



Cottage Grove Sentinel

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 23, 2016

SOUTH LANE COUNTY'S MOST AWARD-WINNING NEWS SOURCE SINCE 1889

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City says Main Street bridge 'could collapse any day'

Repairs expected to take funding from another needed road project

BY JON STINNETT
 The Cottage Grove Sentinel

City officials say a bridge that helps connect the eastern and western halves of Cottage Grove could fail at any time, and repairs to one of the area's most ragged streets will likely be delayed to address the bridge issue.

City Manager Richard Meyers told the City Council at its March 14 meeting that the approach to the Main Street bridge over the Coast Fork of the Willa-

mette River "could collapse any day," according to information he said the City received from OBEC Consulting Engineers.

"The river bank between the bridge abutment and the land on the other side of the street is eroding," Meyers said, referencing the abutment on the south side of the bridge. "It needs to be addressed right away."

"It's not a pothole, it's a sinkhole," Meyers said of the problem, adding that the bridge repairs will likely mean that the notorious potholes on South

Sixth Street will likely not be repaired this year.

"It's going to kill the South Sixth project," he said. Late last week, Meyers pointed out where the road bed and sidewalk have begun to shift in response to the gradual washing-out of the river bank beneath the roadway.

"The engineers need to do more investigations to determine its urgency," he said. The City had planned to spend about \$400,000 to \$500,000 fixing South Sixth Street using a process called "crabbing" to cover



City Manager Richard Meyers examines evidence that the ground under a downtown bridge is washing away.

its potholes. Meyers said the City does not know how much it will cost to fix the Main Street bridge but that the City "needs to get moving" to get the bridge

repaired. "If it fails, traffic headed westbound could fall right into the river," he said.

Seeking its 'new normal'

LCC considers its future in CG after enrollment decline

BY JON STINNETT
 The Cottage Grove Sentinel

On a Thursday morning, there's quite a bit going on at Lane Community College's Cottage Grove campus.

One room plays host to a meeting organized by the Oregon Community Foundation. Nearby, families with small children arrive at Peggy's Primary Connection, the local family resource center that moved to the LCC branch last fall. On Friday, the South Lane Children's Dental Clinic, which also occupies space at the college, will be in full swing.

But a sound that one might expect from a college campus — the sound of groups of young people milling about in common areas or on their way to



Mary Jeanne Kuhar, LCC's Executive Dean, and local director Lida Herburger, examine student achievements displayed in a case at the local campus. The college is reaching out to see what offerings can be most beneficial in Cottage Grove.

a variety of classes — is noticeably absent, and officials with LCC say they're not sure if the Cottage Grove branch will be hosting young adults just embarking on their college careers anytime in the future.

These days, in the wake of an economic slump that found Oregonians returning to school in droves and the subsequent recovery that has severely

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Worksession informs city budget process

City considering adding part-time police position, nuisance abatement

BY JON STINNETT
 The Cottage Grove Sentinel

Information from a fast-paced City Council worksession that dealt with topics ranging from fiber optics to road improvements to a potential marijuana tax is now being used to set priorities in the City budget, according to City Manager Richard Meyers.

At the worksession, held an hour before the Council's regular Monday meeting, Meyers handed out a full-page list of topics and sought direction on how to deal with deteriorating city parking lots, implementation of the recently approved Main Street Refinement Plan, amending the City charter to put the City in first position on any property liens related to nuisance abatement, a potential bond for road improvements that cannot be financed by the City's general fund, potential updates to the City's fiber optics system and much more. At the close of the worksession, he again asked each city councilor to state their first priority.

The need for more police to combat a rise in crime was mentioned, and the fiber optics upgrade was mentioned as a way to keep the City at the forefront of developments that could bring more and better jobs to town. The Council appeared to support a bond to finance road repairs, and several councilors said they would like to see a plan to deal with the "limbo houses," or houses that are currently involved in the foreclosure process and have owners that are difficult to track down.

"We still didn't answer the big questions," Meyers said, "but I did come away with a general feeling of what the Council wanted to do."

For now, Meyers said city staff are exploring the notion of adding a half-time position at the police department to handle duties that would free up time for sworn officers to devote to patrols. Tasks such as checking door locks of local businesses at night could be performed by a part-time staffer, he said.

Meyers told the Council that the City is also exploring the possibility of adding a part-time staffer to handle nuisance abatement issues. Currently, nuisance abatement is handled on a

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Building fee hearing sets off growth discussion

BY JON STINNETT
 The Cottage Grove Sentinel

The Cottage Grove City Council voted at its Monday, March 14 meeting to adjust some of the City's building fees after a short public hearing.

Community Development Director Howard Schesser told the Council that the City has been using a building permit tracking program developed by the state of Oregon since 2008, a program offered at no cost to the first 14 jurisdictions that signed up to use it first.

Last year, Schesser said, the City was notified that it would need to adjust its per-

mit fees to the state's new standard model of assessment, after a 2009 statute from the Oregon legislature required a standard methodology for all building fees.

Some changes were proposed for permits that fall outside the scope of a standard permit, including some electrical, mechanical and plumbing permits. New fees were also proposed for manufactured home parks and renewable electrical energy systems.

One person spoke up during the public hearing, though realtor Ron O'Keefe seemed to be addressing the City's Systems Development Charges, or SDCs, which are

fees assessed to developers to offset the new burdens their developments will place on city systems. The Council previously voted to raise the fees to help finance a backlog of infrastructure repairs that have not been covered in the general fund of the city budget.

O'Keefe said that statistics show that housing sales in Oregon were 38 percent better last year than the year before.

"One would think that builders would start coming to Cottage Grove," he said. "There is definitely a shortage of homes here."

But new construction seems scarce, and the prob-

lem, O'Keefe reasoned, is that the City's SDC fees are scaring away potential builders.

"People get excited about Cottage Grove and all that's offered here, but if they want to build, it scares a lot of people away. I see this pattern over and over," he said.

O'Keefe said he didn't believe the City should encourage a major housing boom by keeping its SDC fees too low, though their ability to stifle growth if the fees are too high is also worth examining. While Schesser pointed out that the current action only dealt with permit fees and the Council subsequently voted unanimously to support the

hike, City Councilor Mike Fleck took the opportunity to reiterate that he also feels high SDC fees may be stifling growth in Cottage Grove.

"It's exactly what I've been concerned about," Fleck said, adding that before the City published the numbers of recent building permits in its Friday update, he would have assumed that "nothing is going on" with regard to construction here.

"There are very few rentals available," he said. "It's becoming a big issue, and we should look at our permits and fees overall and try to be competitive with other communities."

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