

Traffic safety committee ponders slower speeds, better bike lane striping



By ERIC A. HOWALD
Of the Keizertimes

Figuring out how to make the city more friendly for pedestrians and cyclists through reduced speeds and new asphalt striping were some of the leading topics of a recent Traffic Safety, Bikeways and Pedestrian Committee.

“Under the new standards, River Road north of Lockhaven and Wheatland Road could both be eligible for reductions,” said Mike DeBlasi, chair of the committee.

In 2020, the Oregon Department of Transportation updated its speed zoning process allowing for local authorities to petition for speed zone changes. Previously, speed zones were set based on the speed at which 85% of drivers traveled at or below. The new policy takes into consideration the surrounding community and use speeds as low as the 50th percentile.

DeBlasi argued that Wheatland and the north stretch of River Road qualified as urban settings and therefore a speed reduction.

Sgt. David LeDay, the Keizer Police Department liaison to the committee, said that most crashes in Keizer are not the result of speeding.

“Speed is not the issue, it’s impairment or distracted driving,” LeDay said.

David Dempster, another member of the committee, and Councilor Ross Day, the Keizer City Council’s liaison to the committee, both suggested there wasn’t a need to reduce vehicle speeds in the city.

“It sounds to me like you are only considering this because you can. If the recommendation is to lower the speed limit because we can, that isn’t going to get you very far,” Day said.

DeBlasi countered that setting speeds at the 85th percentile caters to drivers interested in pushing the envelope of safety at the expense of pedestrians and cyclists feeling safe.

“It’s about the context and whether it’s a space to get from place A to B quickly or a place where people are living,”

DeBlasi said.

There needed to be a more careful conversation before moving in a direction that would consume taxpayer money, said Hersch Sangster, another member of the committee.

Committee members made more headway discussing additional striping for bike lanes in places where large intersections exist. DeBlasi suggested Lockhaven-Chemawa, Chemawa-Shoreline and Verda-Alder-Claxter. DeBlasi said he wanted to encourage the city to plan for restriping bike lanes, in a different color, as the roads narrow in those areas. He said it would signal to drivers to provide space for cyclists in those areas.

Sangster offered his full support of the idea.

“Most cycling organizations now recommend color and I think we need to take the steps to have it included,” Sangster said.

The committee would need to recommend specific changes to the Keizer City Council and either work into the existing budget for public works or planned for in coming years.

PGE plans for resilience after fires, ice

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An historic ice storm, explosive wildfires and a yearlong pandemic are prompting Portland General Electric (PGE) to build a more resilient power grid, said leaders at the company.

Maria Pope, President and CEO of PGE, Bill Messner, director of safety, resiliency and wildfire mitigation, and Kevin Putnam, director of utility operations spoke with members of the Keizer City Council at a work session Monday, May 24.

The aftermath of the ice storm was “the largest restoration effort in the company’s history,” said Pope.

More than two-thirds of Keizer residents, 11,500 homes, lost power and the average outage lasted 62 hours.

“A series of storms added more ice to our lines each time. We sustained massive damage to our transmission lines and found some lines with ice as thick as an inch-and-a-half on them,” added Putnam.

Between fires and ice, the company is investigating how to make the regional grid more resilient to all threats.

“We are looking at things like ductile iron poles, fiberglass cross arms and aggressive vegetation removal,” Messner said

The effort includes hardening the software that runs the grid against cyber attacks such as the one that recently shut down an oil pipeline in the eastern U.S.

“We have a suite of tools to try to get the most resilient assets in place and try to make the best, low-cost decision for the customers,” Putnam added.

Mayor Cathy Clark encouraged the company’s representatives to partner with the city on messaging around powering food storage and medical devices during outages. Those were the most frequent questions she fielded as a result of the ice storm earlier this year.

Sign up for SKPS summer camps

Salem-Keizer Public Schools will be hosting nearly 200 free enrichment opportunities and academic programs for students on a variety of topics and focus areas

and they are open to all students.

The array of programming includes topics such as foreign languages, engineering, cooking, performing arts and fused glass. A full list is at tinyurl.com/skpscamps. Many camps are being offered more than once and all COVID-19-related precautions will be in place for programs that meet in person.

Camps being hosted at McNary High School include: Science Magic-Design Challenge, Exploring Language Arts through Stop Motion Film Animation, Farm to Fork, Summer Rock Orchestra

Camp and Bell-choir camp.

The registration window for summer programs will close on Monday, May 31. A lottery system will be used if registrations exceed program capacity. Families will be notified of program placement by June 4, 2021.

- Session 1: June 28-July 9
- Session 2: July 12-23
- Session 3: July 26-Aug. 6
- Session 4: Aug. 9-20

District officials are still determining what transportation options will be available.

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