

Commentary



Photo by JOEY CAPPELLETTI of Keizertimes

Delays have consequences | *The editorial board*

In the past four months, the Keizer City Council has worked to fill three vacancies of paramount importance in the community of Keizer.

The first vacancy is Keizer's next permanent city manager. It's been eight months since Chris Eppley resigned from the position on April 1 and interim City Manager Wes Hare has served in the position since July.

An initial timeline by the Greg Prothman Company, the agency contracted to recruit for the role, estimated that applications for the position would close on Oct. 17 with final interviews taking place on Nov. 22 or 29.

At the Dec. 6 Keizer City Council meeting, the council decided to continue accepting applications until at least the middle of January — pushing the delay on the initial timeline to three months.

The second vacancy is the management of the Summer Concert Series at the Keizer Rotary Amphitheater. KRA, led by Clint Holland, has managed the series for the past nine years. KRA's contract expired this summer and the city began accepting proposals for the management of the series until at least 2025. The Keizer Chamber of Commerce's proposal was chosen over Holland's and the city began working

to finalize a contract.

At the Dec. 6 meeting, as council was set to sign the contract, councilors opted to restart the process and allow KRA and the chamber to resubmit proposals. The decision will most likely delay the process by at least another month.

The third vacancy is the management of the Keizer Little League Park. A contract for the position was initially scheduled to be signed during a Oct. 11 meeting. The contract wasn't finalized, so the decision was delayed until Nov. 1. Councilors voted to once again delay the decision at the Nov. 1 meeting, before finally signing the contract at a Nov. 15 meeting.

Delays in government are nothing new. But the delays that have arisen the past couple months in Keizer aren't because of bureaucracy or a lack of information. Rather, they are because of the council's inability to make decisions they were elected to make — or even be informed enough to make a final decision.

Let's take the Summer Concert Series decision for instance. Proposals for the management were submitted at the end of August. The grading of the proposals occurred in early September. The Keizer Chamber of Commerce officially signed the contract to become the managers of the concert series on Nov. 5.

For months now, Holland has contested the process. Holland says the city sent the request for a proposal to the wrong address, giving him a week less time to fill it out than the Chamber. The city has confirmed that this is true.

But even as questions lingered about the fairness of the process, the council was still set to sign the contract with the Chamber on Dec. 6.

After more than 30 minutes of public comment, the council began debating the issue. They spoke at length about the grading criteria of the applications — which was decided on almost five months ago. They discussed the fact that each party had different amounts of time to finish the application — which Holland has told the council for over two months.

At one point, the council made the impromptu decision to bring a local musician to the microphone and ask what his opinion was. The council then contemplated an entirely new idea: What if each group splits time managing the concert series? Both parties said no, that wouldn't work.

In the end, unable to make a decision, the council decided to delay and restart the process.

The issue isn't debate, or the council being thoughtful in their decision making. It's the fact that the council has

had the information in front of them for months now and didn't work to answer these questions until the last minute. With only two regular meetings a month, the council's job is to do research and talk to constituents outside of meetings, and come to them ready to make a decision.

But the lack of preparation has occurred time and time again.

"I don't know why I just have this feeling that we need to pause and do this right," Councilor Roland Herrera said during a meeting where a contract for KLL park was set to be signed. "I am guilty of not following this as closely as I should have. I had some medical issues for like a year-and-a-half. I didn't follow it until the last couple weeks."

At the time, Keizer Baseball and Softball President Michael Bays said about Herrera's comment, "I thought that was disturbing. Public officials should be able to do their job. If they continue to drag this out, the kids are going to be the ones who suffer."

During the Dec. 6 meeting, Hare advised the council to keep city manager applications open until the middle of January because only three viable candidates had applied so far.

"The suggestion from the consultant is to extend the review to the middle of January. The reason for extending it that long is that the holiday season is a difficult time to recruit, you don't generally get a lot of applications around Christmas time," said Hare.

The application process was supposed to close in October, but delays pushed it to the holiday season.

All three of the vacant positions, one of which has been filled, will dramatically shape how the city of Keizer looks for the next year, or decade. And the continuous delays in decisions may have lasting consequences. In the case of the Summer Concert Series, bands have already begun filling their summer schedules and the delays may significantly influence the 2022 summer lineup.

The community needs — and deserves — a council that can provide a clear directive for the entire city of Keizer going forward. The current city councilors are capable of providing this direction but need to prove it going into the new year.

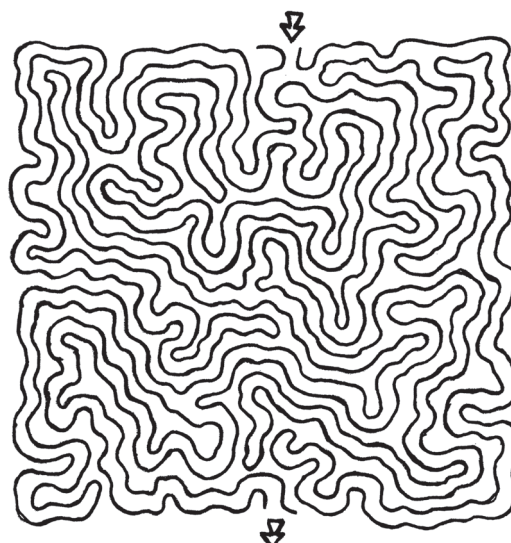
brainfood

sudoku

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sudoku answers pg A9



maze by Jonathan Graf of Keizer