

Parks Board talks about KRP orchards

By CRAIG MURPHY
Of the Keizertimes

What will happen with the remaining trees in the orchard at Keizer Rapids Park?

The topic has come to the forefront recently in light of Tony Weathers being granted a release from his contract with the city to harvest the orchards, citing potential litigation issues related to spraying pesticides.

When Keizer City Councilors agreed to let Weathers out of his contract, the question arose as to whether the remaining trees could be taken down.

The question of what to do with the trees came up again during the July 14 Keizer Parks and Recreation Advisory Board meeting. It also came up at this week's council meeting (see related story, pg. A1).

"Could the rest be leased out?" Richard Walsh asked at the Parks Board meeting.

Bill Lawyer, Public Works director for Keizer, isn't holding his breath on that.

"Potentially, but it's being looked at as no more farming in the orchard," Lawyer said.

Brandon Smith, the council liaison to the Parks Board, noted the argument some make for having the trees gone.

"If the trees come down, it looks like progress is being made," Smith said. "Some felt empty ground would exert pressure on the city to do something."

Walsh pointed out the KRP master plan has trees in the orchard being gone.

"As long as the trees are there, they will be a hurdle to soccer teams and other groups," he said. "There was the plan of eventually zero revenue there, as there eventually would be ball parks there."

Walsh pointed to one drawback to the idea.

"We're looking at an expensive project to clear the land," he said. "If we clear it now, it will cost money."

Emphasized Lawyer: "It will cost a lot of money."

Volunteers knocked down nearly 200 trees on two acres to make room for the Big Toy. Others came to chop the trees into firewood and haul it away.

"That was for two acres," Lawyer said. "We have 22-plus acres more."

Board member Clint Holland noted he'd heard the cost to cut trees would be \$90,000.

Lawyer said no real plan was in place for the orchard.

"The plan was to farm the orchard as long as the farmer would farm," he said. "We were hearing five to six years would be left. We hoped the five to six years would turn to eight to 10 years. Filbert prices went way up the last couple of years, so we hoped they would continue to farm them."

While part of the discussion was about the remaining trees, there were still lingering questions about the potential litigation Weathers referred to in regards to spraying pesticides. Both Walsh and Lawyer noted Weathers had originally been fine with some of the orchard being used for the Big Toy, but something changed his mind.

"My concern is my ass being sued," Weathers told the Keizertimes in May. "My concern is someone using the toy when the park is closed, get flu and found out I sprayed. I have too much to lose."

Walsh, an attorney, questioned if there truly could be a lawsuit concerning the pesticides.

"We have insurance and there is little scientific risk," Walsh said. "We could just close (the Big Toy) on those days we do the spraying."

Lawyer corrected Walsh. "We do not have insurance for this," Lawyer said. "We've explored every option we could think of. The insurance won't cover if we get sued for spraying. (Weathers) expressed concerns about being sued. He said if we could indemnify him, he would continue to farm. But we don't have insurance coverage for that."

Walsh still wasn't quite convinced.

"It's hard to believe there's not insurance to cover it," he said.

Smith said a "number of people" had weighed in on the issue.

"There are organizations out there that will sue you," Smith said.

"Not if the chance of succeeding is low," Walsh responded.

Smith said all factors were looked at.

"Council felt that was a risk that was a little too far," he said. "We had a written opinion from the insurance company they would not cover it. If (Weathers) had his own insurance, that would be one thing. But we don't have insurance for that exposure."



Darrell Richardson has requested a smoking ban in Keizer parks several times recently, including at Monday's Keizer City Council meeting.

KEIZERTIMES/
Craig Murphy

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"I'm excited about you putting up the signs at parks," Richardson said. "I hope you will include Sunset Park. I haven't heard back about my request (from April)."

Councilor Marlene Parsons noted the Parks Board didn't do anything with the request.

"I know; I was at the meeting," Richardson replied. "The Parks Board representative downplayed it so much, I couldn't believe it. Why do we have to depend on the Parks Board for this? Sunset Park is one that shouldn't have smoking. I live right next to Sunset. We have two or three guys that come down and smoke cigars for several hours. Quite a few cities don't allow smoking in parks. Let those that don't smoke have some rights, too."

Mayor Cathy Clark expressed her appreciation to Richardson for bringing the topic up again.

"I don't think this is a conversation that has finished by any stretch," Clark said. "Marion County and Salem don't allow smoking in any parks. Enforcement is an issue."

Clark suggested having members of the Marion County Health Authority talk about smoking at a Parks Board meeting.

"The way people in our community make decisions is with good information," Clark said. "It is a community conversation. In Salem they had a series of public hearings. This was a process the community got involved in."

Councilor Dennis Koho said he'd be willing to vote on the issue, even if the Parks Board continues to have no recommendation.

Richardson noted how recent fires in the Northwest have been started by discarded cigarette butts.

"It's a common sense law," he said. "The state, Marion County and Salem have all stepped up."

Despite his frustration with the lack of action, Richardson emphasized he still loves Keizer.

"This is the best city in the world," he said.

In other business Aug. 3: • Lyndon Zaitz gave a presentation about Saturday's RIVERfair, which runs from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. at KRP.

"We have nice, diverse activities," Zaitz said. "We have a lot for families. We're very excited about what is happening. There are a lot of new vendors and a lot of returning vendors."

• Councilors approved a request from Clint Holland to add a concert and a movie date at the KRP amphitheater. The concert on Aug. 22 will take the place of the cancelled Pig in the Park event, while a movie will be added for sometime in September.

Koho noted he's heard some complaints from people about not being able to bring their water into events on hot nights. Holland said waters can be brought in on movie nights and also noted crowds have been big throughout the summer.

"This year we're packing them in for every event," Holland said. "This last weekend we sold more food and beverages than we have for any event. The last four events have all been large."

• Councilor Amy Ripp noted Red Wing Shoes is moving to Keizer Station; more specifically, into the space currently occupied by the Keizer Chamber of Commerce. As a result, the chamber office is moving to 6150 Ulali Drive next week, next to World Market.

• Jessi Long was appointed to fill a vacancy on the Keizer Public Arts Commission. Long will serve a three-year term ending in June 2018.

• The council work session on Aug. 10 will be a tour of the Salem-Keizer School District's Career and Technical Education Campus on Portland Road. The tour starts at 5:45 p.m. and will be open to the public.

Lawyer to miss Parks Board meetings

By CRAIG MURPHY
Of the Keizertimes

Each month at the Keizer Parks and Recreation Advisory Board meeting, Bill Lawyer is on hand to answer questions and give updates.

This month will be different.

Lawyer, the Public Works director for Keizer who has attended Parks Board meetings for 16 years as the city staff representative, is letting his seat at the monthly meetings be filled by Robert Johnson, the parks supervisor for the city.

"This is my last regular appearance at a Parks Board meeting," Lawyer said at the July 14 meeting. "From now on Robert will be the staff liaison. I will only be here as needed."

JT Hager led the effort in thanking Lawyer for his contributions.

"Bill, you have been invaluable," Hager said. "Your ability to look back at the past and see how it can be done in the future has been very, very valuable."

Richard Walsh, a longtime member of the Parks Board, also gave praise.

"Bill, you are the Parks Department," Walsh said. "We couldn't have done what we did in the last several years without your help. We give you a ton of work every time you're here, but you always smile about it. I really do appreciate it."

Parks Board members approved a motion recognizing Lawyer for his efforts, then gave

him a round of applause.

"I'm not going anywhere," Lawyer said. "I'm still invested, but not at the meetings. This is a tough one for me. But I need to step back and get other people to step forward. Robert is ready for it. Thank you for the recognition. I appreciate it."

In other Parks Board news:

• In an effort to generate more revenue, Parks Board members approved a motion calling for councilors to actively pursue additional cell towers in Keizer parks. A cell tower is already in Bair Park, bringing in \$2,100 a month in revenue for the city. That funding is split in half between parks and the water fund.

Parks Board chair David Loudon wasn't sure councilors need to be involved with creating more parks revenue.

"It's more up to us to come up with additional revenue ideas," Loudon said.

Hager, however, felt it was an appropriate motion.

"This lets the council know we're looking to do things,"

Hager said. "We're on record. The more cell towers, the more the funding we get with revenue to the parks. What we're saying is we need money."

• Gary Blake once again brought up the subject of the potential sale of Palma Ciega Park.

"I've spent a lot of time going down Cummings Lane and Rafael Court asking residents about the park," said Blake, who sat with several neighbors. "Without a doubt, they are shocked and amazed at the idea it could be sold. Neighbors are willing to sit and talk and find out what could be done."

Blake said ideas include having a neighborhood garden and volunteers sprucing up the park.

"What we'd like to stress is the residents of the area want to be involved with the discussion of what happens to the park," Blake said. "I have neighbors here who are willing to be here. Our intent is not to direct the Parks Board, we just want an opportunity to speak before a decision is made."

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