

Plan

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zoning issues for the project, called the discussion “fascinating” and suggested he could come up with ideas for affordable housing grants.

New parking plan
Green also unveiled a new plan for public off-street parking for the downtown area. His plan calls for acquiring a lot on West Main Street formerly used by Wright Chevrolet and several lots across North Canyon Boulevard from the post office.

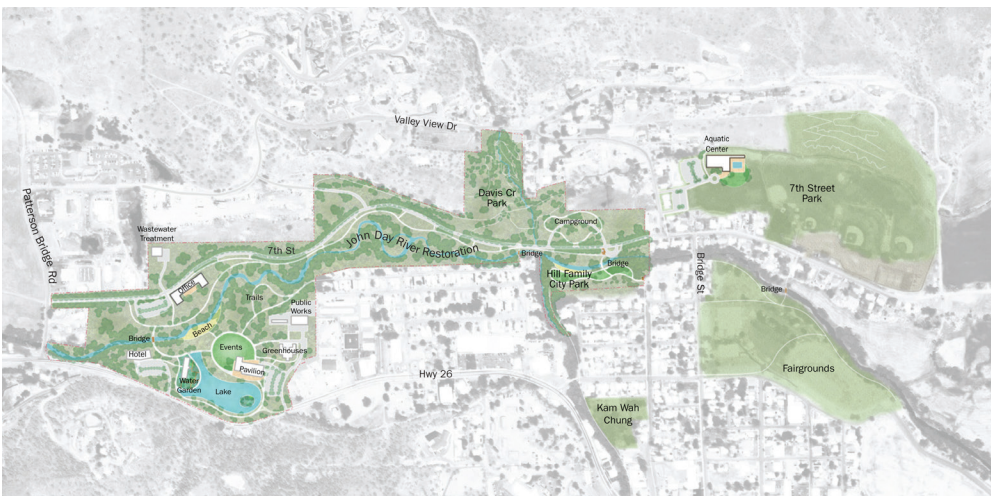
Existing parking behind the John Day Elks Lodge could be reorganized, and a small lot on South Canyon Boulevard where the former city hall building stood would serve as a parking lot and charging station for electric vehicles. Green said public restrooms could be built across from the post office and at the West Main Street site.

Green said the city street fund is debt free. He estimated the cost of the needed land at \$250,000. Estimated development costs of about \$300,000 to \$400,000 could come from a local improve-

ment district established among the downtown merchants. With interest rates around 3%, now was the time to act, he said.

Councilor Shannon Adair said she hadn’t yet talked to downtown merchants about the parking plan. It could be a hard sell as they might not recognize the long-term benefits, she said.

If the merchants won’t support the plan, then they should stop complaining, Green said. The city council gave its consensus support to the parking plan. Green said he believed it was attainable.



Contributed image
The preferred concept plan for the Innovation Gateway project was presented to the John Day City Council, the city planning commission and two advisory committees on Aug. 27.

Suicide

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“I’ve been asked before at a doctor’s visit if I own guns,” said Bill Littlefield, an entrepreneur and a board member of the Bend chapter of the Oregon Hunters Association. His internal response is, “it’s none of your damn business.”

The question makes him suspicious that it may be a thinly veiled attack on guns.

“Is this really about helping people with depression and mental illness or are there ulterior motives, such as finding another way to take guns from people?” Littlefield said.

Still, he shares the goal of preventing suicides. “The question is, how do you support the goodness of this cause in a practical sense but don’t allow it to go wild?”

The Bend researchers believe their culturally sensitive conversations can help prevent suicides outside of the doctor’s office too — in gun shops, for example — but they admit it’s not easy. Guns and gun deaths are a polarizing topic, and trust is crucial. Both the researchers and gun owners were wary of a reporter’s calls and the potential of the news media to sow dissension and mistrust.

“I would like to see an article that says firearm owners are an ally in suicide prevention,” Keys said. “Firearm owners as a group sometimes get the short end of the stick. People who own guns need to have an equal say at the table.”

In New Hampshire, the suicide prevention collaboration between

public health professionals and gun owners has been going on longer. The NH Firearms Safety Coalition began in the early 1990s when Elaine Frank became the director of the injury prevention program at Dartmouth College, about the same time data showed a rise in youth suicides by gun.

“Both pro-gun and anti-gun folks were saying the same thing about safe storage,” Frank said. “Everyone agreed.” So she created a coalition around firearm safety to prevent gun deaths among young people.

If Frank wanted to do something about guns, she needed to talk to Ralph Demicco, others advised. He was the owner of Riley’s Sportshop, then the highest gun volume store in the state, and a well-known advocate for guns and the second amendment.

When Frank asked him to join the coalition, “it gave me pause,” said Demicco, now retired. His retail mentor, Richard “Dick” Riley, who went on to serve as president of the National Rifle Association, had preached the importance of being a responsible member of the community. In fact, guns were not sold on commission, and he told his clerks they had no obligation to sell anything, especially if a person appeared to be under the influence, incoherent or didn’t display firearms knowledge.

Demicco joined the coalition for two reasons.

“I wanted to watchdog the group and make sure it was about gun safety and not anti-gun, and I wanted to spread the word.”

With money from a local gun

manufacturer (Sturm, Ruger & Co.), the coalition developed and distributed youth gun safety posters in gun shops. The coalition fell dormant.

“Then about 10 years ago, Elaine called me again,” Demicco said. She said a few niceties and then asked him if he was aware that in the space of six days, three different people bought guns at his store and took their lives. “I was aghast,” he said.

The coalition started meeting regularly again and added other gun enthusiasts and public health professionals, including Catherine Barber, director of the Means Matter program at Harvard School of Public Health, a program that focuses on reducing a suicidal person’s access to highly lethal means.

They created the Gun Shop Project, first consulting with owners of gun shops and shooting ranges, and then hanging posters and suicide hotline cards. “We’re anti-suicide, not anti-gun,” said Demicco, who likes the comparison to the friends-don’t-let-friends-drive-drunk campaign that reduced deaths by effectively discouraging drunk people from getting behind the wheel.

“I’ve probably gotten more push-back from the left than from the right,” Frank said. She recounts a brief presentation she made about the Gun Shop Project to fellow board members of the NH Public Health Association. “One woman raised her hand and said, ‘Elaine, this is very nice, but what are you doing about gun control?’” Frank replied, “This is not about gun control. This is a

different approach.”

The NH Firearm Safety Coalition has shared its information and approach with gun shop enthusiasts and public health people in other states, including Maryland, New York, Missouri, Texas and Utah.

“I’ve never worked with a nicer group of people who happen to be politically on the other side of the fence than anything I’ve ever done,” said Demicco about the secret to their success. “We don’t preach pro-guns per se, and they don’t preach anti-guns per se. We focus on anti-suicide.”

Three years ago, American Foundation for Suicide Prevention partnered on a program with the National Shooting Sports Foundation, an industry group for gun retailers and manufacturers based in Newtown, Connecticut. The program was modeled after the New Hampshire Gun Shop Project and championed by the NSSF president, a former coalition member and former CEO of Sturm, Ruger & Co.

Before the Gun Shop Project took off, a gun-owning clinical psychologist in New Hampshire had created a video to help train his health care staff about how to talk about gun storage with parents of teens at risk of suicide. Frank and Barber built that idea into a training program for how to talk comfortably and effectively with gun owners at risk of suicide. The training is called Counseling on Access to Lethal Means (CALM). A new version was posted in December to the website of the information clearinghouse, Suicide Prevention

Resource Center. Two years ago, Frank held CALM trainings in the Portland Metropolitan area and Southern Oregon.

The strategy is resonating across the country. A recent public service announcement from Utah sums it up the culturally sensitive suicide prevention message, Barber said.

“In under 30 seconds, here is something that encapsulates the whole message of resilience and recovery, not waiting for a person to ask for help, that friends are aware when friends are having trouble but don’t want to get into the weeds emotionally, a real bro way for showing concern and assisting a friend, and not waiting until a person says they’re suicidal,” she said.

In Oregon, the gun-friendly public health message developed by Keys, Pennavaria, Marino with firearms owners passed the strictest test imaginable to Kimberly Repp, an epidemiologist with the Washington County suicide prevention program who was raised on the Oregon Coast.

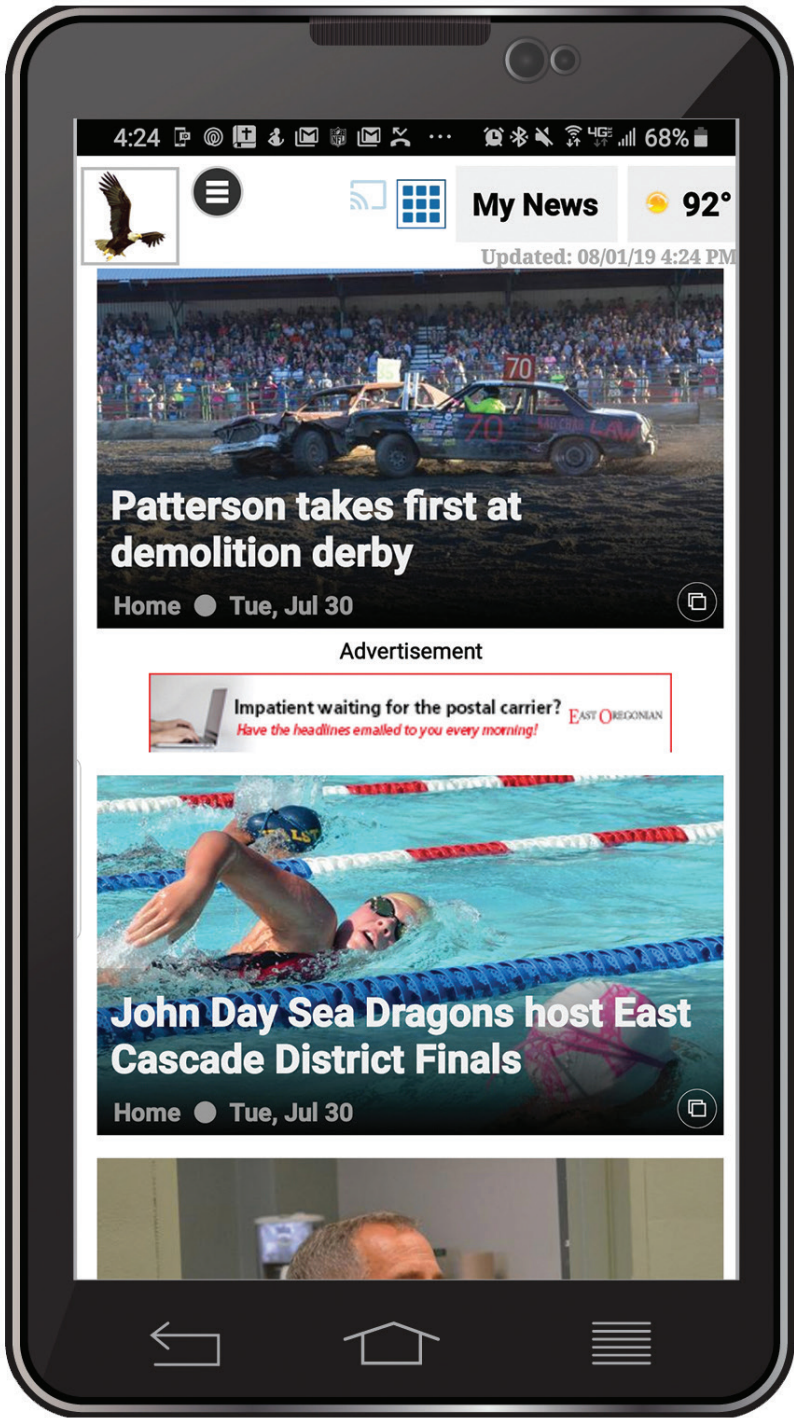
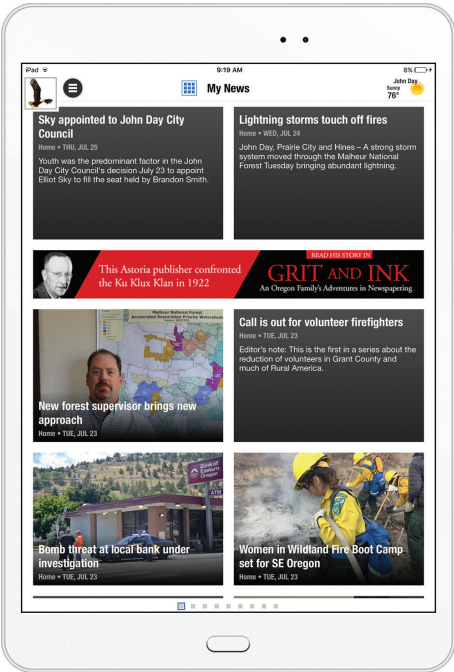
“I’m the only person in my family who is not a lifetime member of the NRA,” she said. “When I saw this brochure, I actually took it home. It passed the test of not setting off alarm bells in my dad. It’s truly exceptional work in terms of culturally competent in gun ownership and cultural competent in suicide prevention. I know hundreds of people who own guns, and I don’t know anyone who wants people to die by suicide.”

This story was published Aug. 16 in Pulse, the Bend Bulletin’s quarterly health magazine.

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