

NINKASI WORKING TO MITIGATE NOISE, CEO SAYS

Eugene’s Whiteaker neighborhood is an eclectic blend of houses, businesses and industrial complexes, “a mixed-use neighborhood,” as Ninkasi CEO Nikos Ridge puts it. This mix can bring unwelcome noise to Whiteaker residents: Shouts and music from the booming nightlife scene on Blair Boulevard make their way in to households or, in Ninkasi’s case, industrial noise from its new brewing facility.

The expansion went online in April of last year, and in terms of brewing, Ninkasi considers it a success — the facility currently produces about 70,000 barrels of beer per year, and it allows Ninkasi to brew a greater variety of beers.

But the noise from the brewing equipment, Ridge says, is a problem — one that he is trying to fix.

It wasn’t readily apparent to anyone just how much noise the equipment would make until it was up and running, and Ridge says that while Ninkasi followed permit and city code procedures, the city of Eugene doesn’t have a process that assesses the auditory impact of a building. Because of that, the structure was never evaluated in terms of noise output.

“We’re in a situation where we wish we could have designed it a bit differently, but since we didn’t, we’ve been working to develop an ex post facto solution,” Ridge says. “It’s just taking some time because it’s a big project and has to be custom engineered with regards to the building.”

Ridge says a giant, sound-blocking wall is in the works, manufactured by Oregon Industrial with a cost of around \$90,000.

In the meantime, nearby Whiteaker residents say they can hear loud noises coming from Ninkasi’s facility.

“It gives me headaches and stresses me out, and it makes it so I can’t even use my yard,” says Whiteaker resident Hannah Levin, an LCC student. “It’s a constant, high-pitched noise. Trucks run for hours and hours on end, there are fork lifts and trucks going at 6 am and even just the music they play.”

Levin says she talked to the city of Eugene, but the sound levels do not exceed Eugene’s decibel threshold.

“There isn’t a formal compliance action, but the city is working with neighbors and Ninkasi to help facilitate a solution,” says Laura Hammond, communication and policy analyst for the city of Eugene, in a written statement. “We understand that Ninkasi has recognized the noise as an issue and is working on constructing a sound wall to reduce the impact.”

Ridge says he is waiting on final permits from the city, and he hopes to move forward with the construction project in the next few months.

“It hasn’t made us super happy either that it’s taking so long,” Ridge says. “It has become much more involved than we thought it would be early on, but we did want to take the time and make sure we put an actual solution in place, not just a stopgap measure.” — *Amy Schneider*

AMENDMENT WOULD PUT LOCAL RIGHTS IN LOCAL HANDS

Organizers with the Oregon Community Rights Network (OCRN) have launched a campaign to put a consti-

tutional amendment on the Oregon ballot in November 2016 that will affirm the right to local self-government and potentially reframe how environmental debates play out.

The amendment would protect the right of local governments to pass ordinances — even if they conflict with the interests of corporations — and ensure that these ordinances are legally binding.

Under this rights-based framework, communities and even natural environments are granted legal rights, which can be violated.

The amendment could help grant authority to the local communities that are directly affected by environmental issues — whether it is by GMO farming, fracking, mining or constructing an LNG terminal.

Ann Kneeland, a Eugene-based attorney with Support Local Food Rights, singled out the Parvin Butte gravel mine in Dexter — which went forward despite local opposition — as a case in which local people were disempowered. “That’s an example of how our current system operates,” she says.

A local-rights amendment, Kneeland says, could change how such issues are decided. “It creates the right of local people to use local government to enact laws,” she says. “It’s about people talking with each other and recognizing that we have rights that are being squashed.”

She adds, “It is not new. It is all founded on the Declaration of Independence.”

The initiative is part of a growing local-rights movement, says Mary Geddry, a representative with OCRN. Geddry points out that more than 200 communities across the U.S. have passed ordinances that protect local rights. “Only nine have been challenged in court,” she adds.

The Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund, an organization based in Pennsylvania, helped pioneer

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