

PENDLETON: Wants to renovate the Happy Canyon Room

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because the convention center is among the most visited facilities in town on a year-round basis. In his first 100 days on the job, staff recorded 56 events spanning 79 event days that brought 3,600 attendees through the lobby.

Beard's ambitions don't stop at the current spate of improvements. He also wants to renovate the Happy Canyon Room, a concessions area toward the back of the building that Beard said wasn't inviting enough.

"It's kind of hard to have fun in an elementary school cafeteria," he said.

Beard's vision includes a revamped bar and floor that would fit better thematically with the Happy Canyon arena, which shares a set of doors with the room.

Beard said his goal is to not only bring events to the arena, but for convention-goers to utilize the rest of Pendleton.

Growing Pendleton's tourism industry is in the center's best interest: it relies on two separate hotel room taxes — the transient room tax and the tourism promotion assessment charge — to fund its operations.

The city has used those funds to heavily reinvest in the convention center. According to Pendleton budget documents, the assessment charge fund has spent \$1.4 million from 2006-2015 on outlays like heating, ventilation and air conditioning replacement, new kitchen equipment and an expansion of the east side rooms.



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

The Pendleton Convention Center staff would like to remodel their existing concessions area to make it a more inviting area for guests.

"We will be putting dollars to our dreams and asking for money from you to supplement some of the things we need. But we believe it's an investment, not a sinkhole."

— **Jayne Clarke**, the chairwoman of the Pendleton Convention Center Commission

For the current fiscal year, the city budgeted \$124,000 for replacing the convention center roof. But the lowest bid came in \$61,000 above the city's estimate and staff were forced to delay a few convention center purchases and a city hall window replacement project to cover the gap.

Smaller projects, like the \$35,828 paint job, were covered out of the convention center's operations budget.

Jayne Clarke, the chairwoman of the Pendleton Convention Center Commission, told the council that

staff has to come up with creative ways to fund some of the recent projects.

The department paid for the production of a promotional video by having some of the businesses featured in the clip cover the costs. The video will play at a kiosk in the lobby during events to advertise Pendleton's amenities.

Instead of trying to make it fit into a future budget, Beard plans to partner with the Happy Canyon organization and seek out grants and private donors to cover the cost of the upgrades.

That doesn't mean the convention center won't rely on traditional sources to fuel more improvements.

Clarke said she would return to the council with a list of capital expenses and cost estimates.

"We will be putting dollars to our dreams and asking for money from you to supplement some of the things we need," she said. "But we believe it's an investment, not a sinkhole."

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TRAILS: Similar planning process underway for west end of Umatilla County

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grants for trails are not available," Waldher said. "We haven't even attempted to apply for trails grants because of that."

Inspiration for the Blue Mountain Region Trails plan can be traced back to Community Council, a nonprofit organization based in Walla Walla that gathers residents to study broad, regional issues such as food insecurity and reducing gang membership.

In 2015, Community Council issued a 25-page report on how to enhance outdoor recreation. One of the committee's recommendations was to "connect the public to communities and landmarks via a network of trails in the region," a proposal that caught on quickly with local planners.

Mary Campbell, executive director of Community Council, said the proposal has garnered support from cities, counties, ports, health departments, state and federal natural resource agencies, the Walla Walla Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization and the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation.

"It's been a really huge collaboration," Campbell said. "The synergy was just there. It was really exciting."

With that kind of support, Campbell said they were able to apply for and receive a technical assistance grant from the National Park Service's Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program in October 2016.

Dan Miller, who works as a community planner with the RTCA in Portland, was assigned to work with the Blue Mountain Region Trails group and provide expertise. Miller said the Park Service was initially very excited about the project application, and he was thoroughly impressed by the level of public involvement.

"I've been doing this type of work since 2000, and this is one of the more impressively attended and participated processes that I've seen," Miller said. "They're doing a really good and comprehensive job, and the communities seem to be embracing it."

"I'm fully confident there will be action from this planning process," Miller added.

The first round of public input kicked off Jan. 30 through Feb. 2, with a series of four meetings held in Milton-Freewater as well as Dayton, Walla Walla and Burbank in Washington. Campbell said the group received nearly 1,000 suggestions regarding potential trails connections throughout the region. At least 80 people signed in at the meeting in Milton-Freewater, she said.

A second round of meetings was also held May 1-4 at the same locations to refine and prioritize projects in the plan. A third and final public comment period was held online through October, with comments ranging from missing sidewalks to a multi-use trail connecting Dayton and Waitsburg.

Closer to Milton-Freewater, Waldher said the project area does include Harris Park, which is managed by the county public works department. Waldher said the county may consider building equestrian facilities at the park, making it easier for horseback riders to park their trailers and access trails.

Waldher said residents also discussed routes connecting Milton-Freewater to Walla Walla, the Blue Mountains and the Columbia River.

"We like to say Umatilla County is a great place to live, work and play, and if we have more of that infrastructure it can help maintain that overall quality of living," he said.

Outdoor recreation and trails are not only key to public health, but to the region's economic health, Waldher said. He pointed to the growing trend of "agritourism" in Eastern Oregon, including a new farm loop between Pendleton and Milton-Freewater developed recently by the Eastern Oregon Visitors Association.

A similar planning process for trails is now underway on the west end of Umatilla County as well, Waldher said, bringing together city leaders in Hermiston, Umatilla, Stanfield and Echo.

"Ideally, we'd like to do something similar in the west part of the county," he said. "I think it could be a real asset to the overall quality of life."

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RESTAURANTS: Rare for department to issue 'fail to comply'

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illnesses, such as food temperature or not washing hands. Each violation in that category costs the restaurant five points.

Priority foundation violations are those that don't directly lead to foodborne illness, but can quickly become a problem. Failure to have testing strips for chemicals is a priority foundation violation. Each of those errors costs the restaurant three points.

Code violations are facility-based and do not impact food safety — such as a small hole in the corner of the ceiling. They do not have a point value attached to them.

"Theoretically, you could get 100 percent and still have violations," Fiumara said.

If a restaurant has any repeated violation from their previous inspection, the restaurant is docked twice as many points — they can lose up to 10 points on one item.

If a facility scores lower than 70, they are issued a "fail to comply" sticker, which has to be posted on the restaurant's entrance. Then, they are given 30 days to correct the violations before the department conducts a re-inspection.

"There are only two results of a re-check," Fiumara said. "Compliance or closure."

He said that in the two years he's worked at the department, he has not seen any restaurants close because of a failure to comply.

"It's very rare for us to issue a 'fail to comply' in the first place," he said.

He said in the last round of inspections, all the restaurants in Umatilla and Morrow County were in compliance. In the one before that, he said two failed to comply — Kwong's Cafe in Pendleton, and Fortune Garden in Hermiston. Kwong's has since closed, of their own accord, and Fortune Garden was re-inspected shortly after and was found in compliance.

Fiumara said it's uncommon to see a restaurant score 100, unless it's a small establishment.

But some restaurants do. The Midway Bar and Grill,



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

A cook, who did not want to be identified, takes dishes out of the dishwasher at the Midway Bar and Grill on Tuesday in Hermiston.

Hermiston received a 100 at their last inspection, a score owner Stuart Rice said they expect.

"We have house policies and procedures, and we set the standard high," Rice said. "My mom always said, 'If you have time to lean, you have time to clean,' so I always expect people to clean if they're not busy."

Rice said their policies exceed those set by the county health department.

"If they come in and want something adjusted, we adopt that immediately," she said. "We don't mess around."

At the last inspection, the Midway had one code violation, a thermometer that was showing an incorrect temperature.

"We had another one within two hours," Rice said.

Fiumara said common violations included temperature control, such as not keeping hot food hot, or cold food cold. Other issues that appeared for many restaurants included improper storing of food, when to wash hands, improper marking of food, and chemical sanitizers with inadequate pH.

Fiumara said scores can also vary depending on the inspectors.

"When you get new people going into facilities, things get seen that weren't seen before, or were overlooked," he said.

He said the county also does inspections for the school district's food service on a contract basis, but they don't get scores because it's not a public food service.

For businesses that primarily have food for

off-site consumption, such as grocery stores, the inspection becomes the responsibility of the Department of Agriculture.

Restaurant scores are available at <https://healthspace.com/Clients/Oregon/Umatilla/Web.nsf/home.xsp>.

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