

OUR VIEW

City, county deal raises questions

A decision recently by the Umatilla County Board of Commissioners to approve \$2 million in a Pendleton project left a few questions in its wake that elected leaders need to answer sooner rather than later.

The issue evolved out of a Nov. 10 commission meeting when commissioners voted to furnish Pendleton with a \$2 million revolving loan fund. The fund will hopefully help pave the way for the construction of a connector road between Highway 11 and Highway 30 on the city's south hill to open land for housing.

Commissioner Chair George Murdock and Commissioner John Shafer voted to approve the deal, while Commissioner Dan Dorran voted no because he had not seen the actual agreement.

Dorran's views strike home because, apparently, hardly anyone else has seen the pact either. Murdock and Shafer voted on the proposal without — it appears — an actual text of the agreement to refer to. Neither has the public — the voters — gained the ability to see the actual agreement.

Murdock said the agreement wasn't available because county counsel Doug Olsen was out of the office and couldn't provide it. Murdock did say that while the elected board voted to approve the move, the agreement — wherever it is — isn't set in stone because it has not been signed.

During the commission meeting, Dorran requested the issue be tabled until he could see the agreement. That didn't happen. It should have.

Briefly, the issue appears to be a minor bureaucratic move, but the way it was handled raises questions. How can you vote on an agreement that you have not even seen yet? The answer is you shouldn't, but two commissioners did, raising the specter that this relatively minor move is more than it seems.

In all fairness, there is most likely nothing wrong with how the commissioners faced this issue. Yet their actions — essentially shoving through an agreement without an actual document to refer to or to allow the public to see — is heavy-handed and a gross misjudgment.

Elected leaders should know better. Blaming the absence of the agreement on the fact the county counsel is unavailable doesn't wash, either. If the county counsel was unavailable, and therefore could not provide the agreement, the commissioners should have done what Dorran asked — table the issue.

In short, the way it was handled looks bad to voters and raises questions that are unnecessary and a distraction.



Remembering those we've lost



REGINA
BRAKER
ANOTHER MILE

My neighbor was finishing her walk as I was picking up some windblown items in our yard, and we paused to talk for a bit about our neighbor we now miss, who didn't quite make it to her 90th birthday. As we shared anecdotes about our interactions with her, we agreed that her sense of independence was something we admired.

As November started, there were cultural and religious references to commemorations of the departed in Dia de los Muertos, All Saints and All Souls Day, and I thought of people I know who are no longer among us. Remembering each one, it brought to mind what they offered, whether to their families, their neighbors or to colleagues they worked with, and the void left by their passing. Sometimes it's not easy to define the lines between collaboration, concern, affection and love, when we think back to our relationships with those we've lost.

Some offered their talents and capabilities to civic groups as volunteers. I have a special memory of a friend whose candy-making lesson, auctioned at a community fundraiser years ago, allowed my son and me to learn to make her favorite holiday sweets together in her kitchen. That was an important

experience for both of us, at a time when the challenge of navigating teenage behavior resulted in dissonance in the family atmosphere.

Others extended their love and affection in special ways to anyone they included in their expanded definition of family. That was my mother-in-law's sister, who was happy to become grandma to whoever needed one. In the year her sister died, she took on that role for our son at his wedding, standing in for her sister. We were lucky to be among those who surrounded her at her home this spring when her life was coming to an end.

As this month progressed, we marked Veterans Day. Though this holiday honors the living who've sacrificed so much in their service to the nation, commemorations around us also focused attention on those who made the ultimate sacrifice. This year has seen recognition of others as heroes as well, because they've stepped up to the challenges brought by the coronavirus pandemic, and they, too, have sometimes paid with their lives for doing their jobs.

This year many of us have made our first extended travel to belated gatherings, to happy occasions such as weddings, but also to the postponed celebrations of lives of those we now miss. Some succumbed to COVID-19. And there were those unable to receive care for conditions that under normal circumstances would not have ended their lives.

Our local obituaries document a sampling of who has departed among us, their interests and passions, their

commitments. And often the accompanying photo is of a friend and loved one who is far too young, someone's son or daughter, a sister or brother, cousin, aunt or uncle. It may be a parent or grandparent, someone with a parental role in children's lives.

As we remember them, I wonder about the impact of their absence in our lives, in what we have lost in a permanent relationship as we experienced the death of a relative, spouse or partner, friend, colleague or neighbor. What also matters is the absence of their impact on others beyond ourselves. Will our loss inspire us to take on some contribution that we can commit to in their honor? Are we willing to consider filling some void they have left?

With Thanksgiving approaching, I hope we can be grateful to the people we knew who have passed beyond us this year, as we remember what their lives meant to folks for whom they mattered. It can prompt us to consider our role in filling a gap they've left us with, an inspiration to us to say yes to something new. And it can challenge us to look back on their lives, even those we didn't agree with, to seek something positive to emulate. A common wish in the Jewish tradition is to let their memory be a blessing to others. I understand that to mean the fulfillment of that wish only happens through us. May it be so.

Regina Braker, of Pendleton, is a retired educator with journeys through many places and experiences who enjoys getting to know people along the way.

YOUR VIEWS

Chuck Sams' appointment is a 'bright gift'

Some are born great, some achieve greatness and some have greatness thrust upon them. Chuck Sams is all three. At this time of year, we are reminded to be thankful and grateful, his appointment is a bright gift. What an honor to have the director of national parks from Eastern Oregon. Congratulations, Chuck.

Many ancestors rest on Chuck Sams' shoulders. Our community is proud of him and his hard work. His staffs and accomplishments are proof of greatness. Congratulations for perseverance, integrity and a sense of humor hold true, Chuck.

Sams' work for education is greatly appreciated. Chuck is a bright light.

Harriet Tubman couldn't read but she could memorize. My former students know this story well. From the Bible, in the book of Isaiah, Harriet memorized and used as her life mantra to guide her in difficulty "Forget the former things;

do not dwell in the past, I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland."

With Chuck's input there will be light, exciting perspectives and creative ways to celebrate humanity at our national parks. Chuck Sams has continually demonstrated Chief Seattle's take on this world — take nothing but memories, leave nothing but footprints. I can't wait to experience the new parks memories.

Congratulations to Chuck Sams as our new director of the National Park Service. Chuck's contributions to Eastern Oregon education have been greatly appreciated and what exciting news for all of us. Chief Seattle would be so proud.

Sally Sundin
Walla Walla

Why Pluto should be a planet

A while back in 2006, the International Astronomical Union reclassified Pluto as a

dwarf planet. However, reclassifying Pluto as a dwarf planet has caused disagreements on whether it's a dwarf or a planet.

I vastly disagree with reclassifying Pluto as a dwarf planet. One reason is the definition is a little rough around the edges. The three criteria were: No. 1, a planet must orbit the sun; No. 2, a planet's gravity must be massive enough to form it into the shape of a ball; but No. 3 is a bit unclear. It is that a planet must clear its orbital neighborhood. How big is this neighborhood — 8,000 yards, 3,000,000,000 meters, 986,000,000 miles?

Another thing is Pluto is technically in Neptune's orbit. No one has seemed to question if Neptune is a real planet. In conclusion, Pluto should be a planet for various reasons, such as the voter count, definition and history. One thing, however, is very clear:

Change is usually awesome. But in some cases like this, change is very questionable.

Garrett Willingham
Pendleton

EDITORIALS

Unsigned editorials are the opinion of the East Oregonian editorial board. Other columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of the East Oregonian.

LETTERS

The East Oregonian welcomes original letters of 400 words or less on public issues and public policies for publication in the newspaper and on our website. The newspaper reserves the right to withhold letters that address concerns about individual services and products or letters that infringe on the rights of private citizens. Letters must be signed by the author and include the city of residence and a daytime phone number. The phone number will not be published. Unsigned letters will not be published. Letter writers are limited to one letter every two weeks.

SEND LETTERS TO:

editor@eastoregonian.com,
or via mail to Andrew Cutler,
211 S.E. Byers Ave., Pendleton, OR 97801