

# The INDEPENDENT

Serving the upper Nehalem River valley. Published twice monthly, on the first and third Wednesdays of each month, by Public Opinion Laboratory Ltd., 725 Bridge Street, Vernonia, OR 97064, as a free newspaper. Editors and Publishers, Dirk & Noni Andersen. Phone/Fax: (503) 429-9410.

## Opinion

### Concern, not apathy, displayed at hearing

It's easy to point out that democracy doesn't work well when citizens are apathetic. That certainly wasn't the case at a public hearing in Vernonia on January 10. Participation included people ranging in age from teens to senior citizens, and the testimony, whether for and against continuing a ban of bicycles on downtown Bridge Street sidewalks, was mostly well thought-out and presented without rancor at a hearing last week before the Vernonia City Council.

Mayor Art Parrow, who proposed lifting the ban, is genuinely concerned about the safety of children who ride their bikes in the traffic on Bridge Street. There is good reason to be concerned, but, as most of the people at the hearing said, the solution is not to put others at risk of being knocked down by a bike rider.

Aside from consensus that it's necessary to develop a good alternate route for bicycles, several people mentioned the need for more education about the responsibilities of bicycling. They spoke not only to the need for parents to work more seriously on teaching their children to be responsible bike riders, but to the police department.

Vernonia Police Chief Jim Walters, who agreed with the majority on retaining the ban, also heard comments that a contributing factor in people riding bikes on the sidewalk is the police department's failure to enforce the ordinance. Those comments were underscored by Walters' expressed lack of familiarity with the existing ordinance, although he has been in the department for 14 years, and has been chief about five years.

The city needs to follow through, too, making the necessary amendments to the ordinance, but also purchasing and installing signs to direct bicycle riders to the preferred route, and to make it clear that bikes, skateboards and rollerblades are not allowed on sidewalks in the four block section of Bridge Street from Rose Avenue to Adams Avenue.

The success of the program will depend on the cooperative efforts of parents, city administration, police department and bike riders. It can be done, but it requires effort.

Incidentally, if you assume the teens who testified opposed the ban, you're wrong. They also supported keeping sidewalks downtown free of bicycles.

### Time to complete linear trail to Vernonia Lake

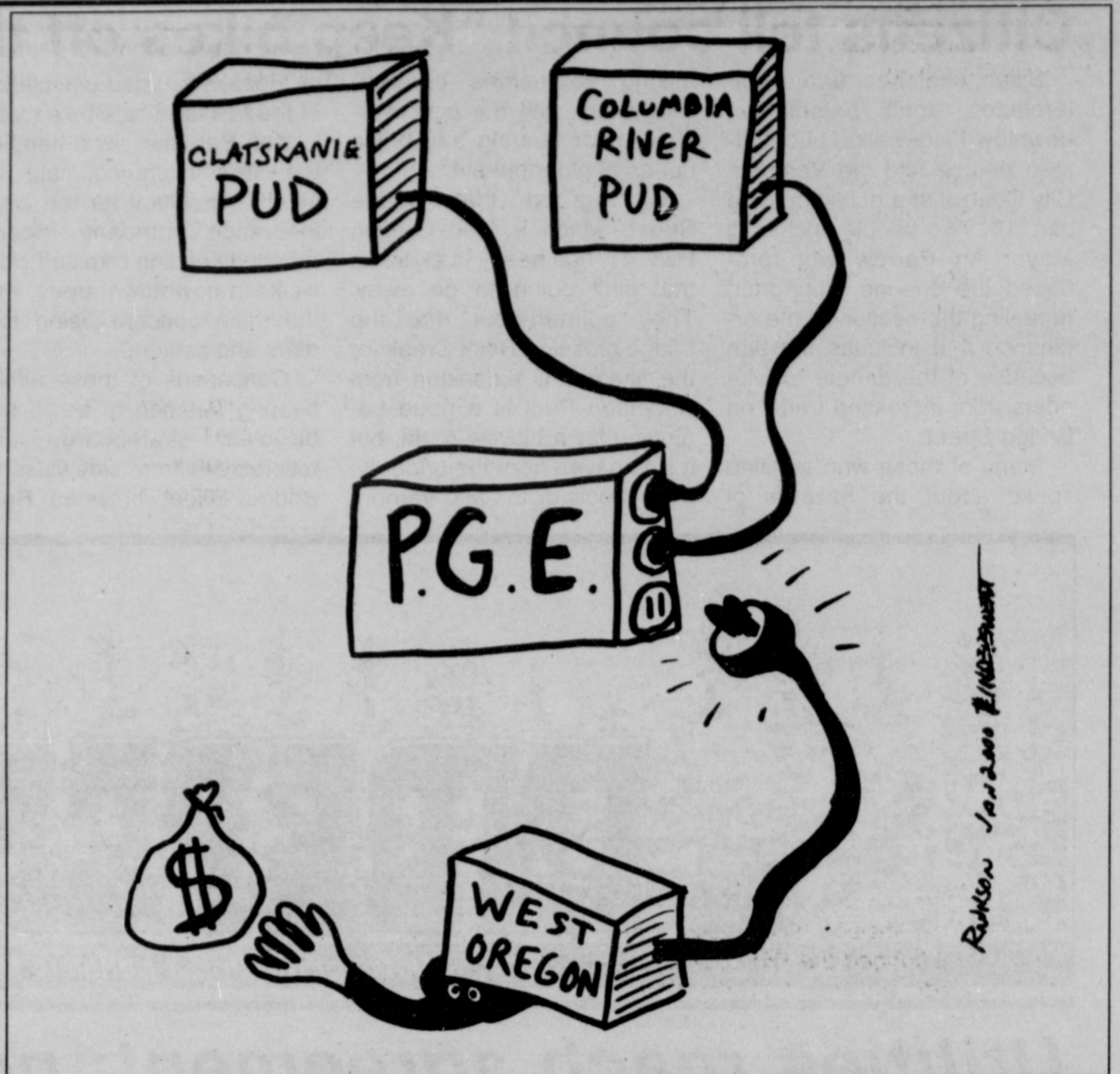
**From page 1**  
struct a bikeway/pedestrian bridge across Rock Creek..."

With the increasing traffic on Hwy. 47, there is increasing danger for bike riders who must use the narrow, curving road to travel the section between the museum and Washington Grade School. Even walking on the single-file, uneven path, with only a guard rail between pedestrians and

vehicles, can be "interesting" in a negative sort of way.

There is no other way around that section of Hwy. 47.

Vernonia needs to seek other funding, also, but the board of commissioners and ODOT should stop acting like this is something new. It is an ongoing enhancement and safety project, and it could be completed during the summer of 2000.



### Letters to the Editor:

#### Annexations will cause more traffic

To the Editor:

I have heard a proposition: Let's double the amount of traffic on Highway 47.

According to ODOT, there are an average of 3000 trips per day on 47. That's only half of what Highway 26 carries to the coast each day. Instead of a fifteen minute drive from Vernonia to Hwy 26, it can take twice that long, and traffic moves like a big kiddie choo-choo train putting along. The worst part is the road rage, caused both by reckless drivers and those who refuse to pull over and let the cars following them go on by.

Why would anyone want to double the amount of traffic we already have to deal with? Did we enjoy the road construction we had to fight last year? If traffic doubles, we'll see a lot more of that. Highway 47 wasn't built to carry the amount of traffic it does now, and it's literally falling apart.

Yet the city's plans for massive annexations will double traffic or worse. If you think I'm exaggerating, do the math. Ask the city planner. We aren't talking about 100 or so people building homes that will blend in with the existing neighborhood, we're talking about hundreds of lots being annexed by various "property owners," which I take to mean "developers." (Look at the January 5 issue of this paper, page 14.)

Case in point: a Beaverton developer wants to put a 150 unit mobile home park in on Mellinger Road. This would mean hundreds of cars driving past my home. Hundreds of cars driving through town and up State Avenue. This would mean a massive group of homes in one small area - next

to people who thought they were living in the country. They will expect me to pay for road improvements made necessary by their development! And I don't even get a vote.

There is only one way in and out of this burg, and that's 47. Can we handle seeing traffic doubled? It's a miserable thought. Have you tried to pull out onto Bridge Street lately in the mornings or afternoons? It's worse than downtown Portland.

And does that Sewer Pond smell like it needs another hundred toilets?

We saved for ten years to buy a home in an area that was peaceful, private, and isolated. We bought what we could afford; a home in a low density housing area, which means that we can possibly throw a rock as far as our nearest neighbors.

The city plans on putting my home into an area that might as well be downtown Hillsboro. My home is worth nothing to me if this happens. If I wanted to live in Hillsboro, I'd move there and save myself all the driving.

There have been a lot of improvements made to our town, and I admire the city planners for all their hard work. I don't mean to make the city sound evil. However, the only people whose opinions are being heard on these issues are the out-of-town developers who see only dollar signs and do not have to live in and commute from this town.

I don't want overcrowding to drive me out of Vernonia. Am I the only one who feels this way? If I'm not, then please, let the city council know how you feel.

One last thing: Give our kids on bikes and skateboards a break! I'm tired of hearing how they aren't welcome downtown. These kids are out there

getting fresh air and exercise instead of sitting around getting stoned. Treat them with consideration! They are not a liability; they are an asset to our town. Until we can offer these kids some kind of indoor recreation, I think we'd better show some tolerance.

Sincerely,  
April Kinney  
Vernonia

*(Ed. note: The properties being annexed are already partly developed and all of them have been on the City's plat map for several decades. They have nothing to do with the 150 home development referred to above.)*

#### Commissioners' support appreciated

To the Editor:

This letter is to express our sincere gratitude to the Commissioners of Columbia County for their substantial ongoing support for the senior and disabled programs we administer. Through their support for our programs, the County Commissioners have shown their dedication to the quality of life for this county's elderly. With the county's support, we are able to meet a great majority of the needs of seniors and disabled in this community; with only the support of federal and state monies, we would have to make deep cuts in our programs. The programs that draw substantial support from the county include:

- Meals on Wheels
- Congregate meals
- Outreach and case management
- Information and Assistance
- Administration

Frequently, letters to the editor are written to complain about the actions of elected of-

Please see page 3