

Longtime hoops coach to hang it up after five decades, page 1B



Cottage Grove Sentinel

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Council holds hearing on Main Street Refinement Plan

Close to 20 citizens weigh in; public hearing extended

BY JON STINNETT
 The Cottage Grove Sentinel

Much has already been said of Cottage Grove's Main Street Refinement Plan, a document that aims to guide the construction of a new Main Street corridor between its historic buildings. And much more would be said Monday evening during a public hearing before the City Council, which heard impassioned opinion on many of the key aspects of the plan before ultimately deciding to allow the public a little more time

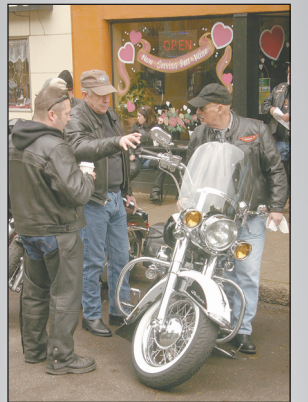
to weigh in. The Refinement Plan includes recommendations for a complete redesign of Main Street between River Road and Highway 99 and on some side streets. The City of Cottage Grove's Planning Department has stated goals for the plan of reducing the "crown" or pronounced hump of Main Street itself; fixing damaged sidewalks; improving access for those with disabilities and adding outside utilities in the area. Grant funding has been used to hire an outside consultant to aid the planning process, which has now included several public meetings and hours of testimony. The plan came to the Council after it was recommended for adoption by Cottage Grove's Planning

Commission after the Commission's own public process. Key issues that have dominated discussion of the plan have been the fate of the current trees on Main Street, a plan to widen the sidewalks and reduce the width of travel lanes from 16 to 12 feet and whether or not to include bike lanes in the plan. These issues again held sway Monday night, when close to 20 community members including downtown business owners addressed the Council to air their concerns. Before the hearing, Alex Dupuy of the consultant assigned to the Refinement Plan addressed the process for estimating the project's \$9 or so million price tag, in addition to the plan to reduce the

width of travel lanes and whether bike lanes would be feasible. Dupuy stated that Main Street's 16-foot width is much wider than comparable streets. He said studies show that wider lanes increase speeds, safe crossing distances and the severity of auto accidents. He said 10-11 foot travel lanes are recommended for streets such as Main. Dupuy said there isn't much room to include bike lanes in Main Street's 65-foot right-of-way, adding that an alternative route for bike traffic is being sought and the plan includes "sharrows" that indicate bicyclists and motorists should share the roadway.

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Calendar 2015
 Several notable events not to be found, page 3A



Taste of Creswell
 Business showcase draws a crowd, page 6A

HELPFUL HABIT



photo by Jon Stinnett

Marie Longfellow donates blood in a mobile bus operated by the Lane Blood Center Monday morning with the assistance of Jodi Stephens. The Center's Raena Wood said that Longfellow is usually the first to donate at each blood drive in Cottage Grove. Drives are held every eight weeks, the minimum time of eligibility between donations for one person. "Cottage Grove is a powerhouse with donations and volunteers," Wood said. The next drive at the Cottage Grove Community Center will be held Monday, April 20.

Local E-cig regulations approved

BY JON STINNETT
 The Cottage Grove Sentinel

The Cottage Grove City Council approved an ordinance Monday night that outlaws the sale of electronic smoking devices to minors, restricts the distribution of free samples of e-cig products and subjects e-cigarette use to the same restrictions of the Clean Indoor Air Act that govern other types of smoking. The ordinance also included an amendment that increases the smoke-free zone outside business entrances from 10 to 25 feet. Monday's vote was the second 5-1 tally in favor of the ordinance; the Council previously considered the issue at its Feb. 9 meeting, and each time, Councilor Jake Boone was the lone vote in opposition. Boone said he sought to minimize the infringement of the ordinance on those it is not intended to target. He specifically addressed the unintended impact the new e-cig rules could have on users of medical marijuana, referencing practices at the local dispensary where he serves as manager. Between the Council's two discussions on the matter, attorney Carrie Connelly examined revisions to the ordinance sought by Boone, specifically exemptions for medical use of e-smoking devices and allowances for the ability of parents to oversee the use of e-cigarettes by their minor children. Connelly said their were no "easy changes that could be made" to address many of Boone's concerns, saying that parts of the ordinance could be left to "prosecutorial discretion," or the dis-

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Local economic indicators pointing to a strong 2015

BY JON STINNETT
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It's not always easy to gauge the health of the economy in Cottage Grove, but those interested in such local trends say that, while hard and fast stats pointing to an economic recovery are hard to come by, anecdotal evidence certainly showcases recent progress. Evidence of recovery is ample at the state level. Statewide, reports compiled at the end of January by Oregon's Employment Department show that in November of last year, the number of payroll jobs in the state reached the peak attained in 2007 prior to the economic slowdown. Oregon's economy

added 50,300 jobs last year, the largest November to November jobs gain since 1996, and the unemployment rate also dropped in that time frame. The summary of a report on Oregon's economy by the Office of Economic Analysis was also released last week, stating that "with each passing month, it is becoming more evident that the U.S. economy is finally emerging from the aftermath of the Great Recession and financial crisis." Job growth is reaching near-boom levels, the report stated. The combination of job growth acceleration, solid economic output and the impact from substantially lower energy prices has the typical economic

forecaster more optimistic today than any other time in recent years." The report called 2014 a "surprisingly solid economic year," with 2015 expected to be even better. Economic statistics specific to the Cottage Grove area, though, can be hard to come by, according to City Manager Richard Meyers. "The statistics we get are mostly for Lane County as a whole," Meyers said. "We get the stats and we have to think to ourselves, 'Is that really our number?' If we were a bigger community, those numbers would be there." Many of these numbers are calculated every two or three

years and are thus largely unreliable in pointing out recent trends. Still, Meyers said there is plenty of anecdotal evidence that showcases a local economic recovery. While there is no sales tax in Oregon that could gauge retail activity, Meyers said the City's take of hotel room and gas tax receipts indicate a stronger 2014 than the past several years. These receipts are expected to rise during the warmer months, and a bigger-than-average rise could point to more people willing to spend their disposable income in Cottage Grove. The housing market can also provide a glimpse of the health of the local economy, and activities there appear to be returning

to pre-recession levels. "From what I've seen, there's more activity in the market now than there has been in probably the last five years," said Remax Realtor Ron O'Keefe, who's plied the local market for 25 years. "Some of that growth is people listing properties because the market keeps getting better, but we'll see if that translates into sales. People still have to price properties right." Lane County lost an estimated 30 percent of its home values during the recession, but O'Keefe said values are "creeping back to near the pre-recession rates." Historically low interest rates also favor an active market, and lenders are starting to do so more frequently.

"There's talk of loans loosening, though nothing like before the recession," O'Keefe said. "Now, there are more stringent guidelines. We're also seeing very few foreclosures right now, which is of course positive." O'Keefe said commercial properties in Cottage Grove are also garnering renewed interest, though he said that the City of Cottage Grove's Systems Development Charges, which are levied against developers to cover the added cost of their developments on city infrastructure, are higher than those of comparable communities. Construction of new properties in Cottage Grove is also

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WEATHER

HIGH **55** LOW **39**

Partly Cloudy

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