

Offer made to buy Petersen Rock Garden

New owner would preserve the roadside attraction near Redmond

BY JOE SIESS

The Bulletin

The owner of the Petersen Rock Garden, one of Oregon's beloved roadside attractions, is reviewing an offer from a potential buyer and plans to close it to visitors while the deal is reviewed, according to the owner's real estate agent.

Kaisha Brannon, of Coldwell Banker Sun Country Realty, the seller's agent, said the possible new owners would like to renovate and maintain the rock garden for the public. The prospective new owners of the rock garden are long-time residents of Central Oregon and wish to remain unnamed, Brannon said.

"I know that it will remain the rock garden and be open to the public, but I can't really say what they plan on doing because we ultimately don't know what they are going to



Ryan Brennecke/The Bulletin, File

The owner of Petersen Rock Garden is reviewing an offer to purchase the roadside attraction south of Redmond, her real estate broker said.

get pushback on," Brannon said.

Deschutes County land use officials said last week that zoning questions about the permissible use of the property still need to be addressed. The county told stakehold-

ers, including Brannon, that many potential issues could come up given the property is zoned exclusively for farm use, the most restrictive zoning in unincorporated Deschutes County. The property, on SW 77 Street southwest of

Redmond, is also listed on the National Register of Historic Places, creating another layer of uncertainty regarding how the property can and cannot be used or altered by a new owner.

Brannon did not disclose

financial details about the offer. The rock garden's owner, Susan Caward, 57, is selling the property because of health reasons.

The rock garden was put on the market in early June and listed for \$825,000, a price that includes all the art and rocks and the peacocks that freely roam the property. It was built by Danish immigrant Rasmus Petersen in the 1940s and '50s and sits on 12 acres that was not zoned by the county until the 1970s.

At this point, Brannon said, the potential buyers will have to engage in their own due diligence and research into the property, a process that could take months.

Brannon said while the deal is not closed and the possible buyers have yet to actually buy the property, the seller is accepting backup offers to be considered in case the current potential buyers pull out of the deal.

Annette Perry, co-chair of the Petersen Rock Garden Preservation Association, a

newly formed nonprofit organization whose mission is to preserve the rock garden, said the association is both pleased to hear there is a potential private buyer and ready to help the new buyer in any way.

"We almost feel it is a blessing that there is an outside buyer," Perry said. "Because just starting out as a new nonprofit, and us knowing the Petersen and us having experience in a lot of different areas...we know this is a huge task, and having a private buyer will allow our group to step in and focus on what our mission is."

At this point, Perry said the preservation association hopes to hear from the prospective new owners of the rock garden and is willing to lend a hand in any way it can.

"We are staying true to our mission," Perry added. "We would love to help whoever owns it. We can't wait to hopefully meet them at some point when they are ready to talk to people and find out what assets ... we can help them with."

In rural West, more worries about access to abortion clinics

BY CLAIRE RUSH

Associated Press/Report for America

PORTLAND — In the central Oregon city of Bend, the sole Planned Parenthood clinic serving the eastern half of the state is bracing for an influx of patients, particularly from neighboring Idaho, where a trigger law banning most abortions is expected to take effect this summer.

"We've already started hiring," said Joanna Dennis-Cook, the Bend Health Center Manager.

Across the U.S. West, many abortion providers serving rural areas were already struggling to meet demand in a vast region where staffing shortages and long travel distances are barriers to reproductive services for women. Oregon alone is larger geographically than the entire United Kingdom.

Some facilities serving rural communities in states where abortion remains legal worry those pre-existing challenges could be further compounded by the overturning of Roe

v. Wade, as more patients travel from states where the procedure is banned or greatly restricted.

Anticipating an abortion ban in Idaho, Oregon lawmakers earlier this year created a \$15 million fund to increase access to abortion services.

Northwest Abortion Access Fund, a nonprofit that helps patients pay for travel and the procedure itself, has been tapped to receive the first \$1 million. NWAAF has worked with the Bend clinic for 20 years, and they are collaborating to meet the needs of a growing number of patients.

Dennis-Cook says her clinic is providing additional training for staff and modifying schedules "to ensure that we can accommodate increases in patient numbers" as more people travel farther for care.

Before the Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade, 20% of U.S. women already had to travel at least 42 miles to reach the nearest abortion clinic, according to 2014 data analyzed by the Guttmacher Insti-

tute, a research group that supports abortion rights, which published its findings in The Lancet Public Health. Across much of eastern Oregon, that distance can jump to nearly 180 miles. As more states move to enact trigger bans on abortion, distances could increase further for many patients.

Dennis-Cook says the Bend health center has been seeing patients coming from as far away as Texas.

Bend's clinic has six exam rooms and receives about 600 visits per month. As it is "on the smaller side," Dennis-Cook said it is "limited" in what it can provide.

"We only do first trimester procedures here," she explained. She added the clinic can't do procedures involving general anesthesia. "We don't have a plethora of nurses who can do that type of work to draw from."

Smaller abortion clinics, particularly ones in rural areas, have historically grappled with shortages of staff and doctors who can perform

the procedure. This in turn affects scheduling availability.

Amidst growing demand for travel funds, NWAAF has already exhausted its planned operating budgets for this year, according to Riley Keane, a Practical Support Lead for the group.

"Last year we gave away about \$1 million all told," Keane explained, referring to grants given to clinics to cover abortion costs and travel funds provided to patients. She said this year NWAAF is "on track to double that potentially."

Keane expects the \$1 million from Oregon's new abortion access fund will make "a huge difference" for NWAAF, which normally relies on individual donors. She says this year marks the first time the group is receiving government money.

NWAAF says it is concerned about providing travel funds to patients in states where abortion is banned or greatly restricted, but added it is working with legal professionals to assess the shifting land-

scape.

"They keep us up to date on things we need to be concerned about," Keane said.

In response to laws such as those passed in Texas allowing private individuals to sue abortion providers, the governors of Oregon, Washington and California announced a joint commitment to protect patients and doctors "against judicial and local law enforcement cooperation with out-of-state investigations, inquiries and arrests."

The three Democratic governors also said they will refuse "extradition of individuals for criminal prosecution" for receiving or supporting abortion services that are legal in their states.

NWAAF's service region includes Oregon, Washington, Idaho and Alaska.

Keane says NWAAF will continue its work for now.

"Currently, our legal advisers haven't told us that we need to stop operating," she said.

Voting

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Early Western states allowed noncitizens to vote as a way to encourage settling specifically by white European immigrants, the students found. In Oregon, white men who had resided in the state for six months prior to an election and declared an intent to become U.S. citizens could vote.

People have long applied measures of groups' contributions to society as a means to decide whether they should be able to vote, Stumpf said. Literacy tests and proxies of taxation such as property ownership or residency were common qualifiers historically.

Charter review committee members cited multiple reasons for expanding voting rights, including reducing taxation without representation.

Undocumented people in Multnomah County pay an estimated \$19 million in state and local taxes annually, according to a report by the Oregon Center for Public Policy. About half of those taxes are property taxes and the other

half are income taxes and excise taxes on goods like gas and alcohol, the report shows.

Undocumented people aren't eligible to access many of the social services to which they contribute, however. They can't access Social Security, Medicare, the Oregon Health Plan after age 18, federal food assistance programs, and state and federal earned income tax credits, among others, the report states.

Legal challenges

Granting voting rights to noncitizens likely will face substantial legal barriers, Katherine Thomas, assistant Multnomah County attorney, told committee members in March.

First, Oregon's constitution requires citizenship for voting. State statutes related to voting refer to citizenship requirements, including one that says state voter registration cards must indicate a person is a U.S. citizen.

"Ultimately, it's untested," Thomas said. "I'm not aware that there is a local jurisdiction that has expanded voting to noncitizens. We don't know how a court would necessarily treat

that kind of proposal if it was challenged in court."

The committee will present by Aug. 4 all of its recommended charter changes to the county board, which files the ballot title and other information with the elections division. Any ballot title challenges must be resolved by Sept. 8 to appear on the ballot for the Nov. 8 election.

If the measure passes, county staff would consult with the board about how to implement an expansion of voting rights, said Ryan Yambra, spokesperson for the county.

The committee also researched whether people under 18 and people currently prohibited from voting because they're serving a sentence for a felony conviction could gain voting rights.

"The committee expects that the county will explore every possible avenue to expand local voting access," Yambra said. "The details of implementation would depend on a variety of factors, and so we can't say at this time whether or what board action might be required."



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