

Many of the Sentinel's top stories of 2015 will continue to make headlines in 2016 and beyond.

Here are some of the year's most impactful articles and how they'll continue to shape the future of Cottage Grove:

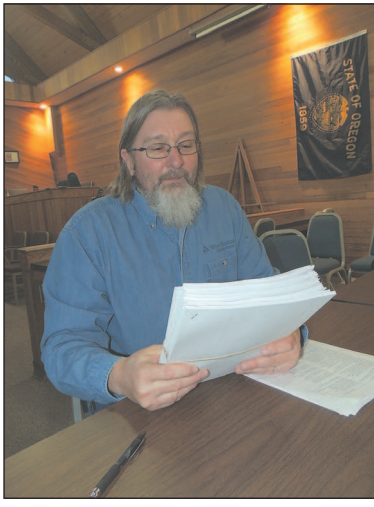
## Down on Main Street

Refinement Plan ignites local discussion

Much as they had in 2014, deliberations over Cottage Grove's Main Street Refinement Plan, a comprehensive plan to redesign Main Street downtown between its historic buildings, dominated the local discussion early this year. The Cottage Grove Planning Commission recommended approval of the extensive document last year after work-sessions that packed the Council chambers at City Hall with those wishing to share their input on the plan, which aims to level the pronounced "crown" of Main Street, improve access for those with disabilities and add outdoor utilities downtown.

The issue of whether or not to include the trees that currently line Main Street in the plan polarized opinion on both sides of the issue, and the Planning Department decided to shelve the tree issue for a later date. A group calling itself Friends of Main Street formed in opposition to the Main Street Refinement Plan, particularly its non-inclusion of the trees and plans to alter All-America City Square at the corner of Seventh and Main Streets.

The City Council got its first look at the MSRP at a worksession held in early February. An extensive public hearing was held on Feb. 23, a hearing held over to include more public testimony. The Council postponed a vote on the plan at its March 9 meeting, opting to schedule another worksession on March 16. At that meeting,



Sentinel file photo

**City Councilor Jeff Gowing examines a copy of the Main Street Refinement Plan at a February worksession. The Council approved the plan in April.**

The Council worked through a list of the plan's 22 basic components, though much of the discussion involved only the first component: the cross-section of Main Street and the plan's recommendation to widen sidewalks from eight feet to 12 1/2 feet; increase parking lane width to eight feet and decrease the travel lane width from 16 feet to 12 feet. The Council appeared deadlocked on the issue of widening the sidewalks and decreasing the width of Main Street and in the end voted not to make changes. The Council recorded its first 'yes' vote for approval of the plan on March 23, then adopted the plan without much fanfare at its April 13 meeting.

By the end of April, a group hoping to refer the MSRP to local voters in a September election had begun gathering signatures for a petition to place the plan on the ballot, further intensifying the conversation surrounding the plan, particularly on social media outlets. The group worked to gather about 600 signatures from local voters in a three-week span. Petitioners were



confident that they had gathered enough signatures as the deadline loomed, though the effort eventually fell short by 55 votes, with many signatures deemed invalid after it was discovered that those who signed resided in the wrong district or were not registered to vote.

### What's next

The Cottage Grove Planning Department will now pursue grant funding to implement the changes spelled out in the Main Street Refinement Plan. The City Council will hold a public hearing on Cottage Grove's Transportation System Plan, or TSP, of which the Refinement Plan is a major element, at its Monday, Jan. 11 meeting.

## More on marijuana

Legalization of recreational marijuana draws crowds to local dispensaries

In 2013, the Cottage Grove City

Council did not take action to ban businesses that do not comply with state and federal laws, a move that could have prevented medical marijuana dispensaries from opening here. The Council later voted against attempting to place a local tax on recreational marijuana sales.

By March of 2014, the first dispensary opened in Cottage Grove, and by the end of the summer of 2015, the number of dispensaries in the City Limits had swelled to four. Oregon's Measure 91, which won voter approval in November of 2014, legalized recreational marijuana use for those over age 21 and allowed individuals to possess up to four mature plants or eight ounces of the drug; many of its provisions kicked in on July 1, 2015.

The Oregon Liquor Control Commission opted to allow established medical marijuana dispensaries to begin recreational sales of the drug on Oct. 1, a day that found crowds lined up outside dispensaries in Cottage Grove prior to their opening. Sales topped \$11 million statewide during that first weekend.

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## Training exercise to include police presence, gunfire

School District's A.L.I.C.E. training replicates active shooter situation

South Lane School District officials say that neighbors of Cottage Grove High School may hear the sound of gunfire and notice a police presence at the school on Monday, Jan. 4 as part of a scheduled training exercise for district employees.

A change in approach to active shooter situations in schools will bring personnel with the Lane County Sheriff's Office, Cottage Grove, Eugene, Springfield and other agencies to CGHS on Monday for training in the "A.L.I.C.E." method of response.

A.L.I.C.E., which stands for "Alert, Lockdown, Inform, Counter and Evacuate," reflects evolving thinking with regard to active shooter situations in schools, according to South Lane School District Superintendent Krista Parent.

"In the past, you would generally lock yourself in, close the windows and wait," Parent said. "Now, the best thinking says that there are other procedures that can be used to counter and confront a shooter."

Monday is not a school day for South Lane students, but Parent said staff members will witness seven different scenarios in seven different classrooms, with two officers in each room to lead the exercises. Officers will use blank rounds in real weapons and Nerf guns for live practice situations, and Parent wished to caution those living near Cottage Grove High that they may hear the sound of shots fired and witness an intense police presence during the drills.

## String of holiday car break-ins reported

The Cottage Grove Police Department said a string of car break-ins occurred over the Christmas holiday weekend, break-ins concentrated in one area on the south end of town.

Dispatcher Dawn Loshbaugh reported that six car break-ins had been reported near Arthur and Johnson Avenue area in southern Cottage Grove just off Sixth Street between Christmas morning

(Friday) and Sunday afternoon. One involved a bag of Christmas presents reported stolen on Christmas morning that was recovered on Sunday.

Loshbaugh said the break-ins share a similar lesson for local car owners.

"It's all about not leaving valuables in your car," she said. "We shouldn't have to be worried about it, but that's the way it is."

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