

# REFERENDUM

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are deemed invalid, adding that there was "no doubt we're going to make it."

The Cottage Grove City Council approved the Refinement Plan with two majority votes in April. The plan aims to redesign Main Street downtown between its historic buildings, including efforts to remove the pronounced "crown" of the street itself. It also calls for the widening of adjacent sidewalks and narrowing of travel lanes, in addition to adding outdoor utilities and making the area more accessible to those with disabilities. The plan can be viewed in its entirety at the City's website, [cottagegrove.org](http://cottagegrove.org).

The Cottage Grove Planning Commission had previously recommended the plan's approval with conditions after extending its own public comment period.

Critics of the plan have objected to many of its aspects, including plans to narrow Main Street's travel lanes and widen sidewalks, and the absence of trees lining the street in early versions of the plan helped coalesce opposition to its passage. Supporters, meanwhile, point out the need for many of the repairs the plan mandates and the lengthy public process used to arrive at the plan as being among their reasons to support it.

The public debate has ramped

up considerably since petitioners began their efforts to place the plan on the ballot, and by Monday, the social-media conversation on Cottage Grove-related Facebook group posts featured a fair amount of vitriol from both sides.

McNamara said she's endeavored to steer clear of the online brouhaha, though others feel it may have helped the referendum effort.

State law allows petitioners to gather signatures to refer any ordinance passed by a municipality to its voters, and McNamara said people are "coming out of the woodwork" to make sure it happens here.

"They're a determined bunch,"

she said, adding that she would be collecting signatures herself in front of the Bookmine until the deadline.

The referendum process has offered a learning curve for local petitioners and city officials. On Monday, City Recorder Trudy Borrevik said that all the signatures have to be turned in to county elections officials at one time in advance of the deadline. This differs from the initiative process, which allows petitioners two years to try to gather signatures to place an initiative before voters. It also essentially gives petitioners one chance to get the proper number of valid signatures. The City estimates that, without any other issues

before voters on the September ballot, the cost to the City to refer the Main Street Refinement Plan to the voters would be about \$10,000.

At Monday night's meeting of the Cottage Grove City Council, Councilor Kate Price, herself a participant in recent heated online discussions regarding the plan, asked what the outcome might be if the referendum were put before voters and should it fail at the polls.

"If the petition is successful and the election is a no," responded City Manager Richard Meyers, "the entire Refinement Plan would go back into the process, and you get to start over with the Council looking

at it. Then you could change it and readopt it, or the City could refer it back to the Planning Commission. Or you could do nothing — there could be other options between there."

Councilor Jake Boone asked Meyers if, even if the voters rejected the plan, could the Council "theoretically pass the exact same plan?"

"You would need to have a public hearing, but yeah, you could readopt the same plan," Meyers said.

Councilor Heather Murphy cautioned that there are "at least 50 'ifs' between now and then." "We did our due diligence," she said. "I encourage you to be confident."

## Some people should have to earn the right to use fire

BY NED HICKSON  
News Media Corporation

Some of you know, in addition to being a columnist, I'm also a volunteer firefighter. I generally try to keep those parts of my life separate because, more often than not, the experiences in my firefighting life have no place in a humor column. However, there are exceptions.

Case in point: What follows is a re-enactment of sorts, pieced together from observations and details gathered during an incident this past Mother's Day weekend. When you consider that we once carried embers around in hollowed out animal skulls for fear of losing the potential to make fire, it seems we've come a long way

as a species.

Then, again, I've seen chimps driving motorcycles — it doesn't mean they're in line at the DMV...

"You kids stay away from the grill! It's gonna get very hot!" Mr. Kingsford said, ripping open a bag of briquettes labeled "easy starting." Over his bermuda shorts and a "49ers" T-shirt, he wore a red and white striped apron with the words "It Ain't Ready Yet" emblazoned on the front.

A prophecy, really.

After stacking the charcoal into a pyramid, he grabbed a quart of lighter fluid and proceeded to empty half of it over the briquettes, one hand patting his pockets. "I need matches," he hollered, then pinched the cigarette from his lips. "No I

don't — never mind."

Crouching, he extended the red tip toward the vapory charcoals, holding as much of his body away from the grill as possible.

On the steps of the mobile home, his son and daughter sat riveted, elbows on their knees and hands clasped in anticipation, watching as Dad summoned the fire god. And kept summoning.

Then summoned some more.

"Where's those matches I asked for?!" he bellowed, and rose to his feet.

"Mo-therrrr!"

From the living area, a window slid open, and from painted fingertips was tossed a small box of matches.

"Thanks —"

The window slid shut.

" — Honey," finished Mr. Kingsford. Scratching the comb-over beneath his "Just Do It" hat, he examined the briquettes and decided the gods needed something more.

Eyes widening, his children watched as he opened a compartment near the rear of the mobile home and removed a red, plastic canister.

"But Dad, Mom said..."

He scowled, index finger pressing his lips. "You want to eat or not?" he hissed at the top of his voice, then proceeded to douse the grill with gasoline.

Slowly, the children backed along the mobile home and away from the epicenter as Dad slid a sulfur-tipped stick from the matchbox and pressed it against the gritty side panel.

He stood, poised for the sprint, one leg dug into the ground for traction, the other angled for speed — like a relay runner waiting for the baton. Trembling slightly, Mr. Kingsford smiled reassuringly at his huddled children, then struck the match to life and tossed it into the face of the grill.

In that instant, the lid blew shut, which caused the dog to bark, bringing Mom to the door just in time to see the kids cover their ears as Dad pushed off for the sprint while the split-level grill lifted off like an early 1960s NASA rocket, rising about six feet before angling left, then exploding into a ball of flames.

As the firemen put the last of the flames out a short time later, and the surrounding campers

returned to their campsites, Mr. Kingsford shoved a copy of his citation into an apron pocket and nursed a minor head injury with ice. From the small kitchen, the sizzle of skillet burgers made its way outside as Mom cooked over butane fire.

When you consider that we once carried embers around in a hollowed out skull for fear of losing the potential to make fire, it seems we've come a long way as a species.

Then, again...

Ned is a syndicated columnist with News Media Corporation. His book, "Humor at the Speed of Life," is available online at Port Hole Publications, Amazon Books and Barnes & Noble. Write to him at [nedhickson@icloud.com](mailto:nedhickson@icloud.com)

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