

When should Bend councilors cut speakers off?

Much of a Bend City Council meeting is pre-scripted, tame drama. Staff talks. Councilors discuss. Councilors vote. Then march through more agenda.

Decorum is the rule. There is the occasional councilor versus councilor clash. Few cliffhangers.

The public comment section is different. It can teem with surprise. It gets edgy. People criticize the city. What, though, should councilors do when the comments cross the line? And where is the line?

The Bend City Council rules subcommittee met last week and plans to meet again this week to talk about how public comment might be improved. How long should people be able to speak? When should the public comment be during the meeting? And are there other ways the council could gather public input?

Councilors have not made any changes, yet. They just talked about them. Some of the options discussed include:

1. Allow public comment for an hour at every meeting starting at a set time, perhaps from 6 p.m. to 7 p.m. Then, it would end. That idea seemed to be dismissed because public comment doesn't usually last an hour, anyway.

2. Move public comment perhaps to the end of the meeting. That also seemed to be dismissed, because it would make it hard on the public to have to wait two hours or longer to be able to speak.

3. Allow other councilors — other than the mayor — to interrupt a speaker making inappropriate comments. As Mayor Sally Russell explained, she doesn't know what people will say until they say it. And it can be difficult in the moment to decide if a speaker should be cut off. One suggestion was to also allow the Mayor Pro-Tem Gena Goodman-Campbell to interrupt a speaker. Another possibility is to open that up to all the councilors.

Councilor Rita Schenkelberg made an excellent point. She said the mayor or others councilors should not get

into an exchange with that person over what the person said or how the person said it. The council could have a short, standardized statement to recite to end that person's time and then shift to the next speaker. Minimize the drama. Sounds like a smart approach, if used with discretion.

4. Create other ways for the public to comment with the whole council. The public comment section of the meetings is special. It gives the public an opportunity to speak before the whole council. Live. A member of the public knows almost for certain that they will be heard, which is less certain when an email is sent. Members of the public want to have that ability to comment on the record, be recorded and allow others to hear what they have said.

Previous councils have had office hours. Usually two councilors would set up in a meeting room in City Hall or elsewhere and talk to whoever showed up. We attended a couple of those. We aren't certain they were a roaring success. They may have just needed more time to take hold.

City Manager Eric King said staff is looking for ways that councilors could engage the public outside of the council meetings. One thing in particular that people seem to want is to have a dialogue or discussion with councilors on certain topics. Councilors generally don't do that in the public comment section.

And it can be frustrating for speakers to ask passionate questions during a council meeting and get no response.

We hope we haven't given the impression that councilors are gunning to silence criticism. They are not. Public comments are an important check and balance on what the city does. It's the fabric of democracy. If comments deteriorate into ugly personal attacks, the city does need to have a smart way to hit the brakes.

Blind hiring might be better for Bend

The first meeting of Bend's Human Rights and Equity Commission ended with a discussion about the best way for the city to conduct interviews.

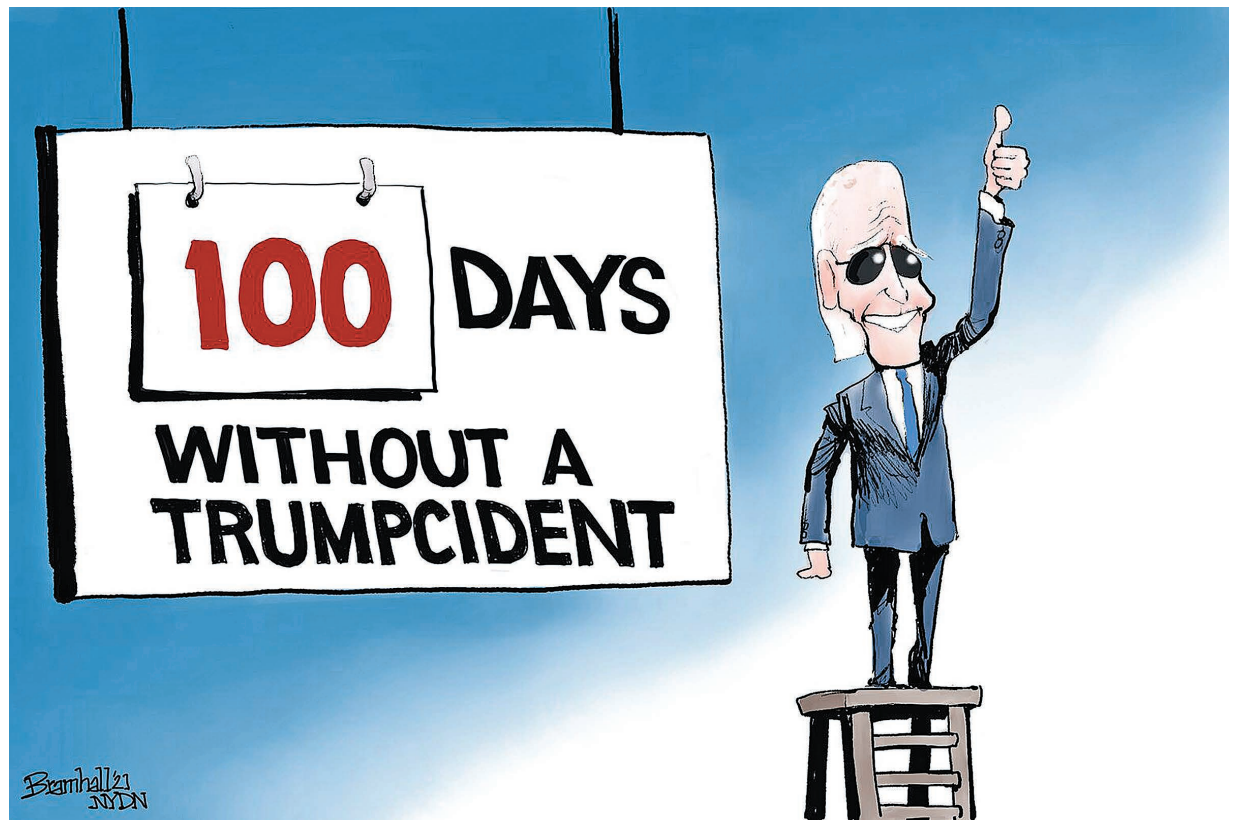
Commissioner Jasmine Wilder wondered if Bend city councilors should have done blind interviews of the potential commissioners. Would it have meant that even more people of color were appointed to the commission?

There are several ways to do blind hiring. Basically it is a way to hire

people to block out their personal information that may bias a hiring decision. One more famous example was the effort of the Boston Symphony in the 1950s to have musicians audition behind a screen. That way it was the performance that mattered — not race, not gender nor any number of other factors.

We'll have to wait and see if the commission is truly able to create changes in city policy and in Bend. It sure seems like the commissioners are going to try.

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.



Robin Vora for Bend parks board

BY ROBIN VORA

I request your vote for Bend Park & Recreation Board Position 4. I care deeply about our parks, trails and recreation programs. As a board member, I would look forward to being more deeply engaged in all aspects of the district's programs, and hope to make a significant contribution to the district and my community.

My priorities would be:

- Recovery from COVID-19-related program suspensions and closures.
- Completing river trails and expanding Bend's trail network.
- Creating future parks in underserved neighborhoods.
- Maintaining the diversity of programs.
- Serving all population groups.
- Increasing native vegetation in parks.
- Installing fish passage through Mirror Pond dam.

I think community service is important and believe I can use my professional background in natural resources and volunteer experiences on several city of Bend committees to make significant contributions in parks and recreation management. I have been closely involved with many projects related to parks and trails over the last 19 years, starting as liaison with Bend Park & Recreation when a board member of the Orchard District Neighborhood Association for 10 years.

In Bend, I:

- Am a regular advocate for parks, trails, facilities and recreation programs and make periodic public comments at Bend Park and Recreation Board meetings.
- As the principal proponent,

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worked with District staff for three years to find a property for a neighborhood park for the community between Butler Market Road and the canal, with Canal Row Park the result.

- Advocated for and assisted with the acquisition and planning of three other parks: Orchard (with adjacent Latino residents as a member of the neighborhood association), Goodrich, and Miller Landing (financial contribution to its purchase).
- Served on a Park & Recreation District Citizen Advisory Committee.
- Worked 13 years with two school principals to maintain public access to Pilot Butte outside school hours, and have advocated with State Parks for rogue trail closures on the butte.
- Got a sidewalk around Marshall High ball field.
- Got Park & Recreation to improve the landscaping at the entrance to Juniper Park off Franklin to better keep headlights out of living room windows across the street.
- Pull noxious weeds in parks.
- Assisted with adaptive recreation for people with disabilities.
- Have benefited from district classes and membership at Juniper Swim & Fitness.

Prior to coming to Bend, I coached youth soccer for seven years in Minnesota.

Further, I have dedicated my time and expertise to our community in other ways. I have served on several city committees including Urban Growth Boundary Expansion, Urban

Renewal Advisory Board, Metropolitan Planning Organization (transportation) and Historic Landmarks Commission. I am on the Soil & Water Conservation District Board. I oversaw recreation programs as a manager with the U.S. Forest Service and assisted with youth environmental education. I served on a Minnesota city's recreation committee. I volunteer at the Tower Theatre and have been involved with the Deschutes Land Trust, East Cascades Audubon Society and Habitat for Humanity.

I worked 39 years for the U.S. Forest Service and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service in seven states as a forester, ecologist, wildlife biologist, and manager. In addition, I completed assignments in seven countries. I have master's and bachelor's degrees in Natural Resources from the University of Idaho and U.C. Berkeley. I immigrated with my family from India when I was 13.

I think we have a great Park & Recreation District. I would like the opportunity to continue to contribute more directly as a board member. I am endorsed by the Oregon League of Conservation Voters and Central Oregon Labor Chapter.

See me on Facebook: [tinyurl.com/RobinVoraforBend](https://www.facebook.com/tinyurl.com/RobinVoraforBend). Vote for Robin Vora for Bend Park & Recreation, Position 4.

■ Robin Vora is a candidate for the board of the Bend Park & Recreation District.

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
Bend, OR 97708

Fax: 541-385-5804

Elect people who care about the people who live here now

BY BILL EDDIE

Let's cut right to the point. Bend's growth and future planning is out of control and taking us rapidly toward a dark future.

Our city planners projected in 2019 the need for 17,000 new houses or apartments by 2028. If you assume two cars for every house, this will put 34,000 more cars on our roads every day. We certainly don't need a traffic "consultant" to tell us that our roads are already crowded and parking is at a premium. One can only imagine the traffic nightmare in the near future if we remain on this misguided path.

Bend has been "discovered." No more money promoting Central Oregon need be spent. The local trails, mountains, lakes and rivers are stressed to the max. The main water storage facility for our area, Wickiup Reservoir, has been reduced to a mud puddle the last couple of years. Park-

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ing on Century Drive has become difficult, and this season the Forest Service will charge daily fees to access the "wilderness." While we give lip-service to the environment, we are selling out Mother Nature on a daily basis. We need to realize that our local beauty is finite and impossible to replace.

I always thought that the main job of our local elected officials was to serve the needs of the folks who actually live in the community. Instead our current leaders are more interested in growth and planning for those who don't yet have a stake in Central Oregon.

Why? Does everyone need to live in Bend/Redmond? Call me a NIMBY (not in my backyard), but if the folks

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who already live here don't speak up to preserve the beauty and uniqueness of Bend, then who will?

I believe we need to elect some local leaders who truly value the concept of livability. This means stopping what I view as "urban sprawl."

This means stop building large "box hotels" at the expense of beautiful views and stands of long existing trees.

Our city council and county commissioners should resist the idea of

expanding the Urban Growth Boundary. The notion of more resorts like Sunriver being built in Central Oregon should be scrapped. Like we need more congestion on our roads?

We need to preserve the rocks and juniper trees that define the essence of the High Desert landscape. Don't compete with other chaotic cities in Oregon (like the City of Roses) where it's become risky to venture downtown.

Contributing to the growth and in-

stability is the ever increasing number of transient camps which defy local regulations and police oversight. We should endeavor to create and preserve our own unique vibe here in Central Oregon.

I keep hearing about "housing shortages" and "low inventory." Really? It seems there is no end to new homes being constructed in the Bend area. I sometimes think the city planners would OK a permit to build a home atop Mt. Bachelor if it meant more property taxes. The natural turnover of existing homes will continue to be driven by market forces and no government subsidies should be needed.

The only way to derail the current madness is to vote for those who agree that bigger is not better and will work to enhance the city for those already invested in the area.

■ Bill Eddie lives in Bend.