly functional and effective at its task.

The counter argument that Seitz brings to the table is that his equipment is almost completely identical to another certifiable system on the market which the serviceman is legally allowed to inspect. In Seitz's view, there is no question about the fire suppression system's serviceability as far as replacement parts are concerned. Since it is functional, and replacement parts can be found, Seitz refuses to pay for a new one.

"He's done everything he can do not to comply with the code that he's known about now for three plus years," Hoke said, summarizing his view of the situation before continuing, "We want businesses to thrive in Cave Junction. It's not the fire districts role to shut people down."



(Photo by Laura Mancuso, Illinois Valley News)

Gary Seitz standing with his paint booth April 11 that is at the center of a dispute with I.V. Fire District at Seitz Restoration & Collision.

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