

Bend's code needs some changes for homeless shelters

The rules for homeless shelters in Bend need to change.

You could sit all day in front of your house in Bend. Your neighbors might wonder about you and might ask what is going on. But there's nothing illegal about it.

If a homeless person did that in front of a homeless shelter in Bend, it's against city code. In fact, in Bend even loitering in front of a homeless shelter is prohibited by code.

There's some other curious wording in the code for homeless shelters in Bend. At a homeless shelter in Bend, there "must be a competent adult present for every 25 persons utilizing the facility." So the people utilizing the facility are not competent? Couldn't that be phrased better?

There are reasons for restrictions. They were designed to minimize concerns about impacts of homeless shelters. But at Monday's meeting of the Bend Planning Commission, committee members challenged city officials to take a new look at them. Bend Planning Commission Vice Chair Whitney Swander and Scott Winters, the chair, deserve credit for raising many of the concerns. It was Winters who made the point about the contrast in what most people can do in front of their homes.

City staff's answer Monday was: Changes like that are going to have to wait.

The city is trying to move swiftly on some changes. It is making some code

changes to allow the city's plan to essentially buy a hotel on Third Street and turn it into a homeless shelter. It's competing for funding and it wants the path cleared quickly to ensure it doesn't miss out. Jon Skidmore, the city's chief operating officer, said the other changes may be more controversial and would require more of a community conversation.

So for now, the city's plan is to get rid of the requirement that there must be 1,000 feet of separation between temporary housing. And the asked for changes would also allow temporary housing, including warming and permanent homeless shelters "as an outright use in commercial zones and in the section of the Bend Central District that is west of Third Street. The Bend Central District sits east of U.S. Highway 97 and west of Fourth Street and is centered on Third Street." That quote is from Brenna Visser's article about the meeting, which includes more detail.

Left unanswered in the meeting, though, was why only those areas for shelters in Bend? And what about those other concerns in the code?

Bend residents deserve answers. Skidmore said many issues will be raised in a discussion with the Bend City Council, perhaps on March 3. If you are curious about the city's policy for homeless shelters that meeting should be an important one.

Bend plans to allow areas for homeless to park

Many people who are homeless have jobs. They have cars. They don't have any place to park safely and with easy access to bathrooms and trash disposal.

Bend wants to do something about that and is creating a safe parking program. It was actually discussed at the same meeting of the Bend Planning Commission that we wrote about in today's other editorial. But we didn't want the parking plan to get lost in it.

The proposal has two components: overnight camping and transitional overnight parking.

In overnight camping, up to three vehicles would be able to park on properties owned or leased. It would be open to a broad variety of organizations — religious, nonprofit, business or public entity. The overnight camping must provide access to sanitation, including a bathroom, hand-washing and trash disposal.

The transitional overnight parking would allow up to six vehicles. And the city may allow more than six vehicles on property owned or leased by a public en-

tity. There would be a requirement about "who can stay, how long and what hours of the day." Supervision would be required. The city would require a permit, likely annual. There must also be a plan for supervision, sanitation, a neighborhood meeting and a contact person.

We should note that transitional overnight parking is currently allowed in Bend under COVID-19 emergency orders. This plan would allow that to continue. The city has two locations where a similar type of parking is happening now. A member of city staff said the city could not disclose the locations because of medical privacy regulations. We decided to test that by making a public records request for any associated permits. The city had not responded as of our deadline. There certainly seems to be a public interest in knowing where in a community the city authorizes temporary housing.

If you have any thoughts about the city's future parking program, you should contact the Bend City Council at council@bendoregon.gov or write us a letter to the editor.



My Nickel's Worth

Seniors can wait

I just finished the recent article on senior COVID-19 vaccinations. I am a senior waiting for my vaccinations, but all I can say is "call me an ambulance."

The ME generation has gotten old and now must be first once again. Most seniors have the opportunity to stay isolated to a great degree and living in Bend, where there are many opportunities to recreate without contact with others, I think that the prioritization of people such as teachers and first responders, who do not have that option, is a sound one.

My advice to my generation: Be patient and be grateful. You will get your vaccine soon enough. A couple of more weeks, or even a month is not long in the scheme of things. It is frustrating to not be able to see family members not in your pandemic pod. Find something to do for someone else and the time will pass quickly.

— Heather Stout, Bend

Confidence in vaccine distribution

Communities across Oregon, and the country, are asking themselves what is necessary to recover from the pandemic — economically, mentally and physically. Elected officials must support our constituents through these tough times and bolster the industries helping us fight off COVID-19.

Oregon is vaccinating high-risk front-line workers, long-term care facility residents, teachers and seniors. This is a good start, but we need more, and more

quickly. The vaccine rollout is a volatile situation and everchanging process. There are gaps, and I thank everyone sharing ideas, voicing concerns and creating opportunities for improvement. In order to gain that herd immunity that we have all been waiting for, we must not let up. We must do more.

This is a massive, unprecedented undertaking, and it is going to take every bit of coordination between the government and our health care industry. I encourage my fellow elected officials, Gov. Kate Brown's administration and the federal government to strengthen their communications with those helping to get Oregonians the vaccine, including manufacturers, distributors and clinicians. These critical partners share our commitment to vaccinating the population, and they have infrastructure for delivering and administering.

Health care distributors have sent more than 1 million vaccines to our state, and around 836,000 have been administered by medical providers as of late February. I am hopeful and confident, that if we work together, the health care distribution industry and medical teams will be able to deliver and administer vaccine as quickly and safely as possible throughout all of Oregon.

— Patti Adair is a Deschutes County commissioner.

Expel Nearman

On Dec. 21, a large crowd of armed right-wing protesters, in-

cluding Patriot Prayer militia members, gathered outside the Oregon Capitol in Salem. They pounded on doors and broke windows. They harassed journalists and assaulted Oregon State Police officers. During this chaos, lawmakers were in session, working to pass legislation that would help our businesses survive the COVID-19 pandemic. Instead of working with his colleagues to support the people of Oregon, Republican state Rep. Mike Nearman did something incredibly destructive. He let the mob in.

Security camera footage obtained by The Oregonian shows Rep. Nearman opening a locked door and letting violent men with guns inside. In doing so, he put his congressional colleagues in danger, he put law enforcement in danger and he put the regular Oregonians who make sure our government does its job in danger. Nearman's behavior was reckless, irresponsible and possibly criminal. Can you imagine working in a school and opening the door for an armed mob? Or being a bank employee who waves a would-be bank robber inside? At the most fundamental level, we are called to care for our fellow humans, to do unto others as we would have them do unto us. By his actions, Nearman invited violence into his place of work and into our place of government. I don't care what your political leanings are. We should have zero tolerance for violence. Nearman should be expelled from the Legislature.

— Amber Keyser, Bend

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.

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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.

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'Parking reform' is a hidden ploy to turn Bend into California

BY CHAD BUELOW

I am writing in response to the column by City Councilor Melanie Kebler calling for "parking reform." I'm a liberal Democrat and Kebler voter but now question whether our new "blue wave" city councilors, with post-graduate degrees but notably less private sector experience than their predecessors, are capable of tackling the pressing issues facing Bend.

Having fled California because well-meaning, well-educated, progressive politicians like Kebler failed to address out-of-control traffic, housing costs and homelessness, I feel compelled to sound the alarm — be very afraid when your elected leaders do things to make life worse for constituents and local businesses in pursuit of abstract social justice goals, as Kebler is doing here.

For those who had trouble deciphering the progressive euphemisms and jargon in Kebler's column, I'll

translate what she means by "parking reform." Kebler wants to improve traffic by making it harder to use a car — in the hope that if driving becomes too difficult, people will drive less and traffic will magically disappear.

To accomplish this, Kebler would implement paid parking or remove parking altogether in popular areas, such as downtown Bend. Kebler would also eliminate minimum parking requirements for new developments and let the "market" decide how much is appropriate. Kebler would then use parking revenue to create slush funds ("parking benefit districts") to finance pet projects ("other great things.")

To those skeptical of Kebler's claim that by making people's lives worse she will actually make them better, she assures us that "it can be hard to see the bigger picture" — the implication being that she can. I disagree — and here is how I see the "bigger picture":

GUEST COLUMN



Buelow

answer. I've lived in and traveled to many places where car ownership is unnecessary. I'm shocked this needs to be said, but Bend is not one of those places.

The city requires things like minimum parking precisely because the "market" is incapable of doing so. With an acute housing shortage, someone will live in whatever developers are allowed to build. Apartment residents won't give up cars because they don't have parking — they'll

just park in the surrounding neighborhood. Downtown businesses like Dudley's Bookshop or Smith Rock Records, already threatened by Amazon, will lose business when customers choose free shipping over paid parking.

Kebler presumably opposes fossil fuels, not cars. Well, in the "bigger picture" the future is electric — and the city should want Bend residents zipping around town in zero emission vehicles charged with locally generated solar power. If Kebler gets her way, though, only homeowners with chargers could own an electric vehicle — which hardly seems "equitable." The city should ensure all future residents can own an EV by putting charging stations on public property and incentivizing builders to do so on private property — in both apartments and single-family homes.

Second, if Kebler wants to lower housing costs, she should get to work

expanding the urban growth boundary to increase the supply of buildable land. This will have a far greater impact on housing affordability than waiving code requirements that protect the quality of life of all Bend residents.

Lastly, Kebler's proposal is a slap in the face to the overwhelming majority of her constituents who approved the transportation bond. Bend voters clearly want the city to invest in vehicular transport — not impede it. We even provided a funding source and a "to do" list to prevent future elected officials like Kebler from overriding the will of the voters with their own pet policy prerogatives.

I've tried to heed the advice of long time residents to not turn my new home into my old one — unfortunately, it seems that Bend natives like Kebler are hellbent on turning Bend into California on their own. For Bend's sake, let's hope she doesn't get her way.

■ Chad Buelow lives in Bend.