

## SURVEY, continued from Page A1

In recent years, Keizer Rapids Park and all of its amenities have gotten a lot of attention, but the vast majority of the work that's been done has been completed through volunteer efforts and grant money from other sources. However, maintaining the park has fallen on the two full-time parks staff members and a few seasonal employees.

Many improvement projects have already been delayed for years (See Case Study No. 2), and the increased costs of deferred maintenance pushes projects waiting in the wings even further down the list.

"Last year, we had a bid to fix the south parking lot at Claggett Creek Park for about \$7,500. We couldn't pay for it then and when it finally got done this year, it cost us \$13,000. It was the same space, but it had gotten that much worse," Lawyer said.

Due to statewide ballot measures that locked in property taxes at 1996 levels, the city cannot raise additional funds simply by raising taxes. It leaves essentially three options for creating a dedicated parks fund: 1) creating a parks district, which would create additional set-up costs for implementing and managing the parks system; 2) local option levies, which would need to be renewed at the ballot box every time they expire and put future sustainability

in question; or 3) imposing a fee like the one being proposed in the survey. The city council could impose the fee and are looking to the survey responses as a stand-in for an advisory vote.

Parks board member Scott Klug wasn't a fan of imposing a fee until the idea for the survey came forward.

"It concerned me that we were going to be asking people to pay for something that not everyone uses, and I especially didn't want to impose the fee without asking," Klug said.

Keizer voters have a history of balking at the mere thought of additional taxes and fees, but board member Jim Taylor, a former Keizer city councilor and longtime parks advocate, said even people who don't use parks benefit from their presence and good condition.

"Parks are a reflection of the health of the community. Nice parks are a deterrent to crime and increase property values," Taylor said.

Taylor sat on the council as many fee proposals died at the ballot box, but he feels better about this one than many in the past.

"If enough people take the

time to understand, we have a good chance at doing this. People have to understand the repercussions of not paying and the benefits of paying a little more," he said.

At the \$8 per month level, the additional cost would be \$96 per year per household.

Parks board members encourage residents to take a stroll through their neighborhood parks and make note of what needs attention and

what they would like to see as far as improvements before responding to the survey.

Without a dedicated parks fund, Johnson said the reality is that relatively minor maintenance like mowing and debris removal will become more infrequent and some amenities would be closed or removed as they reach the end of their lifecycle.

"In the last wind storm, we had another five or six shingles blow off the gazebo (behind the Keizer Civic Center). The roof is going to begin to rot and we're going to be faced with closing it down or removing it entirely," Johnson said. "Too many people think you can buy something for a park and not touch

it for 20 years. Parks are no different than a car, you have to get tires rotated, you have to change the oil, you have to do the things that keep it running and usable."

Responses to the survey will be accepted through the middle of March at which point the data will be analyzed and the parks board will forward a recommendation to the Keizer City Council.

"The information we get back will help prioritize what comes next in our parks — even if we find out we don't have the support needed for a fee. This is about taking pride and ownership in our neighbors and neighborhoods. We're all one community and we want it to be the best one possible," Lawyer said.

Members of the parks board will be holding outreach events between now and mid-March. The kickoff will be a joint city council and parks board work session on Monday, Jan. 9 at 5:45 p.m. The public is encouraged to attend. If you are part of a community or civic organization willing to host an outreach event, you can contact members of the parks board to arrange a time through Deputy City Recorder Debbie Lockhart at LockhartD@keizer.org or 503-856-318.

## Case Study No. 2

### Forging a disappointing legacy

At the October meeting of the Keizer Parks and Recreation Advisory Board, a Keizer teen named Dean spoke to the members in attendance. He asked that board members help him repair Carlson Skate Park behind the Keizer Civic Center.

Of all the amenities in Keizer parks Carlson Skate Park stands one of the best chances to become a flashpoint. Cracks are forming throughout the park and the bowl in the northwest corner is all but unusable for riders of anything but a bike. It's been on the to-do list for five years and one hoped-for renovation project has already fallen through.

Dean had already contacted a potential business partner who was willing to fly into town and provide an estimate for doing the repair work, but the price tag is going to be hefty.

"There's a light resurfacing that will cost about \$50,000 to \$100,000 and can be done in phases. The permanent solution is going in and doing a little redesign and a lot of resurfacing. That would be about half a million," said Robert Johnson, Keizer parks and facilities supervisor.

The skate park was built in the 1990s through volunteer efforts and donated materials, but it is approaching the point of becoming a liability for the city. Without some sort of overhaul, it may face closure.

"If we had kept it up, you can't put a price on how neat it is to have a place for kids to hang out," said Scott Klug, a member of the parks board.

Unfortunately, the parks board could do little other than encourage Dean to stay involved.

"We had a high school kid come in and ask us, 'Please, can you fix our park?' When you have to talk to a kid and say, 'Sorry, there's nothing we can do about it.' That is heartbreaking," said Matt Lawyer, a member of the board in attendance that night.

It hit especially close to home for parks board member Jim Taylor, who has spent decades involved with youth activities in Keizer.

"I was so frustrated because there was nothing we could do to financially help him. What kind of message does that send to a kid who worked up the courage to come and talk about the issue? That's a bad lesson in government," Taylor said.

## SALEM: 'We have a very complicated homeless problem'

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Keizer, and Marion and Polk counties have all approved UGB expansions to accommodate the bridge at Pine Street and that

paves the way for an environmental impact statement," he said.

Keizer and Salem officials are interested in expanding the UGB beyond accommodating a new bridge. Keizer needs industrial commercial land and Salem needs more space for multi-family and single family housing.

He lamented the lack of affordable housing in the Salem core, which has contributed to growing homelessness in the mid-Willamette Valley.

"We have a very complicated homeless problem and we have a large number statistically listed as homeless," he said.

Currently, Salem and Keizer officials along with representatives from Marion County have convened a task force to explore options for tackling the homelessness problem, but the group's time

is waning and plans for what comes next are still hazy.

Bennett said about 500 of the area's homeless residents are dealing with late-stage addiction issues or mental health problems that make them the hardest to find alternative housing for.

On a more positive note, Bennett credited the work of the Salem-Keizer School District and specifically the Career and Technical Education Center (CTEC), a public-private partnership, as a model for similar projects to follow around the state and the nation.

"There are opportunities ahead of us and I think good times are ahead, if we keep our heads on straight," he said.

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**SAINT EDWARD Catholic Church**  
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5303 River Rd. N., Keizer  
Father Gary L. Zerr, Pastor  
Saturday Vigil Liturgy: 5:30 p.m.  
Sundays: 8:15 a.m. & 10:30 a.m.  
La Misa en Español: 12:30 p.m.

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