

# Gates may get reopened at MHS

By ERIC A. HOWALD  
Of the Keizertimes

After numerous appeals to the Keizer City council, there may be some light at the end of the tunnel for neighbors on the west side of the McNary High School campus.

Three nearby residents, Charles Anderson, Jeff Weekly and Michael Catlow, spoke with council members at a meeting Monday, May 1. Anderson and Weekly have made regular appeals to the council during the past several months hoping to find some sort of relief from overflow traffic and parking problems during the peak drop-off and pick-up hours at McNary.

"It's a convenience for the students, but you are doing it on our backs. Please wrap your head around that. (The students using Newberg) get out of paying the parking fees and get out of parking in that school lot. I wouldn't want to park in that lot," Anderson said.

One of Anderson's main points of contention is that when the school closed gates to the campus on Sandy Drive and Robindale Drive the problems associated with student traffic all moved to Newberg Drive. He objects to the school not taking similar action at the Newberg gate, and wants the city to put pressure on the Salem-Keizer School District to make a change.

Councilor Laura Reid, who is also a teacher at McNary, recently met with Principal Erik Jespersen and said the school administration is looking into experimenting with reopening the Sandy and Robindale gates during peak hours, but no action is likely until this fall.

"We don't want to open them permanently and invite the criminality that was happening

before. And it's going to take a relatively large communication campaign to let students know about it," Reid said.

Reid added that even if the other gates were opened on a limited basis, it might not curtail the parking issues on Newberg, only the traffic congestion.

In an display of his frustration with the situation, Weekly confessed to having put a lock on the Newberg gate in mid-March. School officials responded by cutting the gate off entirely.

The action drew sharp rebuke from Mayor Cathy Clark.

"You locked a gate to keep our students out of our high school? Is that what you just told us? Words fail," Clark said. "There have been a lot of things that we have worked together on like allowing police to tow vehicles blocking driveways. There are things that can be done like sidewalks and lights that have been refused. Locking students out, it's something that ... wow."

Weekly retorted, "I didn't lock them out of school. I kept them from using our street. They can walk an extra block on Chemawa and Lockhaven."

City manager Chris Eppley, who has urged Anderson to take up the issue with the school district during meetings and in private correspondence, did so again.

Anderson asked whether the city could block off the side of the gate facing Newberg, which is city-owned.

"It's a public right-of-way allowed to be used by citizens for driving and walking. The students are members of the public. It's not illegal," Eppley said.

"You locked the gate to keep our students out of our high school?"

— Mayor Cathy Clark

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four seasonal workers hired each year for the busy season from March to October. One of the full-time employees spends half of his time dealing with maintenance issues at the Keizer Civic Center.

In the past year alone, issues at Keizer parks have caused no small amount of consternation for parks employees and the members of the parks advisory board.

"Too many people think you can buy something for a park and not touch it for 20 years," said Robert Johnson, Keizer's parks supervisor. "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."

When a play structure at Wallace House Park was vandalized, the city struggled to find \$3,500 to repair it. Sections of the structure had to be blocked off for about a week. A planned repair to the parking lot on the south end of Claggett Creek Park cost nearly twice as much as originally estimated because the work was deferred for a year. At Carlson Skate Park, cracks are becoming so prominent that it is becoming a safety issue for park users. Prioritizing fixes at the skate park meant that the parks board will not offer a matching grant program for parks improvements during the next fiscal year.

Without additional funding, Keizer Public Works Director Bill Lawyer has said that even

things like mowing and garbage removal will suffer and that some amenities will be closed or removed as they reach the end of their life cycle.

**What options were considered before settling on fees?**

Bonds and establishing a parks taxing district were considered. Both were rejected for different reasons. Bonds cannot pay for operational costs and those are the heart of the parks' woes. A bond could pay for a new tennis court, but not the staff time needed to maintain it. The taxing district was rejected because of the additional overhead it would create that would add to the cost.

**Why doesn't the city just raise taxes?**

It can't. Bond measures passed in the mid-1990s locked in property tax rates (in Keizer's case, \$2.08 per thousand dollars of assessed value) and the amounts at which property values can increase on an annual basis (3 percent). Recently, additional payments to PERS have eaten up the lion's share of the annual property value increases that Keizer receives.

**Wouldn't residents get to vote on whether the city can charge fees?**

Not necessarily. The city council has the power to enact fees within its jurisdiction. The council could choose to seek an advisory vote, but the results would not be binding. An advisory vote would also add to the city's expenses.

**How would the fees be collected?**

That remains to be determined. Adding the fee to utility bills the city already issues for water would save processing, postage and printing costs. However, the city council could also set it up as a separate bill.

Will my water be cut off if I don't pay the fee?

City staff has assured the council that no one would have their water cut off for failure to pay a parks fee.

**What fee amounts are being discussed?**

Amounts discussed range from no fee to \$8 per month.

**What were the results of the survey sent to residents?**

Residents returned 1,102 surveys, which amounts to about 8 percent of Keizer's roughly 14,300 households. Most survey respondents (23.8 percent) said they supported a \$4 fee, but the results were fairly close across the board. An \$8 fee was supported by 21.9 percent of respondents; a \$2 fee garnered 21.6 percent of the votes; 17.2 percent wanted no fee; and a \$6 fee had the lowest level of support (15.9 percent). Maintenance tasks in general took a higher priority than even the most popular

new amenity requested by respondents.

**Did the Parks Advisory Board make a recommendation on the fee?**

After much discussion, the board unanimously recommended a staggered rollout of a fee. If the city council were to accept the recommendation unaltered, the fee would start at \$4 per month, increase to \$6 the following year and top out at \$8 per month (\$96 per year) the year after that.

While the vote was unanimous, at least one parks board member, Scott Klug, had serious reservations about maxing out the fee at \$8.

"It bothers me that we don't have a consensus of (survey respondents) wanting to pay \$8," Klug said. "More than half of the survey, almost four-fifths, came back saying they don't want to pay \$8."

**What would the fee allow the city to do for Keizer parks?**

• \$4 per month/\$48 per year. At that level, the dedicated fund would be \$686,000 per year. The additional funding would permit the maintenance, repair or replacement of most play structures, restrooms, picnic shelter, paths, sports courts and parking areas. Most safety issues could be mitigated, and older equipment could be replaced. Perhaps most importantly, a separate dedicated fund would be established for the sole purpose of unlocking system development charges (SDCs) collected when new residential construction projects are started.

• \$6 per month/\$72 per year would generate a dedicated fund just north of \$1 million per year. All current amenities would be maintained, repaired or replaced; all safety-related issues would be addressed; the fee would maintain all current equipment and replace older equipment as needed; allow for removal of most invasive species and installation of many of the amenities already planned for Keizer parks.

• At \$8 per month, \$96 per year, the dedicated fund grows to \$1.3 million per year. In addition to all of the work made possible with the smaller fees, the final option would: support completion of most projects in the parks master plan within the next 10 years; allow for additional land purchases and increased trail options; and be used to develop environmental, nature and wildlife programs.

**What comes next?**

The next steps will largely depend on what happens at the public forum on Monday, May 8. Check next week's edition of the *Keizertimes* for a full recap and the plan moving forward.

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