

# CHANGES: Comm. center activities cratered just as outlook was rosy

(Continued from Page A1) with St. Vincent DePaul and the Salvation Army to provide direct assistance to Keizer residents struggling as a result of the pandemic, job losses and other strains of the past nine months. He's already disbursed about \$200,000, but has roughly \$300,000 more budgeted for the effort.

"We partnered with them because they have the systems to provide assistance already in place. It's been amazing because someone might come in at 2 p.m. and have paid up their water bills by 4 p.m. It's been one of the most rewarding things I've ever been part of," Wood said.

The pandemic has changed practices throughout city hall, finances are one aspect. Shane Witham, Keizer's interim development director, said his department was no exception.

"It's been a reminder to be flexible, something government isn't always great at doing, and that we're all in this together," Witham said.

Early on, and with the new state-ordered freeze, using online permit application systems has become more frequent. It wasn't necessarily new, but it was already the preferred method for many developers.

"That being said, there is still a large set of folks that prefer to come down to the office and talk with staff or have a meeting in person. I definitely anticipate that we will continue to utilize online meeting tools (like Zoom) post-COVID," Witham said.

In the early going, there was a slowdown in requests for permits, but permits for smaller projects began ramping up and larger ones followed suit. Witham said it was close

to the normal volume again by October.

One of the bigger tasks that required input from both Witham and Wood was administering business loan-grants made available by the city and, later, Business Oregon.

Witham said the initial wave of grants offered by the city was relatively simple.

"The grant money we administered to local businesses that came through Business Oregon did pose some challenges. There were some strings attached and requirements for qualifications that prevented some businesses from being able to receive funding, and the timeframe for getting the word out and accepting and awarding grants was short," he said.

Of the roughly \$90,000 Keizer had access to through Business Oregon, only about \$62,000 was distributed because of the short-windowed, highly-targeted nature of the program.

Grant programs, which required staff oversight even when the process was fairly straightforward, are typically something the city outsources to the Willamette Valley Council of Governments, but the rapid turnaround required meant the city had to reinvent the wheel to some degree.

"[Keizer] was designed to have a small government and we don't have the resources available to us for those kinds of programs. It was definitely a learning experience," Wood

said.

Amid the chaos created by the pandemic, the city was also hacked and its data held for ransom. Wood oversees the tech department as part of his duties and the hack meant changing policies and procedures throughout the city network. Recently, the city has been trying to stockpile laptops for those working from home, ones that will come preloaded with extra layers of cybersecurity.

"We've seen the prices go up in recent months and the inventory drop from time to time," Wood said. "It's also been eye-opening to see just how frequently someone tries to hack city computers."

New protections, give Wood and others access to the number of attempts that are made at hacking the city's network. There was a steep increase a mere month ago as ne'er-dowells sought access points to election systems.

"It all makes me more surprised that other agencies haven't been hit already. We're still recovering a bit five months later," Wood said.

The biggest hit to the city budget will be the community center itself. Lockdowns and warnings against gathering in large groups cratered the business side of the center beginning in March. Pre-pandemic, the community center was on track to have its best year ever.

"We were even going to expand the number of staff in that department, but the lack of revenue led to a layoff last month instead," Wood said.

Wood continues to monitor trends and their possible impact on city finances, but things are only looking up in a few spaces. Revenue from marijuana, cigarette and liquor taxes are mostly trending upward. In January, the city will also get a portion of new taxes on vaping products.

Off all the lessons learned during the long months of 2020, Wood said the most essential is how to keep the city running amid personal differences.

"We have a wide range of opinions and thoughts and backgrounds, but we have to figure out how to work with everyone and keep our eye on the mission at hand," Wood said. "That's one of the lessons I would definitely like us as a city to continue forward with."

"It's been a reminder to be flexible."

— Shane Witham  
Keizer Dev. Director

## GAZEBO, continued from Page A1

as well as Rodda Paint in Salem. He also received free supplies from Herc Rentals in Keizer.

After Elder and his crew began sanding and pressure-washing the gazebo, they were forced to take a two-week hiatus due to the wildfires damaging the air-quality across the state. When Elder was able to return to work, he applied a rust-killing chemical

to the facility, then began priming and masking the gazebo before painting.

Manuel Jauregui, a local painter, offered guidance and assistance to Elder free of charge.

After approximately 415 man hours, the project was completed in late-October.

"I'm so thankful for everyone who helped me out," Elder said. "It was a huge relief once we were finished. I learned that a project of this capacity takes a lot of planning and organization."

## FEMA extends deadline for canyon wildfire aid

The deadline for survivors of Oregon wildfires to apply for FEMA individual disaster assistance and low-interest disaster loans from the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) has been extended to Monday, Nov. 30.

Federal disaster assistance for individuals and families can include money for rental assistance, essential home repairs, personal property losses and other serious disaster-related needs not covered by insurance.

Apply for disaster assistance with FEMA online at [www.disasterassistance.gov/](http://www.disasterassistance.gov/) by using the FEMA app or calling the FEMA Helpline at 800-621-3362 (TTY 800-462-7585) between 7 a.m. and 10 p.m. daily. Those who use a relay service such as a video-phone, InnoCaption, or CapTel should update FEMA with their assigned number for that service. Phone calls from FEMA may come from an unidentified number.



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