

Tidying up

Volunteer Montana Andrews does her part to clean up downtown by clearing out a tree well. Organizers with the Cottage Grove Main Street program and the City of Cottage Grove described Friday morning's "Tidy up the Town" event, which drew volunteers downtown to clean the area's sidewalks and other amenities, as a big success, with 47 volunteers participating. As part of the cleanup, litter was removed, weeds pulled, moss removed and the sidewalks were swept and blown off. The City said that debris cleaned from the sidewalks and pushed into the street would be rounded up when the street was swept on Monday.



photo by Jon Stinnett

PLAN

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Community Development Director Howard Schesser told the Council that this component of the plan informed all the others.

"You need to deal with this element first; all the others will fall in line afterward," he told the Council, which proceeded to spend most of the evening on that one element.

Councilor Mike Fleck proposed a plan to narrow the width of the travel lanes to a less drastic 14 1/2 feet.

"The advantage would be that if we want to phase in new street trees, they'd be in the right spot in the sidewalks," Fleck said.

Councilor Jake Boone opposed the 14 1/2 foot travel lane, stating that the research he had been reading pointed out that narrower lanes lead to slower travel speeds, less accidents and less severe injuries.

Councilor Jeff Gowing agreed with Fleck, stating that Main Street is the main route to get from one side of Cottage Grove to the other.

"I would hate to see that go away," Gowing said. "There are not a lot of avenues to get across town in a straight shot."

Gowing mentioned log and delivery trucks that would be difficult to reroute around Main Street, and Mayor Tom Munroe agreed.

Councilor Garland Burback said large trucks and equipment should not travel through the

downtown core. Councilor Kate Price asked the main reason behind the plan to widen the sidewalks, to which City Planner Amanda Ferguson replied that wider sidewalks were planned as a way to add more amenities such as restaurant tables to the sidewalks, in addition to providing a wider travel lane for pedestrians.

"A lot of studies show that wider sidewalks could have great impacts on economic vitality in the Historic District," Ferguson said.

Councilor Heather Murphy said she had heard "virtually no consistency" from anyone regarding the entire plan. She said that the Council should focus on what it believes the nature of the Historic District should be.

"If the vision for downtown is to make it more pedestrian and street business friendly, then narrower lanes make sense," Murphy said. "If we want to maintain Main Street as a corridor for major traffic, we wouldn't want that to happen. If we're going to redo Main Street, we need to know our basic plan, and we're not in any way going to be able to please everybody."

Gowing said that most of the downtown business owners he talked to didn't want to widen the sidewalks, adding that he was fine with being in the minority on that issue.

Councilor Price agreed with Councilor Murphy's framing of

the main issue.

"There are three core issues," she said. "The crown of the road, the sidewalks and the trees. I think it's worth getting an idea on those three."

Councilor Gowing reiterated that Main Street is the "heart-line" of Cottage Grove.

"I would keep it the same way," he said. Mayor Munroe agreed, stating that, as a retired truck driver, "the more room I have, the better."

Mayor Munroe put forth a possible compromise of narrowing the travel lanes to 13 1/2 feet.

Gowing and Fleck said they could support the Mayor's notion of a compromised set of measurements, to which Boone responded that he thought 12-foot travel lanes should be the maximum. Murphy stated that the compromise wouldn't accomplish either the objective of maintaining a clear thoroughfare for all types of traffic or making the area more pedestrian friendly.

"I think we're just trying to compromise because we want to," she said.

The Council realized that three of its members supported a compromise and three did not. Councilor Price stated more than once that she believed the more fiscally responsible option should win out.

The Council next spent time talking about the Main Street

trees before being redirected to the subject of the street measurements.

"Let's try to agree at least on that first portion," Mayor Munroe said.

In the end, Gowing, Fleck and the Mayor decided that they would stand in the minority of those who opposed narrower streets and wider sidewalks, and the Council moved on to other issues.

Regarding the street trees, Boone said that the plan's recommendation to have the City responsible for any trees as opposed to business owners was very important. Ferguson pointed out that part of the reason the trees are in bad shape now is that they've been variously maintained by business owners over time. City Manager Richard Meyers said if the current trees were to be saved, the City would essentially be spending all the property taxes it receives from the downtown core and spending it on the trees.

The Council ultimately decided to follow the plan's recommendation of a gradual phasing-out of the trees while attempting to find an alternative source of funding for their maintenance.

The Council will revisit the Main Street Refinement Plan at its Monday, March 23 meeting. The plan could pass unanimously in one meeting, or it could pass with majority votes at two successive meetings.

CHAMBER

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some have questioned the wisdom of buying the car.

"Some people are hung up on, 'Why would you pay \$5000 for that old beat-up car?'" he said. "But that's the wrong way to look at it. This is a piece of Cottage Grove history. The car was built in response to the movie that was filmed here; it's a piece of nostalgia, and it gives us something to show off that reminds people of the history behind it. It's not worth much as a car, but is worth a lot as a Cottage Grove attraction."

Palmer said he's wanted the Deathmobile to stay in Cottage Grove since he heard of its existence but didn't know if others felt the same way until the fund-raising effort proved successful.

"I went to college watching that film every few months; it's one of those cult classics, and it would be great to let other people see that it was filmed here," he said.

HABITAT

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them, presented a plaque to Axe & Fiddle owner Bart Caridio in recognition of the part the pub plays in hosting the shows.

Then it was Kahane's turn to be recognized, and Oxley produced a large cake made by the Backstage Bakery nearby before presenting a letter from a very notable Habitat for Humanity supporter, former United States President Jimmy Carter.

"Congratulations on 100 months of service with the Cottage Grove Area Habitat for Humanity," the letter read. "Your hosting of Open Mic Night has helped raise awareness of Habitat's work and generated support for their mission. Your dedication to their fine cause is especially noteworthy as you have also won a battle with cancer during this same time. Rosalynn joins me in sending you our warm best wishes for continued health and happiness."

Kahane pointed out that he has been cancer-free for a year

"It's not worth much as a car, but is worth a lot as a Cottage Grove attraction."

— Chamber Director
Travis Palmer

The Chamber must now figure out how to insure the car, including whether it can be licensed to the Chamber itself. Palmer said Brad Cohen of Brad's Cottage Grove Chevrolet has offered to temporarily store the Deathmobile.

"We'd hoped to have it bought already, but we had delays with the insurance process," Palmer said. He said the Chamber hopes to raise a few more dollars to refurbish certain aspects of the car, after which the plan is to drive it in parades this summer including Bohemia Mining Days, the KNND car show in July and other events.

and a half and thanked those who hosted the open mic while he fought the disease.

"I was thrilled," he said about the recognition. "How often do you get a letter from an ex-president? I didn't expect it at all."

Kahane said that the idea for the open mic began those many years ago when Habitat's Cindy Armstrong asked him to host a jam night at the newly opened Axe & Fiddle. Preferring the open mic format as a way to better showcase local musicians, Kahane decided instead on the open mic.

"The musicians are the reason it has been as successful as it has," he said. "Anywhere you go, you find people that play music at home, people that hardly anyone gets to hear. If you know that at least once a month you're going to be onstage, you start playing more, and it makes you better. It's good for the musicians, and it's raised thousands for Habitat. It's a win-win-win all around, and I'm proud to be a part of it."

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