

PENDLETON: Commission passed a grant to help cover cost of city permits

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businesses were set to open this year, which could further boost Main Street's occupancy rate.

But it wasn't all good news at Tuesday's meeting.

May said that he noticed that because so many businesses have flocked to Main Street in recent years, the downtown area surrounding Main has developed some notable vacancies.

His data back up the trend.

Even though Main Street occupancy has grown from 7.8 percent since 2012, the amount of open storefronts in the Pendleton downtown area as a whole has dropped from 84.6 percent to 84.4 percent over that same period.

In fact, excluding Main Street, downtown occupancy has dropped from 88 percent in 2012 to 84.9 percent.

This year could also help the greater downtown area grow in occupancy, with Govinda's Garden Restaurant and Community Bargain Counter both slated to open on Court Avenue.

Despite the small downshift in occupancy overall, the commission responded to May's report positively.

Councilman Al Plute praised Main Street's development for attracting high-quality businesses and not "antique stores and second-hand shops."

Councilman Neil Brown suggested May add job data to future reports to help the public get a better idea of

how many people work in the downtown area.

While May continues to assist the city in developing Pendleton's downtown on a volunteer basis, Charles Denight will help the commission as a part-time employee.

The commission introduced Denight as the urban renewal district associate director, a position solely dedicated to developing the downtown area.

Although only in his second week on the job, Denight said he planned to use his 40 years in marketing to help grow the district.

Other topics discussed at the meeting included:

- After receiving complaints from downtown business owners about the price of city permits, the commission unanimously passed a grant to help cover those costs.

The Code Barrier Mitigation Assistance Grant will reimburse owners up to \$2,000 for any person who intends to renovate a downtown building or occupy a previously uninhabited downtown space.

The grant only applies to downtown businesses and second-floor residences.

To fund the code grant, the commission moved \$10,000 from the Façade Restoration Grant Committee to provide the new grant funding for six months.

- While the urban renewal district will start considering applications for the code

grant, three applicants for Jumpstart loans were denied.

Top Shelf Restaurant, a new business, and Govinda's Garden and 40 Taps Bar, were all denied loans.

All of the applications were first reviewed by the Jumpstart Advisory Committee on Dec. 8. The committee has the power to approve or deny loans up to \$20,000 and make recommendations to the commission for any application above that amount.

Because Top Shelf's loan application was for \$20,000 the committee voted to deny their application after reviewing the owner's financial information.

With both businesses requesting above \$20,000, the committee also advised to deny the applications for Govinda's Garden and 40 Taps.

The commission followed suit and voted 7-0 to deny both loans, with Councilwoman McKennon McDonald abstaining.

- The commission also unanimously approved nominations for various committees.

Retired Pendleton School District substitute teacher Susan Talbot was added to the commission's advisory committee while Loren Lindell and Casey Severe, both owners of their construction companies, were both confirmed to the façade committee.

Contact Antonio Sierra at asierra@eastoregonian.com or 541-966-0836.

SIPE: Hasn't missed a State of the Union Address since the 7th-grade

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on her mind was her concern for talented rural students who have less access to science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) education than metro-area students.

"I brought up to Sen. Merkley that kids in rural areas deserve that kind of opportunity, too," Sipe recalls.

Merkley responded steering Sipe's school district toward several grant opportunities, including state, NASA and J.C. Penney grants to seed robotics programs.

"Through Senator Merkley's encouragement and assistance, our first robotics team was born," Sipe said. "Since that time, our staff and community have worked to make Umatilla a STEM launching pad for students."

Merkley lavishes just as much praise on Sipe and her community.

"Umatilla's robotics team is a home-grown Oregon success story to be

incredibly proud of, and I'm excited to honor Umatilla's success by bringing Superintendent Heidi Sipe to the State of the Union this year," said Merkley, in a news release. "One of the biggest challenges our country faces today is how to ensure that our kids are getting a strong STEM education that will prepare them for the global economy and help keep good, middle-class jobs here in the United States. ... I'm thrilled that she'll be here in the Capitol as the President lays out his vision to take on these and many other challenges."

Since beginning in 2012, Umatilla's robotics program has grown from nine members to 42. The team made the world robotics finals this year.

The idea of attending a State of the Union in person is surreal for Sipe. She hasn't missed one since her middle-school social studies teacher convinced her to watch.

"Mr. Maxwell told all of us in his seventh-grade

class that it's important as citizens to watch the State of the Union address every year. Since that year, I haven't missed," Sipe said. "The opportunity to go in person—I'm overwhelmed by it."

She only wishes she could take her students and staff.

"It doesn't seem fair that only I will go," she said.

Sipe's husband, Kyle, and two children, Caden and Cameron, 18 and 15, will fly with her to Washington, D.C. But Kyle, who co-coaches the high school's robotics team, and the kids won't be in the House Chamber with Heidi. They'll have to search the gallery for her face on their hotel room television screen. During their time at the Capitol, the family will explore the city together. Sipe will attend a dinner with Merkley before the address, which Obama will deliver at 6 p.m. Pacific.

Contact Kathy Aney at kaney@eastoregonian.com or call 541-966-0810.

SHOOTING: Investigation is not over

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does not show signs consistent with one vehicle forcing another to stop, Rowan said.

She also had a gun, he said, and "it is not out of the realm of possibility" that she shot her own car. But the sheriff cautioned it was too early to make that claim without ballistic analysis from the Oregon State Police Forensic Services Division. Sheriff's detectives sent that evidence Monday to the crime lab, he said, and there is no telling how long it could take to receive the analysis.

The incident also revealed gaps in the sheriff's office chain of command and communication to the public.

Greg Hodgen is the coordinator of the Neighborhood Watch program for the sheriff's office. He emailed a dramatic message soon after the first report of the shooting that warned some 200 Neighborhood Watch members to be on the lookout for a boxy white vehicle. The message also stated the suspects could be hiding on farms, and urged members not to approach them but to call dispatch because "these people are out to kill."

Rowan praised Hodgen for his "100 percent volunteer" efforts that set up networks of rural residents to act as additional eyes and ears for law enforcement, but said the message last week was too strong.

"We wanted to get information out on the possible suspect vehicle, but not to



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

A Pendleton Police officer investigates a vehicle that was the target of a reported shooting last week on Airport Road in Pendleton.

"I think we've addressed that over the last week, making sure that information is vetted through chain of command."

— Terry Rowan, Umatilla County Sheriff

the level that it went to the Neighborhood Watch," Rowan said, "So I think in this case we found a weakness in our system."

Rowan said he, undersheriff Jim Littlefield or an on-duty supervisor should have reviewed the message for tone and to keep possibly sensitive information from spoiling an investigation.

"I think we've addressed that over the last week, making sure that information is

vetted through chain of command," Rowan said.

Rowan also did not call the report of the shooting a hoax, which is how Hodgen described the incident Monday.

Rowan was out of town Monday through Thursday, attending a law enforcement convention in Seaside where marijuana was a major topic. Rowan said he has not talked to Hodgen to find out why the volunteer would call the shooting a hoax.

"It was certainly nothing that we said in-house," Rowan said. "We never used that terminology, I guess you could say."

Rowan also said he did not know why the female would make up a story, if that turns out to be the case, and stressed the investigation is not over.

Contact Phil Wright at pwright@eastoregonian.com or 541-966-0833.

KINDERGARTEN: 75 percent of parents want school to start before Round-Up

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"I've been around construction long enough to know that if we get to the first of August and the Hawthorne Elementary building isn't ready to go, what's our fallback position for 12 classes of kindergartners?" he said. "I'm just concerned that we might be better off now taking abuse from the parents about moving back and keeping it back after Round-Up at least this year and maybe even next year during the construction project."

In an interview following the conclusion of the meeting, Peterson said the

scheduling conflict has yet to be determined, although a later start date for kindergarten students is a possibility.

In a recent online survey on the district's website, 75 percent of parents wanted school to start before Round-Up.

The projects related to the \$55 million bond were not a serious part of previous public discussions of the school calendar.

After the bond was passed by voters in 2013, the district prioritized the Pendleton Early Learning Center in order to meet a state mandate that requires all school districts to offer

full-day kindergarten by the 2015-2016 school year.

The center will house all of the district's kindergarten classes, in addition to Umatilla Morrow Head Start and other early childhood services.

Krumbein provided a rare dissenting vote to the 5-1 motion to approve the calendar, with Vice Chair Greg Galloway absent.

After the meeting, Peterson said schedule conflicts are a fairly standard part of school district construction projects.

Contact Antonio Sierra at asierra@eastoregonian.com or 541-966-0836.



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