

Allow live public comment during public meetings

The big news out of the Bend Park & Recreation District's board meeting last week was that the board moved forward on reducing fees for affordable housing.

Feel free to applaud. The board deserves it.

But also at the meeting, the district tried to get more back to normal. Ever since the park district meetings went virtual, live public comments have been missing in action. It began allowing them again last week. Several people took the opportunity and spoke during the meeting about the fees and affordable housing.

The public never completely lost its ability to comment on what the district is doing during the pandemic. They could always send in emails or submit letters. There is something special about being an actual part of the meeting, speaking

to the board more directly. It is certainly more of a guarantee that the board hears it and also that other members of the public do, too.

The Bend City Council has already been allowing live public comment. So does the Deschutes County Commission. The Bend-La Pine Schools have not, which is a shame because it has been deep in a debate over the new superintendent and how to reopen schools.

Juggling the technology is not easy for government bodies. And some members of the public don't have the ability to connect even if it is allowed. But it is important that government bodies make the effort to allow the public to speak live at meetings.

Oregon may be slower to reach herd immunity

The goal posts have moved on herd immunity for COVID-19. It was initially 60% to 70% and has gradually ticked up.

Dr. Anthony Fauci, the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, most recently has mentioned numbers as high as 85%. Herd immunity refers to the number of people vaccinated or who are recovering from a recent infection to shut down the spread of the virus.

The goal posts are just estimates. Whatever they are, they do make it clear that it's going to be a while.

In Oregon it may take longer than in other parts of the country. About

one third of Oregonians said they were not sure if they would get the shot, according to a December survey, as reported by Willamette Week. The number of people who said they would not get the shot was about 25% of men and 21% of women. Those numbers aren't fixed and will likely change, though, Oregon is generally behind the rest of the nation in getting people to get vaccinations.

Most Oregonians do not even know yet when they could get the vaccine if they want it. Please, state of Oregon, ramp up your efforts. We don't need anything else holding Oregon back from getting the economy back to normal and more people breathing freely.

You can help drive safety improvements

Bend is not a walking and biking paradise. It's pretty good, as towns go. But there's room for improvement.

We aren't just talking about walking and biking. There are neighborhood streets that have become favorite shortcuts for cars. Ever walked along NE Revere Avenue? People zoom up and down the hill like it's the straightaway at Portland International Raceway. OK not quite, but you know the feeling.

The city is attacking the problem. It's recently completed neighbor-

hood safety improvements/greenways on more than 5½ miles of city streets. They include "some firsts for Bend: two-way parking-protected bike lanes and an all-way yield neighborhood traffic circle," City Manager Eric King recently told councilors in an email.

That may be a fraction of what is needed. But city staff does listen to public input on what to do first. So if you have an area or a project that you believe needs safety improvements, let councilors know. You can email them at council@bendoregon.gov.



GUEST COLUMN

Google's monopoly isn't a game for newspapers

BY DEAN RIDINGS

It is no secret that Google has secured a near monopoly in the search and local advertising world. However, the impact on newspapers hasn't been quite as obvious.

A number of lawsuits have recently been brought that call Google to task for its practices. These lawsuits signal the government's acknowledgement of Google's unfair practices and initiate steps to hold them accountable.



Ridings

The first suit, an antitrust action filed by the Justice Department in October, accuses Google of abusing its position over smaller rivals by operating like an illegal monopoly through exclusionary agreements that have hurt consumers and competitors.

The second suit, an antitrust suit filed in mid-December by Texas and nine other states, alleges that the company has stifled competition and enjoys monopolistic power, specifically as it relates to digital advertising.

The third suit, filed just days after the second suit by 38 U.S. states and territories, accuses Google of abusing its market power to maintain its search engine dominance. The suit doesn't seek monetary damages, but instead seeks broader remedies and an order to end any agreements or other behavior that it finds to be exclusionary.

But why does this matter, and what



Marcio Jose Sanchez/AP file

Google headquarters in Mountain View, California in 2015.

does it mean to you or to your community?

Almost everyone uses Google in some way or another. It has become part of our lives, and Google has used this to its advantage. Google games the marketplace through search algorithms to its financial gain. The result is an uneven and often unfair playing field for small and local businesses. At a time when local businesses are struggling to overcome the impacts of COVID, the need to be able to compete fairly has never been greater.

But what it means to local news, including this newspaper, is that Google uses content from newspapers and other news providers without compensating the publisher. If you use Google to seek information about current events in your community, chances are, the results will be from your local newspaper and other news providers. Google monetizes the con-

tent produced by the publishers, creating even more problems for an industry that was already challenged as a result of changing news consumption habits in an internet-connected world.

The shift to digital readership has been inevitable. However, the use of locally produced content by Google without adequate compensation has accelerated a financial crisis in the newspaper industry — forcing newspapers to make reductions. If the local newspaper goes away, Google doesn't replace the content. It just has less viable responses to searches for local information. The ultimate result is significantly diminished coverage in local communities on the issues that matter most — local government, schools, health, environment and all the issues that impact local citizens day-in and day-out.

A successful newspaper is critical to the health of a local community. Encourage your representatives in Congress to support legislative action to require Google to play by the rules and fairly compensate newspapers for the content they develop. If Google is allowed to continue its unfair business practices, there is no passing go or collecting \$200 as it continues to monopolize the board.

■ Dean Ridings is CEO of America's Newspapers, an organization of 1,500 newspaper and associate member companies. It is committed to explaining, defending and advancing the vital role of newspapers in democracy and civil life. Bulletin Publisher Heidi Wright is a board member.

Letters policy

We welcome your letters. Letters should be limited to one issue, contain no more than 250 words and include the writer's signature, phone number and address for verification. We edit letters for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons. We reject poetry, personal attacks, form letters, letters submitted elsewhere and those appropriate for other sections of The Bulletin. Writers are limited to one letter or guest column every 30 days.

Guest columns

Your submissions should be between 550 and 650 words; they must be signed; and they must include the writer's phone number and address for verification. We edit submissions for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons. We reject those submitted elsewhere. Locally submitted columns alternate with national columnists and commentaries. Writers are limited to one letter or guest column every 30 days.

How to submit

Please address your submission to either My Nickel's Worth or Guest Column and mail, fax or email it to The Bulletin. Email submissions are preferred.

Email: letters@bendbulletin.com

Write: My Nickel's Worth/Guest Column
P.O. Box 6020
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Fax: 541-385-5804

Editorials reflect the views of The Bulletin's editorial board, Publisher Heidi Wright, Editor Gerry O'Brien and Editorial Page Editor Richard Coe. They are written by Richard Coe.

Central Oregon Crossroads: Bend's Community Climate Action Plan a helpful guide

The goal of the Bend Community Climate Action Plan (CCAP) is to achieve a 40% decrease in fossil fuel emissions by 2030 and a 70% decrease by 2050. The plan is a balanced and comprehensive document. It is a helpful guide to focus on what Bend can do to address the climate crisis.

Changing climatic patterns will affect salmon

Skiing, fishing, paddleboarding and farming all depend on snow and the pattern of snowmelt. According to the CCAP: Warmer average temperatures will cause dry seasons to last longer and become more extreme. Summer is expected to be hotter with lower rainfall. Winter will arrive earlier in the year and precipitation will fall in a shorter time frame. The precipitation will gradually become rain instead of snow, which will decrease snowpack and water supply during the hotter months of the year.

Salmon will be affected. Cold-water fish species are sensitive due to their



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seasonally timed migration upstream to breed. Higher winter stream flows and earlier peak flows due to climate change will damage spawning nests, wash away incubating eggs, and prematurely force young salmon from rivers. Lower summer stream flows and warmer water temperatures means that by the turn of the century much of the current habitats may be too warm for these species. What impact will a decline in fishing have on tourism in Central Oregon?

Emissions profile

To put it in simple terms, about two-thirds of our local fossil fuel emissions can be attributed to energy consumption for residential, commercial and industrial buildings and one-third can be attributed to emissions from trans-

portation. Bend generated roughly 1 million metric tons of local emissions in the baseline year of 2016, but when externally imported products are added, the sum of emissions almost doubles. That makes the choice of what we buy and bring to our community important. We can choose to buy goods and services from companies outside Bend that strive to reduce, reuse and recycle portions of their products.

The good news is that Bend has a CCAP and that we are in a state that has progressive policies on climate change, but there is also bad news — due to rapid growth, Bend is outpacing the average emission reduction goals calculated for the state as a whole.

Reducing emissions

Like the federal government, the local government has a budget that can demonstrate leadership in reducing emissions. The U.S. military, the world's largest consumer of fossil fuels, can do

things like converting to electric vehicles and investing in battery research and development. It will take a while for the U.S. Air Force to fly battery powered jets, but it might not take long.

As evidence, note that the battery powered nine-seat Cessna Caravan is being commercialized in Washington state.

Nevertheless, major breakthroughs by scores of companies working on electric planes probably depend on reducing the weight of batteries before large planes can fly significant distances on electric power alone. According to Rewiring America, in the electrified future, short-haul flights (less than 500 miles) will be electric, enabled by increases in the power density of motors and batteries. Long-haul flights will use biofuels to get enough range.

At the city level

The city of Bend is planning to buy electric vehicles and will incentivize energy saving retrofits in residential

and commercial buildings. A strong equity component in the CCAP will help poorer households and historically disadvantaged communities find affordable housing along public transit corridors and provide better access to loans and other incentives for home insulation and installation of photovoltaic panels.

In conclusion, Bend has about 100,000 permanent residents and around 2.5 million annual visitors. We are surrounded by world-class outdoor recreation venues that drive our local economy. Tourism helps employ residents, provides a market for local goods and services, and generates tax revenues for reinvestment in Bend. All these aspects of the economy will be affected by climate change, and the risks of forest loss, reduced snowpack and wilder forest fires puts these economic opportunities and our quality of life at risk.

■ Scott Christiansen is an international agronomist with 35 years of experience. He worked for USDA's Agricultural Research Service and the U.S. Agency for International Development.

