

# A big bill for improving the lives of Bend's homeless

When it was introduced, Oregon House Bill 2004 was innocuous. It called for a study related to housing issues. That was it.

But the bill sponsored by House Speaker Tina Kotek was simply a placeholder. It has many proposed amendments, and all of them as of Friday, at least, include \$2.5 million for the city of Bend for a navigation center.

That makes this bill a big deal for Bend. State Reps. Jason Kropf, D-Bend, and Jack Zika, R-Redmond, have signed on to the bill as sponsors.

What is a navigation center? It's about providing services to the homeless and finding ways for them to navigate their way to a better life.

The city of Bend does not have precise plans for such money. It doesn't know if the amount it would receive will change or if it will even get it. In the 2020 session, there was a similar proposal. The Republican walkout meant that the 2020 bill died.

The city does have some tentative ideas about what it might do. First of all, the city likely would not provide direct services to the homeless. It would partner with other organizations: nonprofits that do that kind of work. The goal would be a kind of one-stop shop for homeless people to get access to services. It might include meeting basic needs such as providing food, finding shelter, ensuring people have access to the public benefits they qualify for, offering caseworkers to help them manage medical needs and more.

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a hotel to serve the south part of town. There could also be a center located more to the north. Homeless individuals and families must sometimes make harrowing choices about spending what money they do have. Spend it on gas to get to work? Spend it on gas to get to a medical appointment? Proximity and access are critical when you have to make decisions like those.

The biggest problem with this pledge of money for a Bend navigation center is that it is ephemeral. The city would need to find a way to sustain it over time. Perhaps the city's new fee on building permits would help. If the Legislature invests in helping Bend's homeless, the community needs to back up that investment.

## Bill diverts more money to footpaths, bike paths

We have not checked out the testimony on every bill in the Legislature. In terms of volume of written testimony, though, Senate Bill 395 may be near the top.

It increases the required expenditure on footpaths and bicycle trails from 1% to 5% of amounts received from the state Highway Fund. That would mean a reduced percentage of money allocated to directly serve cars and trucks.

It is supported by groups from Central Oregon, such as Commute Options and Central Oregon LandWatch.

"While we recognize the benefits of highway projects, spending on improvements for biking and walk-

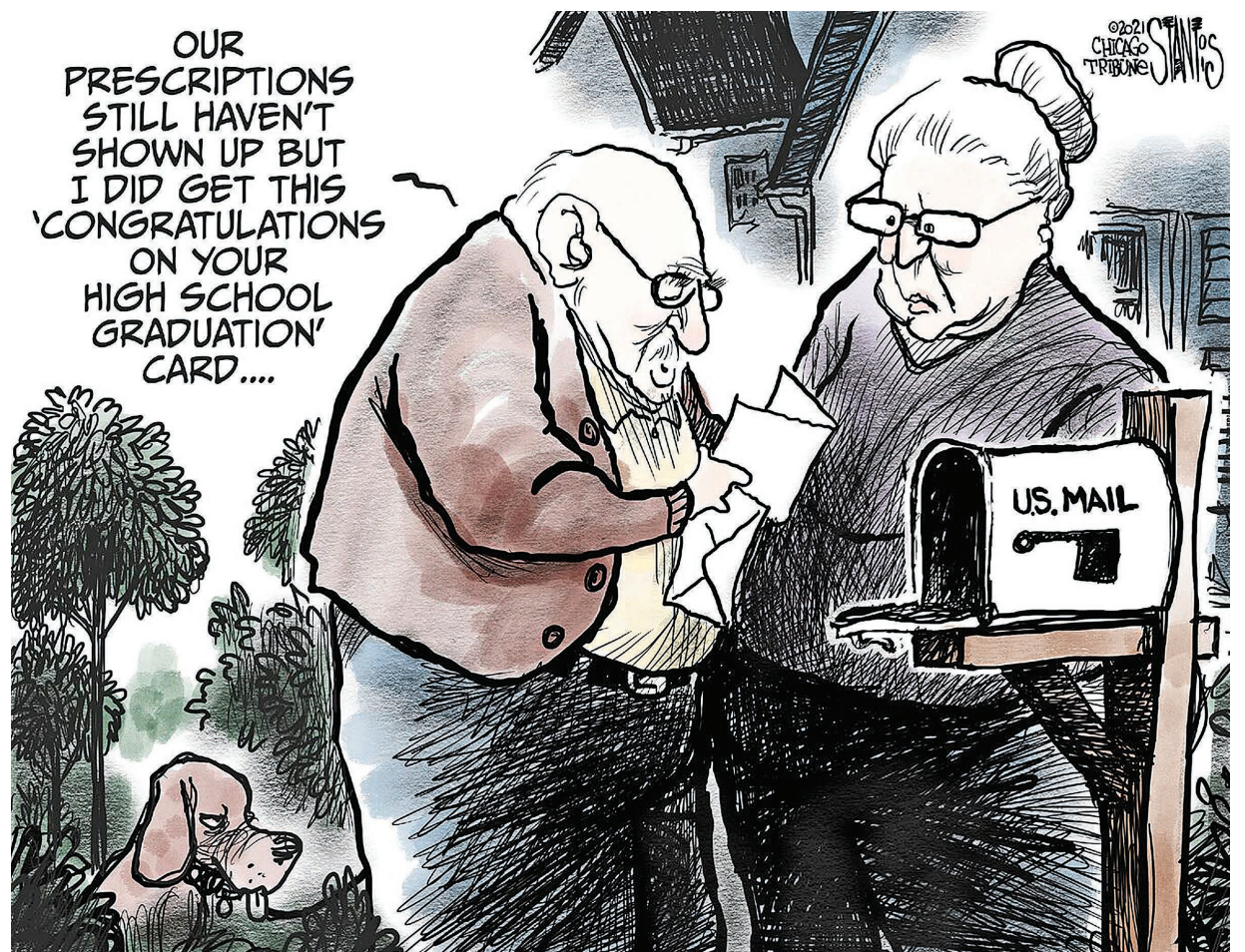
ing routes can prove to have an even higher benefit with a lower investment of resources," Commute Options says.

"Any means to provide safer routes for all and encourage fewer cars on the road is a plus."

It has its fair share of opposition, as well. The Association of Oregon Counties opposes it. It points out that the bill "removes local control over community investments and mandates the diversion of four percent of county road budgets (approximately \$12 million to 14 million annually)."

The bill was still in the Joint Transportation Committee as of Friday.

If you would like to weigh in on the bill, contact your legislator.



## Bend needs diversity of housing that city councilors are backing

BY KATHERINE AUSTIN  
AND DAVID WELTON

We read with dismay the March 3 guest column by Allan Bruckner. While we respect the former mayor's service to Bend, we strongly disagree with his message. Mr. Bruckner complains that the City Council is in the 30-45 age range and can't speak for younger or older residents. I, Kathy, am 69. It is not age that allows one to understand the needs of others. The new councilors canvassed many citizens in their run for council, including me, and they bring a fresh eye to our emerging challenges with empathy and wisdom beyond their years.

It seems that for some, it is difficult to understand that for our fellow citizens, the need for home changes over time and under different circumstances. We do not all want the same thing. As Mr. Bruckner pointed out, post-WWII, the city historically built primarily single-family homes. This has caused a crisis of availability and affordability for those that cannot afford that type of housing.

What is urgently needed in Bend is a variety of housing types that address the needs of our diverse citizenry. Urgently needed are apartments, duplexes, triplexes, quads, townhomes and cottage clusters that offer a range of rental and ownership opportunities. Right now, none of our low and

moderate or even above median income residents can afford to buy a home in Bend. They deserve to live in a dignified home as renters until such time that they are able to buy if indeed they ever want to. Saving for a down payment is difficult enough without curtailing the supply of rentals, and thus raising prices.

While complaining about added traffic, Mr. Bruckner urges us to sprawl outward. This will only increase the need for more cars and traffic to reach services and jobs. There are plans to grow out into our current urban growth boundary. Any new development needs to be done in a way that provides not only a variety of housing but services and jobs, as well. This will allow for alternative transportation including walking and biking as well as driving. Hardly a trendy, new idea, neighborhood corner stores used to be common throughout towns. We agree that we need a new tree ordinance to preserve more of our trees and natural resources, but using the land we have already included in our city more judiciously lets us spare more truly wild land outside town from development.

We all need outdoor spaces. That doesn't mean everyone wants a large yard to maintain. Our parks and rec-

reation department has provided us with world-class parks all over the city and has a goal of everyone being in walking distance to a park. Busy young service workers, students and some seniors do not need to spend endless hours doing yard maintenance and shoveling snow in the winter. It may be when young folks marry and start to raise families they would prefer a detached home. Many, including students, young professionals, empty nesters and seniors, might prefer more dense living close to restaurants and entertainment. Different strokes for different folks!

The mantra of charm and character have been used since WWII to segregate cities by race and income level, and prevent home ownership for people of color. It is time to call that out for what it is and put it into the trash heap of history. There will always be a period of transition when there is change responding to growth. Planning takes place over a long arc of time: 20-30 years is typical. Many of the zoning changes and the transportation bond projects will take many years to materialize. We need to look forward not backward when planning our future and that is what the City Council and city staff have embraced. More power to them!

■ Katherine Austin and David Welton live in Bend. Austin is a member of The Bulletin's community editorial board.

### 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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# Where is the CDC's guidance to vaccinated Americans?

BY LEANA WEN

Special to The Washington Post

First, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidance on what fully vaccinated people can safely do was expected on Thursday. Then the release got pushed back. On Friday, CDC Director Rochelle Walensky said it would not happen that day, either, but that guidance would come "soon."

These unacceptable delays illustrate a larger problem in communication about the coronavirus vaccines: Public health officials have chosen caution over celebration. If this doesn't change, Americans could be dissuaded from being vaccinated, and our country might never achieve the goal of herd immunity.

So far, more than 8% of Americans are fully vaccinated. As vaccinations have ramped up, with an average of 2 million shots per day going into arms,

clinicians have been bombarded with questions from people eager to plan trips, see their loved ones and generally return to their pre-pandemic lives.

In the absence of CDC guidance, we in the medical community have been giving patients our best advice. It's fine to see other fully vaccinated people, for example. Grandparents can travel to see the rest of their family. In public places, vaccinated people should still wear masks, but they can take off their masks around loved ones, in small-group settings.

Patients understand that we don't have all the answers. We don't know for sure that vaccinated people won't spread the coronavirus, but the likelihood is probably greatly reduced. We can't predict exactly how much risk is reduced by getting inoculated, but we can say with certainty that the chance of vaccinated people getting severely ill is very low.

This is more than enough information for the CDC to issue preliminary guidelines. On Friday, Walensky said the CDC is weighing "complex issues" and wants to "take the time to get this right." I understand the impulse to be cautious, but there is a cost to waiting. Some governors are ending mask mandates and allowing all businesses to return to 100% capacity, regardless of workers' or patrons' vaccination status. Individuals are changing their behaviors accordingly. Every day that passes without guidance, the CDC becomes less relevant to decision-making.

This overly timid approach also means that public health officials continue to undersell the incredible benefits of the coronavirus vaccines. If the vaccines are so good, why can't be clearly articulated what people can do after getting them? Right now, there is more demand than vaccine supply, but this will change soon. By July, and pos-

sibly earlier, the barrier to reaching herd immunity will be vaccine hesitancy.

What public health officials need to do, now, is unequivocally endorse vaccination as the path to normalcy. The CDC has an opportunity to give all the examples of things fully vaccinated individuals can do that the unvaccinated cannot. For example, officials could say that vaccinated people are not only able but also encouraged to travel; on the other hand, unvaccinated people should still limit travel to essential trips and must be tested before and quarantine after. Vaccinated nursing-home residents could have vaccinated visitors; unvaccinated people cannot. The CDC could say that it's low-risk for vaccinated people to return to restaurants, churches and museums; it could go further and urge business owners and policymakers to enact different rules for them.

Americans must face the fact that

mass vaccination is not only our best but also our only viable path out of this pandemic. This reality can come true; after all, we have three safe, highly effective vaccines that are essentially 100% protective against hospitalization and death. Public health leaders need to generate far more excitement around these vaccines, and that begins with clear communication about the freedoms people can have once they are vaccinated. Waiting for every issue to be sorted out before publicizing some guidance just won't do.

Come on, CDC. Please give Americans the exhilarating news and the hope that we've been longing for. The perfect cannot be the enemy of the good. There is a real cost to continued inaction.

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