

VENDORS: Ordinance establishes the Riverfront Plaza on Southwest Court Avenue as a 'food plaza'

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faced property, provided they don't block pedestrian or vehicle traffic or cause a parking lot to dip below the minimum threshold of parking spots.

Vendors also won't be able to park "within 100 feet of an existing business whose primary purpose is sale of similar prepared food items." Kerns clarified that this rule only applies to brick-and-mortar businesses and not other food vendors.

For instance, a taco truck could park next to another taco truck but neither could park next to a Mexican restaurant. Kerns said the rule was included to protect the businesses and building owners who pay property taxes.

If a vendor doesn't want to find a private parking lot for their cuisine, the ordinance establishes the Riverfront Plaza on Southwest Court Avenue as a "food plaza" where multiple vendors can locate. The city manager has the authority to impose additional rules, like compiling a list or map with specific locations food vendors can park or a lottery for vendor locations.

The ordinance would apply to the handful of mobile vendors Pendleton has today, two of them located on the 300 block of Southwest Emigrant Avenue.

On Thursday, the two-person staff at Rico's Tacos warmed tortillas and chopped meat in their tiny red trailer on a gravel lot next to 40 Taps. A single customer sat at one of the nearby picnic tables, occasionally returning to the order window to reinforce her salsa supply.

Business has been good enough at Rico's to keep it open for three years. After opening in fits and starts over the winter, Giovanni's, a food truck in the lot next to Rico's, has done well enough to stay open for three weeks.

Management at both businesses said the proposed rules shouldn't affect them too much, although there was some dismay about having to pay the city for business license fees.

Angela Walter is managing

Giovanni's while her sister, owner Krista Dorman, is pregnant. Walter said Giovanni's already paid \$500 for a state license and wasn't eager to pay more money to the city.

"It just sucks that we have to pay more," she said.

Rico's manager Rudy Flores felt the same, adding that it was just a way for the city to charge them again for similar requirements.

Pendleton charges \$100 per year in license fees to businesses the size of Rico's and Giovanni's, although it tacks on an additional \$20 for each full-time position if a business hires more than five full-time employees.

Neither business felt threatened by the other regulations, since both vendors do not affect off-street parking and they were not directly competing with the nearby bar and pawn shop.

Flores anticipated that those rules might be difficult to follow for some vendors, but he understood the city's incentive to protect brick-and-mortar establishments.

"You have to be fair to both," he said.

Kerns said staff helped craft Pendleton's mobile food vendors ordinance after researching rules in the books in similar-sized cities. One of those cities was Hermiston, which could look at changing their own rules four years after creating them.

Hermiston passed a controversial mobile food vending ordinance in 2013 after months of discussion.

At the time the ordinance was passed, there were nine mobile food vendors in town (one of them, Gabriella Rodriguez of Tacos Xavi, owned two different trucks). But Assistant City Manager Mark Morgan said that around the time the city was getting one or two calls a month from people wondering what the rules would be for them to start up a mobile food vending business.

"It was insane there for a while," he said.

Being a "mobile" food vendor meant that food trucks were able to dodge a number of regulations about setbacks, parking and safety that brick and mortar restaurants were

being held to. Morgan said proponents of the ordinance felt this was a loophole that was being unfairly exploited by "mobile" vendors who had stayed in the same place for months on end and in some cases didn't even have a working vehicle. Staying in one place also encouraged some vendors to start putting up plastic tarps and other features that drew aesthetic complaints.

Critics of the ordinance, however, testified in front of the mobile food vending committee and city council that it was unfair to require a \$500 annual license when no other business in town was required to have any sort of city business license at all. They also thought the nine-page ordinance had too many rules that no other businesses in town were held to.

The ordinance capped the number of licenses available for mobile food vendors at the number that had applied by April 2014. But instead of maxing out, most vendors instead decided to close down their business or move into a permanent building and Hermiston ended up issuing just three licenses.

The ordinance gave city council the power to approve increasing the cap on food trucks, however, and at their July 12 meeting Hermiston resident Cindy Traner brought up the subject. Traner, who owns C&R Mercantile, has plans to feature an open-air market as part of her business, and said she had people who would be interested in participating with mobile food trucks if they could get permission from the city.

The ordinance makes an exception for special events, but City Manager Byron Smith said Traner's plan to open the market Tuesday through Saturday eight months out of the year would not count as an "event" and therefore the city council would have to vote to increase the number of mobile food vendor licenses allowed.

Mayor David Drotzmann asked Traner to submit a detailed request to the city in writing so that they could consider whether to look at granting more licenses.



Staff photo by E.J. Harris
Benjamin Drake, 6, of Pendleton eats a blueberry while walking between rows at K&K Blueberries on Friday in Hermiston.

BLUEBERRIES: Bushes originally planted by the HHS football team

Continued from 1A

the plants are dormant, and putting up flash tape to scare away birds that eat the berries. They also prepare by making sure they have the adequate supplies and maintaining the grounds.

"We really enjoy the family atmosphere," said Dopps. "It does my heart good when families come out and take pictures in the field — it's a tradition around July 4. A lot of our goal is to create a place that's welcoming."

Dopps enjoys putting up little statues of animals around the farm for children to find, and planting flowers to brighten the place.

Though the Dopps family runs the farm, they hire a few local students to help out each summer.

"The bushes were originally planted by the football team," she said. "We have strong ties to Hermiston High School and the sports program. When we can, we hire FFA kids who need summertime employment."

Umatilla County has one other self-serve blueberry



Staff photo by E.J. Harris
Owner Kathy Dopps weighs a bucket of blueberries for Bryan Wilson of Hermiston after Wilson and his family picked the berries at K&K Blueberries outside of Hermiston.

farm, Lamson Blueberries in Milton-Freewater. But the relatively small number of those farms in Eastern Oregon draw people from outside the county, too.

Jamie Kile, from Pendleton, was at the farm with some of her family members who made the drive from Baker City.

"We dream of doing this in Baker," said one of the women. "There's no U-Pick there."

Kile, who is the pastry chef at Pendleton's Prod-

igal Son Brewery and Pub, said she plans to use the fresh fruit in desserts at the restaurant, and some will probably make their way into sauces and drinks, too.

"I think all said and done, we pick close to 100 pounds — for home and the restaurant," she said.

K&K blueberries is located at 29555 Minnehaha Road, Hermiston.

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