

# The INDEPENDENT

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## Opinion

### City pursues funds for trail extension

The City of Vernonia and the community of people both inside and outside the city limits have accomplished a great deal over the past ten or twelve years. There isn't enough space here to list all of the accomplishments, but this little town is no longer the gray, depressing place it used to be. And the people are still working hard for improvements, but not at the cost required for big housing developments and fast food chains. Liveability is important in Vernonia.

The linear trail extension is a major component in that liveability. Some consider it great simply for recreation, but that is only part of its importance.

Because of Vernonia's geographic location, lack of a railroad or navigable river, in combination with its narrow winding roads, this will not be the site of a US Gypsum, Cascade Grain, or Armstrong World Industries plant. That same geography, however, makes it ideal to use outdoor recreation as an economic development priority. With the trail to help bring people in, and with development of a recreational complex and RV parking at the old mill site, local businesses will be helped by an influx of cash without a major increase in population. As local business prospers, there will be more jobs. By itself, that isn't enough, but it's a starting point.

The safety factor is obvious. An alternate path is needed between OA Hill and the schools. Another safety factor is development of a bike path from Weed Avenue to the lake, in order to get bikes off Bridge Street/Hwy. 47. The trail extension would fit the bill.

The trail extension would help with economic development, safety and outdoor recreation, as most people here understand.

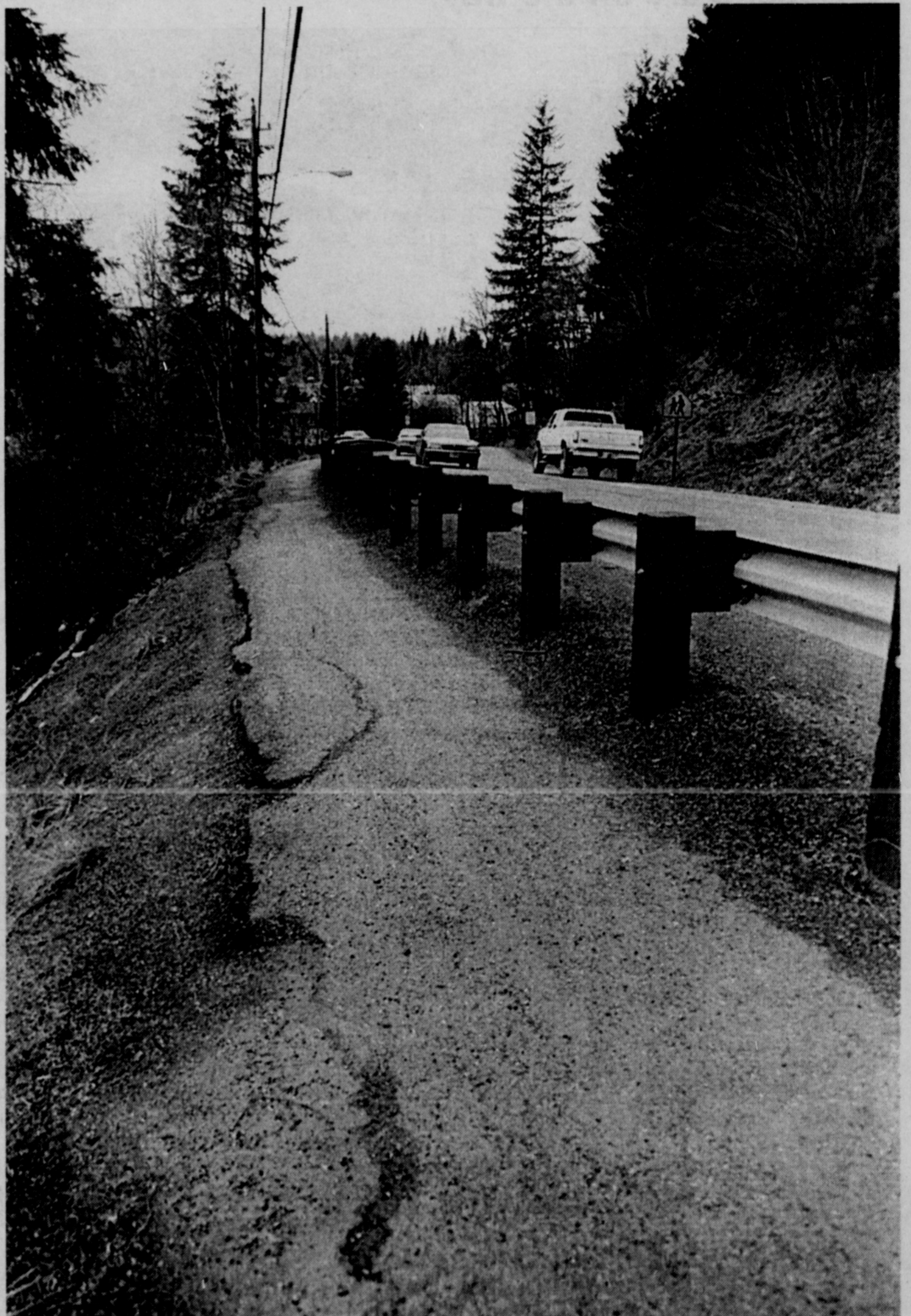
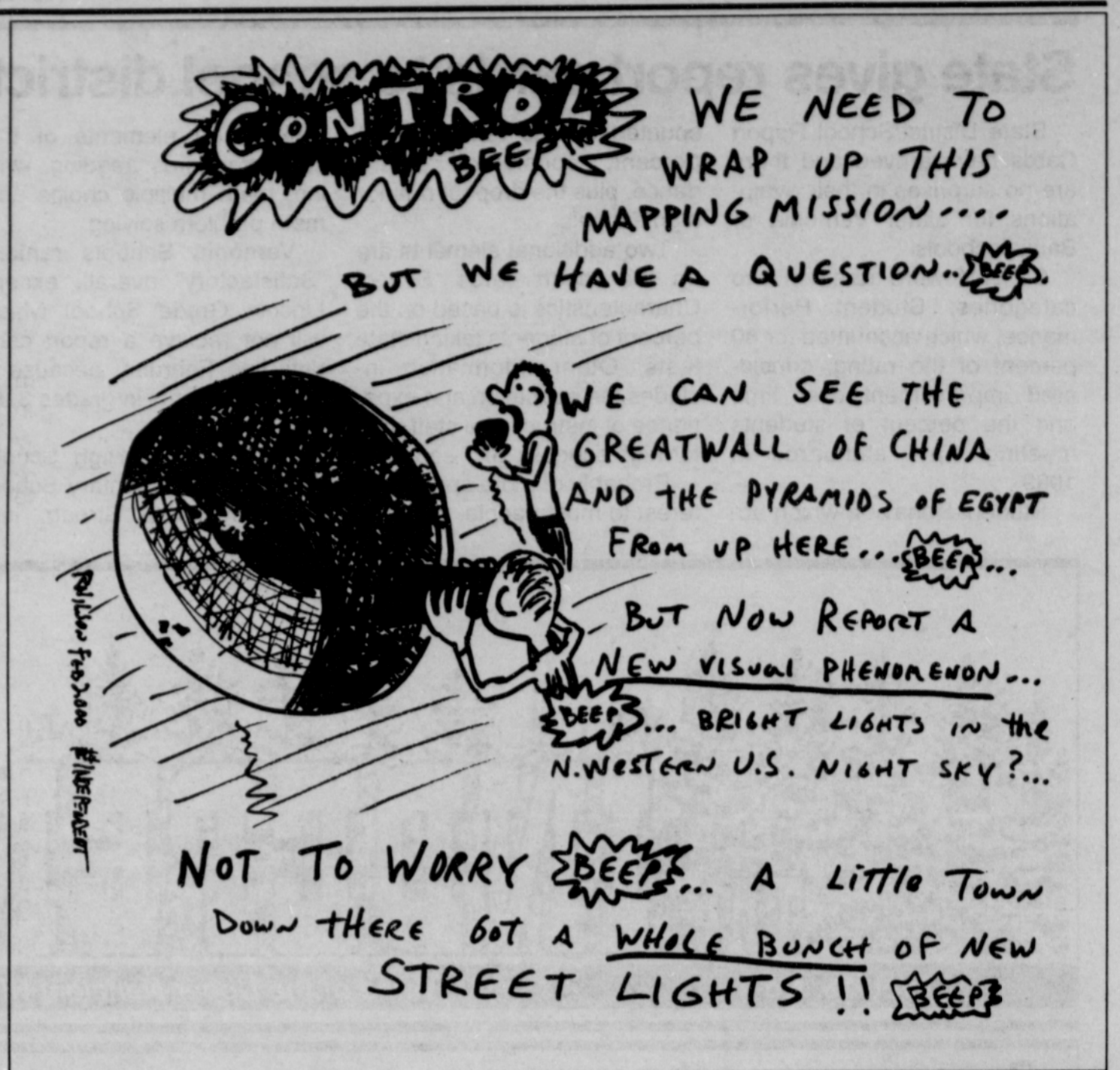
With the foot-dragging of the Oregon Dep't of Transportation and the Columbia County Board of Commissioners, Vernonia has to work even harder—and that is just what the City is doing.

It has now applied for a \$60,000 grant to help purchase the remainder of the property needed. This particular grant won't be easy to obtain because there is only \$600,000 available for the whole state. So the city has pledged \$60,000 to match the amount requested, not just the \$20,000 required.

The Board of Commissioners insists on spending \$115,000 on a quarter mile of Beaver Falls Road. That \$115,000 will help make a great place for "keggers," and entice people to undeveloped county park land at the same time the county is trying to get other agencies to take over parks that have been mismanaged. This is a foolish expenditure that may well become a liability problem, but it's their choice.

In the meantime, Vernonia will continue to vigorously pursue funds needed for economic development, safety and outdoor recreation. Our city government – elected officials and staff – is not afraid to step up and be counted. The people of the community are equally willing and have no intention of giving up just because other agencies put up road blocks.

It won't be easy, but it can and will be done.



JUDY HILL/THE INDEPENDENT

This narrow, crumbling "sidewalk" is the only path between O-A Hill and the downtown area of Vernonia. It is heavily used, particularly by children who have no other way to get to the schools at the bottom of the hill. There is no shoulder on either side of this section of Hwy. 47. Bikes must either use the walkway or compete with highway traffic on the road.