

Lodging tax lessons: Do it the right way

There's a right way and a wrong way to do everything."

If you're beyond a certain age, you've no doubt heard that phrase from a parent or grandparent. They spoke from experience, often having tried the "wrong" way and learned a valuable lesson.

That saying came to mind this past week as the Wallowa County Board of Commissioners made the right choice in shelving — for now — a plan to broaden its transient lodging tax. Clearly, this effort did not follow due process or legal procedure. It was the wrong way to go about it.

This is a huge growing-up

EDITORIAL

Voice of the Chieftain

experience for the county. The days of things being done by fiat and whim are over. Residents and taxpayers deserve better.

The days of back-door under-the-table "gentlemen's agreements" is over and a new level of transparency has emerged. It's a positive development for everyone who believes in open government.

The discussion that ensued has not only pointed out the importance of collaboration,

but it has also generated a new vision for what the Wallowa County Fairgrounds could become — an important asset in our attempt to build a vibrant tourism economy.

No one would suggest for a minute that the traditional county fair be jettisoned. Rather, it can be enhanced by attracting people who need to hear the stories of how agriculture has been and continues to be important to the county's economy. Farmers feed the nation.

Tourists from large urban areas seldom get the chance to interface with large animals and the folks who raise them. That's unique. That's an attraction.

It's going to require breaking a few eggs to make the transition, but it's worth doing. Wallowa County Board of Commissioners are the key to making it happen, but they can't do it without you — your ideas, your input and even your financial contribution, should it come to that.

But everything has to be done above-board and within legal parameter.

The suit against the commissioners alleging 17 ways in which it violated the state's Open Meeting Laws and the letter of protest the Chieftain produced have all had a positive impact on how business is done at the county level.

Credit where credit is due. There is a breath of fresh air that is blowing through the courthouse, and it's refreshing to see. Let's continue to move in the direction of more open communication and consensus-building, rather than strong-arm tactics and belittling those who disagree.

Another good way to show that we've reached a new plateau in openness would be for the commission to initiate a grass-roots process for choosing members of a proposed advisory group, a campaign promise of the late Bruce Dunn. A chorus of "yes" men and women is not what's needed to tackle the sticky issues facing the county.

Joseph's new streets are amazing

Occasionally, we receive feedback that we should stop picking on the Joseph City Council. I always hasten to point out that when there is good news in Joseph, we report that as well.

Always have, always will.

A couple weeks back I turned onto one of Joseph's side streets anticipating the usual teeth-crunching bone-jarring ride through the pot holes. To my delight, the pot holes were gone. Disappeared.

In their place were glorious stretches of black top. I knew some work on the roads had been planned this summer, but I wasn't prepared for how much paving and patching has been completed.

According to Mayor Dennis Sands, the city has paved seven blocks on Lake street and one block on First. Those eight blocks cost \$100,000 and were paid for with a grant from ODOT.



WAHL TO WALL

Paul Wahl

Another 10 blocks on East Street, from the Imnaha Highway south to the Lake Highway, were also resur-

facied at a cost of around \$125,000. That was paid out of the city's street fund.

Dennis said the city had a carryover in that account due to not having paved the previous two years. The paving was done by Hampton Paving of La Grande, the lowest bidder for the projects.

In addition, the Joseph city crew put down nearly 30 tons of hot mix to fill potholes on other streets.

And that's not all. Dennis says the city will have a large paving project in 2019, paid for with the monthly street fee being assessed since July. The city anticipates all remaining streets that need to be resurfaced will be done in next year's project.

Several of my acquaintances in Joseph have commented about how wonderful it is to have drivable roads again.

Jean Falbo shared this story.

"I went to a town hall meeting with Sen. Wyden a couple years ago, and Dennis told us that he and the senator had ridden the tram up Mt. Howard. He said they could see the pot holes clear from the top of the mountain."

Jean says she thought that was actually a bit understated.

"Living on East Street, I was sure that it was zoned industrial — you know all those open pit mines and all," she added.

Congratulations to Joseph on a job well done. It's a tremendous improvement.

WHILE WE are on the topic of good news, be sure to read our story on the improvements planned for Wallowa Lake State Park elsewhere in this edition.

While not everything in the plan may be built tomorrow or even next year, it's exciting to see the possibilities for what I believe is Oregon's most exquisite state park.

Combine the improvements to enhance the visitor experience in the park with natural beauty and the friendly folks in Wallowa County, and you have a sure-fire winner.

I've been covering governmental strategic planning for nearly four decades. In my earlier years, it was frustrating to sit through months — sometimes years — of planning only to have a document that sat on a shelf and collected dust.

Then I had the opportunity to see one county government adopt the planning concepts into its zoning ordinance and the light went on.

I have since become a champion of strategic planning. The Wallowa Lake Park plan is one of the best documents of its type I have seen.

Be sure to come out for the public hearing and see the full scope of what's in store. You will be inspired.

ONE MORE bit of good news. Four individuals have stepped forward to run for the Wallowa County Commission seat previously won by Bruce Dunn.

Choices are what make elections so important in our way of doing things. The amount of discussion about county issues generated by four candidates will benefit everyone for years to come.

Notice I didn't say "the amount of agreement." Agreement is not prerequisite to discussion. Wallowa County Chamber of Commerce will have its candidate forum Oct. 10. Mark it on your calendar.



Keep Wallowa County's rural charm

We have an election coming up this November, and I would suspect the most important thing on the ballot would be the county board of commissioners seat. As of this writing, we have three people entered in the race, and I think any of the three would be OK.

I can remember when Jackson in Wyoming and Steamboat Springs in Colorado were towns about like Enterprise and were also in beautiful areas. What they have become now makes me sad. The last time I was in Jackson I looked at where I remembered hay meadows and saw hundreds of condominiums.

Every corner looked like what you saw in all other cities. Jack-in-the-Box on one corner and MacDonald's on the other. Steamboat was even bigger and even had a Wal-Mart. Now that is progress.

We live in one of the last best places, and I would sure like for it to stay that way. We have unsurpassed beauty and very little of the blight that most places live with. Our population is of the size that most people know or know of each other.

We know whose check is good and whose husband isn't. I don't see homeless people begging on the corners, very little crime and so far no graffiti. My hope is that whoever lands on the county board will work to keep this pristine corner of the world the paradise we enjoy.

Don't let the farmland be chopped up into ranchettes, and I would welcome a county ordinance that would fine anyone who gives money to someone sitting



OPEN RANGE

Barrie Qualle

with a sign on a corner. That should not be tolerated.

TRAVELING THROUGH Bend, you see a lot of corners with people begging for money to feed their addictions and laziness. Arresting them or fining them is futile since they don't pay the fine or quit anyway. The only way to be rid of them is to make it futile for them to clutter up the corners begging.

The county is now in court because they wanted to raise the tax on lodging rooms on specific properties in the county. This would bring the tax up to what the city of Enterprise levies.

The money raised would be used, and is needed, to help out the Sheriff's Dept. and the fairgrounds. I doubt that this would adversely affect the vacancy rate in any of the businesses involved. I know of no one who checks their motel bill for the tax bite before they book.

The owners of these businesses make a lot of money from the out-of-county people that are lured here by advertising, and I am happy for them. I hope they all succeed and do well.

While they are working hard and making money off the tourists that invade the county every summer, there are a lot more residents who have to endure the increased traffic and other

inconveniences caused by the huge influx of their customers. They are an added burden on law enforcement, public parks and restrooms.

It seems fair to me that the people that come to visit us and use our infrastructure should pay a small amount in lodging taxes to help maintain the county.

I HAVE been thinking about Colin Kaepernick and the NFL. A lot of people who like football have been boycotting watching the games. If you want those guys to act respectful, what you should do is enjoy the game and announce to the sponsors that you will be boycotting any company that sponsors an NFL game.

If enough people threaten to boycott the products in NFL commercials, the funding for the league will dry up, and when the overpaid players start getting pay cuts, I predict a wave of patriotic fervor will engulf the league and the players.

It seems as if those guys want a different set of laws for minorities where they are not required to obey police orders. They have had affirmative action laws that favor them in hiring even if they are less qualified, and they are given preferential treatment when it comes to getting into medical school and other colleges.

How is this fair or equal? I agree that some of this was needed to give these guys a leg up, but there should be a sunset on some of this legislation someday. continue or increase legislation favoring a special ethnic group. Anyway it doesn't seem to be working.

LETTERS to the EDITOR

Why so many 'clients' here?

Interesting guest column by Chantay Jett about the need for a combined men-

tal health care facility due to the numbers of clients in the community.

I may be misinformed about why we have so many clients in "God's country."

I had been told many years ago that Union County has no facilities, so the state hospital and other hospitals discharge their clients into Wallowa County.

Also the preponderance of HUD housing allows these clients to transition into their own homes and apartments.

Cathryn Paterson
Enterprise

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