

EDITORIAL

Boys Jungle opportunity

Baker City might have a chance to acquire the property known to generations of local residents as the Boys Jungle, for use as a public park. It's an opportunity city officials ought not let go without a thorough examination of the possible options.

The Boys Jungle, for those unfamiliar with either the name or the place, is an undeveloped piece of ground, covering about two acres, just north of D Street on the east side of the Powder River. The Leo Adler Memorial Parkway runs through the east side of the parcel.

Its name derives from the thickets of cottonwoods and willows interspersed with patches of dense shrubbery.

Most of the trees remain. But the underbrush is gone.

That's the most dramatic evidence of the work that Gust Tsiatsos, a La Grande builder and developer, has made since buying the property last year.

Tsiatsos bought four other parcels in the area, and his main focus is building small cottages that military veterans could either rent or buy. Tsiatsos, whose company is GCT Land Management Inc., obtained a \$1,475,000 grant from the Oregon Housing and Community Services for the first phase of the veterans housing project, which will be built on a lot between F and H streets, east of Elkhorn Village apartments. He also plans to invest \$350,000 to \$450,000 of private capital in the project, which Rick Gloria, Baker County's veterans service officer, said will be a boon for local veterans looking for housing.

Tsiatsos said he would prefer that the Boys Jungle parcel be used as a park.

That's been its unofficial — and illegal — status for decades. The property has always been privately owned, but people, and in particular youths, have frequently treated the place as a de facto park, and one with access to the river.

Over the years, city officials, including police, have expressed concern about underage drinking and other illegal activity at the Boys Jungle. Tsiatsos said that after buying the property he found evidence that homeless people were camping there. That's one reason he felt compelled to clean up the parcel.

His crew did a nice job. They left most of the big trees, although Tsiatsos said many trees seem to be close to the end of their lifespan.

He said his initial idea was to donate the property to the city in exchange for a reduction in utility fees he's paying for his veterans housing development. But Joyce Bornstedt, who oversees city parks, said that's not possible because the utility departments are separate parts of the city budget, distinct from the parks department, which is part of the general fund.

But city officials shouldn't pass on this opportunity because of what amounts to a bureaucratic obstacle.

The Boys Jungle would be a wonderful addition to the city's roster of parks. The site would complement Geiser-Pollman and Central parks, both of which also border the Powder River.

Turning the Boys Jungle into an official public park would not be free, of course, even if the city doesn't have spend any money to acquire the property itself. The city would be responsible for developing and maintaining the parcel in perpetuity. And Baker City's parks department is not flush with cash — its budget for the current fiscal year, which ends June 30, is a decidedly modest \$124,000, and much of that — about \$74,000 — pays a contractor to maintain existing parks. The city parks board has also discussed other improvements, such as a splash pad.

Nonetheless, adding the Boys Jungle to the city's list of parks properties needn't be terribly expensive. Indeed, it makes sense to maintain its relatively primitive condition rather than planting grass and installing expensive accoutrements such as playground equipment. Putting in a few benches and picnic tables probably would be sufficient. Baker City also has benefited the past two years from the efforts of volunteer Tom Clement, who has led campaigns to trim trees, remove brush and make other improvements along the Leo Adler Memorial Parkway, so there's another potential option for maintaining the Boys Jungle that wouldn't saddle the city's parks budget.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor



YOUR VIEWS

Baker County Republican leaders should apologize for episode at candidate forum

Editor's note: This is a letter the author sent to candidates who attended a Republican gubernatorial forum in Baker City on March 25.

Dear Friend and Candidate, We, the true conservative Republicans of Baker County, would like to thank you for your efforts in both choosing to run for Governor and in bringing your campaign hopes to Baker City. All campaigns require energy and money that once expended must be renewed to carry your message forward. We understand the complexities and truly appreciate the difficulties faced when your message is prevented from reaching your desired audience.

Worst yet is the frustration you must have felt when you were forced to have your personal time with the voters compromised by a format replete with outrageous rules on your selves, and worst yet upon your audience. Since each of you faced a highly regulated presentation which denied you essential feedback from your audience, your attempts to reach us were all the more appreciated. Your frustration was matched by ours, your prospective supporters.

To be told by the self-appointed convening authority how we, the audience must behave, was a losing proposition for a gathering of proud, free American adults. Each of us has our own story and nowhere in our lives have we encountered such an insulting list of made-up rules. At least not since the insane and pointless Covid mask rules. Naturally, there was a little push-back. One fine gentleman wanted to record all of you. Perhaps he, as I, has trouble hearing well enough to follow your presentation. A recording of you all would make it possible to review your messaging and allow further understanding of your platform.

The authoritarian nature of the sponsoring party was uncalled for and harmed you in getting your message across. We feel that Baker County Republicans leadership, by virtue of their actions and rules, owes you for wasting your time and energies. They are not representative of the people of Baker City and its environs.

As for the true Republican conservatives, particularly those of us who had the opportunity to meet you, however briefly, we found you all to be exemplary and charming and hope to hear more from you in advance of the election. We must strive to save the Republican Party, our state and our nation. God Bless you all and God Bless America!

Till we meet again,
The True Patriotic Conservative Republicans of Baker City and Baker County.

Rick Rienks
Baker City

County weed district shouldn't compete with private businesses

I had the opportunity to attend the Baker County Weed District meeting on March 29 at 1 p.m. I have been a proponent of the Baker County Weed Levy my entire time as a property taxpayer. Background, I'm born and raised in Baker, 1982. I understand I'm still young, however I also have spent the last 17 years as a crop consultant in Baker and Union counties under two different companies. After attending the meeting, I encourage a NO vote on any continuing weed levy, as the Baker County Weed District is not fulfilling its commitments to spraying.

Per the meeting, it was stated there was minimal broadleaf management last year and many of the gravel roads were not treated last fall. It would seem the district responsible for enforcing the control of noxious weeds in our county is not taking care of their own spraying duties.

I have no complaints with the cost share program the Baker County Weed District has implemented over the past years. This program is a cost share for spray to control noxious weeds on private property. The Baker County Weed District Board of Directors has approved the proposal to both sell chemical and rent equipment (cite 3/29/22 1 p.m. meeting). Which is in direct competition with at least 16 local businesses who provide certified commercial applicators and/or licensed pesticide dealers. Also, a credit card reader has been ordered (first in Baker County Government's history). A card reader costs my business 3% per transaction. If the cost share program works for spray, why isn't the Weed District offering a cost share program for spray application or the rental of spray equipment rather than directly competing with local privately owned businesses? After the state COVID mandates, putting local restaurants out of business, who is to say the government won't step in and say there aren't enough sandwich shops to cover the needs of our community, while using our tax dollars to open up a new sandwich shop in town. This is a very slippery slope and I don't feel it is necessary or appropriate to fund the government to compete directly with my small business, or any other privately owned business.

Joe Hill
Baker County

Thanks to Anthony Lakes, Baker School District for youth skiing program

Our family would like to say thank you to the Anthony Lakes Ski Area and the Baker School District for making the "Ski For The Health of It" winter youth program possible. For \$80, our 12-year-old grandson received all his rental gear, an awesome helmet to keep, private lessons, and bus rides to and from the mountain for 8 weeks! It's such an

amazing opportunity and our grandson is so excited about next year. He went from never being on skis to swooshing down intermediate slopes safely, thanks to the professional lessons and his peers' encouragement. Our 5-year-old granddaughter can't wait for her turn! They have an amazing beginners hill, and who knows, she and grandma may check it out next year because anyone over 70 can ski FREE! Good job, Baker, this is such an amazing place to live!

Pat Brougham
Baker City

County commissioners need to make a decision on constitution resolution

It's time for the Baker County Commissioners to make a decision on the constitutional counties controversy. The issue has been divisive and has unnecessarily taken time and attention away from vital county responsibilities like ambulance service.

Commissioners have basically three choices — adopt the resolution, oppose it, or refer the question to voters. It's time to pick one and get back to business.

But when they choose, they need to keep in mind their responsibilities and their jurisdiction. It is not up to commissioners to pick and choose which state and federal laws to follow or to reinterpret the state or federal constitutions.

In sports, it isn't up to the coaches to pick which rules to follow or to overrule the referees. Their job is to lead and support their team. In government, our elected representatives make laws, our executive branches apply those laws, and our courts interpret them so that they are consistent with each other and with the Constitution. I understand and respect anyone's right to disagree with our government. I often do, too. But we need to accept the authority of elected and appointed officials. When we disagree, we need to express our opinions with our voices and votes, while respecting the rights of other to do the same. It is also our right to ask the courts, not county commissioners, to intercede when we believe government has misused its power.

Commissioners' roles are a blend of legislative and executive functions, but their jurisdiction is local, as laid out in Oregon's constitution and laws. Since 1787, courts have ruled on the scope of government powers and responsibilities. They've also ruled on search and seizure of property, gun ownership, the rights of the accused, mask mandates, and many other issues named or implied in the Bill of Rights. So, no matter what our commissioners decide on the constitutional counties proposal, they will always be responsible to serve all of the citizens of Baker County and to abide by all of the Constitution and the laws that flow from it.

Mark Bogart
Baker City

CONTACT YOUR PUBLIC OFFICIALS

President Joe Biden: The White House, 1600 Pennsylvania Ave., Washington, D.C. 20500; 202-456-1111; to send comments, go to www.whitehouse.gov.

U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley: D.C. office: 313 Hart Senate Office Building, U.S. Senate, Washington, D.C., 20510; 202-224-3753; fax 202-228-3997. Portland office: One World Trade Center, 121 S.W. Salmon St. Suite 1250, Portland, OR 97204; 503-326-3386; fax 503-326-2900. Baker City office, 1705 Main St., Suite 504, 541-278-1129; merkley.senate.gov.

U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden: D.C. office: 221 Dirksen Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C., 20510; 202-224-5244; fax 202-228-2717. La Grande office: 105 Fir St., No. 210, La Grande, OR 97850; 541-962-7691; fax, 541-963-0885; wyden.senate.gov.

U.S. Rep. Cliff Bentz (2nd District): D.C. office: 1239 Longworth House Office Building, Washington, D.C., 20515, 202-225-6730; fax 202-225-5774. Medford

office: 14 N. Central Avenue Suite 112, Medford, OR 97850; Phone: 541-776-4646; fax: 541-779-0204; Ontario office: 2430 S.W. Fourth Ave., No. 2, Ontario, OR 97914; Phone: 541-709-2040. bentz.house.gov.

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown: 254 State Capitol, Salem, OR 97310; 503-378-3111; www.governor.oregon.gov.

Oregon State Treasurer Tobias Read: oregon.treasurer@ost.state.or.us; 350 Winter St. NE, Suite 100, Salem OR 97301-3896; 503-378-4000.

Oregon Attorney General Ellen F. Rosenblum: Justice Building, Salem, OR 97301-4096; 503-378-4400.

Oregon Legislature: Legislative documents and information are available online at www.leg.state.or.us.

State Sen. Lynn Findley (R-Ontario): Salem office: 900 Court St. N.E., S-403, Salem, OR 97301; 503-986-

1730. Email: Sen.LynnFindley@oregonlegislature.gov

State Rep. Mark Owens (R-Crane): Salem office: 900 Court St. N.E., H-475, Salem, OR 97301; 503-986-1460. Email: Rep.MarkOwens@oregonlegislature.gov

Baker City Hall: 1655 First Street, P.O. Box 650, Baker City, OR 97814; 541-523-6541; fax 541-524-2049. City Council meets the second and fourth Tuesdays at 7 p.m. in Council Chambers. Councilors Jason Spriet, Kerry McQuiggen, Shane Alderson, Joanna Dixon, Johnny Waggoner Sr. and Dean Guyer.

Baker City administration: 541-523-6541. Jonathan Cannon, city manager; Ty Duby, police chief; Sean Lee, fire chief; Michelle Owen, public works director.

Baker County Commission: Baker County Courthouse 1995 3rd St., Baker City, OR 97814; 541-523-8200. Meets the first and third Wednesdays at 9 a.m.; Bill Harvey (chair), Mark Bennett, Bruce Nichols.