

Historic Highway and trail nears Hood River

By Gail Oberst
For Columbia Gorge News

The Historic Columbia River Highway and State Trail, a 73-mile restoration project aimed at off-freeway travel, is close to connecting with Hood River, bringing with it added opportunities and concerns for city leaders. The highway and associated trail improvements are not yet fully reconnected, with gaps that now exclude the segment between Viento State Park and the western side of the City of Hood River.

But the gap is closing quickly, according to a May report to the Hood River City Council by Dustin Nilsen, the city's director of planning. Nilsen updated the council on the city's transportation plans, as they relate to the 20-year-old agreement the city has with Oregon Department of Transportation, which is funding Historic Highway improvements.

The Historic Highway's route follows Cascade Avenue and Oak Street through Hood River. Suggested changes to the current Cascade Avenue

streetscape could include connections to trails, a roundabout at Mt. Adams Avenue, added pedestrian crossings, and signals at Rand Road and 20th Avenue, in addition to improved sidewalks and bikeways.

The state's associated Historic Columbia River Trail is within five miles of connecting the city with state trail segments that extend east of Hood River to Mosier and end west of Hood River at Cascade Locks. Oregon State Parks and Recreation is working to connect the currently disconnected hiking and biking paths that border the Historic Highway.

When will the trail be completed? "Given the multimillion-dollar price tag and complexities of the engineering associated with the last five miles from Mitchell Point to Hood River, I would not expect that portion of the trail extension to be completed within five years," said Nilsen.

With the popular trail soon to connect to Hood River, the city council in May discussed the urgency of planning now for additional pedestrian and bike lanes, sidewalks and pedestrian crossings along

Cascade Avenue that would incorporate historic requirements as well as community and visitor needs already identified in the city's plans.

In his report, Nilsen listed council goals as it incorporates historic highway and trail plans into its current plans. "These goals, listed below, are intended to guide the future designs, and fulfill the city's long-range goal of promoting efficient and safe transportation system," Nilsen wrote. Summarized, the goals for Future Cascade Avenue are:

- It will be a corridor with transit, pedestrian, and bicycle facilities that enhances access, equity, and safety.

- It will enhance the historic nature of the highway and the people of the Columbia River.

- It will support a mix of high-quality commercial and residential uses in line with the city's economic opportunities / housing goals.

- It will serve as a gateway to Hood River, providing a sense of place and supporting the livability of the entire community.

Super Manager, please apply

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Mayor Kate McBride joked that only Superman or Superwoman might qualify for the Hood River City Manager's position, as described in the first draft of a May 26 report describing desired qualifications for candidates. Her aside referred to the seven-page list of suggestions for the next city manager, gathered from city staff, council and community members.

Rachael Fuller, Hood River's city manager for the past three years, announced her resignation in March. Her last day is July 2. Finalists for the position are scheduled to be interviewed by the council in September.

"As a whole, it's a tall order, a lengthy list," said Erik Jensen, owner of Jensen Strategies, a Portland management consultant company hired to help find Fuller's replacement. The first draft of preferred qualifications, which will be condensed and edited in the next few weeks, is the first step in the search process.

"You're never going to find a candidate that checks all of these boxes at 100 percent. What you're looking for is who's going to come

the closest to that," Jensen said, adding that high expectations will not deter quality candidates.

"Hood River is the sexy one in our pool. Everyone wants to come to Hood River. It's got a very positive reputation," said Jensen. Other similar-sized cities in Oregon are also searching for city managers, he said.

The list described an ideal candidate with an advanced education and training in public administration, 10 years of experience, training in housing policy, community engagement, public infrastructure management, and union relations, followed by dozens of desired attributes and policy directives. Prominent among the desired attributes was the call for a city manager who can address housing and growth concerns in Hood River while expanding equity, diversity and inclusion among staff, council and community members.

"You want a city manager who has experience ... someone who's really seasoned, who's got some stripes on their sleeves," said Jensen.

Jensen's staff will use the suggested qualifications to narrow the applicants in the search's preliminary process but those

added qualifications may also increase the costs. Jensen suggested offering an annual salary range between \$130,000 and \$160,000, not including benefits. The council will decide on the range before it officially advertises for the position, tentatively beginning June 14.

The first draft of preferred qualifications is in the May 26 meeting packet at cityofhoodriver.gov/administration/meetings.

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