

Josephine County Commissioners
May 31-June 2, 2022

Why would any company want to locate in Oregon? Josephine County Commission Chair Herman Baertschiger brought up this question during a May 31 General Discussion meeting where he launched into a diatribe against Oregon's business climate during a meeting with a representative from Southern Oregon Regional Economic Development Inc. (SOREDI).

"We have some of the highest income tax. We have the most restrictive statewide land use policy of any state. Our schools are dysfunctional. Last time I looked we were 49th out of 50. We have a gross receipts tax. We have the state transportation tax on our payroll. Our gas will continue to increase because of the transportation package of a few years ago so gas prices rise automatically. And now the Governor has instituted increased fees on carbon so any business that creates any kind of carbon is gonna pay. So I just have to ask why would a company come to Oregon?" said Baertschiger. (Note: A quick Google search reveals that Oregon is not even in the top 10 of states with the highest income tax and Baertschiger fails to mention the state has no sales tax. Several states, including California, have more land use regulation than Oregon. The Oregonian says Oregon schools rank 38th in the nation. Most states have gas taxes. Increased fees on carbon are also implemented in California and designed to attract clean energy businesses. Oregon Democrats would like to see the state become an example of how states can create jobs through clean energy.)

Baertschiger's claims that Oregon isn't friendly to business came after Commissioner Dan DeYoung launched one of his rants about Travis Boersma's Flying Lark casino that stands empty on county property after Oregon's Racing Commission upheld the Justice Department's opinion that gambling machines there would be illegal. SOREDI's Colleen Padilla listened quietly as DeYoung implied that SOREDI should have fought for Boersma.

"I can't imagine...I can imagine what the impact the Flying Lark would have on Josephine County and to have somebody stand neutral on that bothers me a lot. Cause you're by name Southern Oregon Economic Development. I would say that one thing would have brought a tremendous...we're looking at what could have been. There's no reason now to put words, even with all the soccer activity over there that was put forth on that property. The vision was at some point in time to have enough stuff going on that side of the river to put in a huge hotel complex and there were so many hopes and dreams for the people of Josephine County and for this organization (pounds the table)." Baertschiger interrupts "268 people." DeYoung replies, "Yes, 268 people that lost their job plus, like I say, it would have been the reason to develop the whole south side of the river and when, not to mention that the person doing that also had a very large presence in a company that has always done well for this valley and to not support them that bothers me. A lot. And when I open up your deal in here (opens SOREDI brochure) but I won't say it. I see pictures in here of people that are highly respected in your organization or maybe ones who didn't need any support, probably on your board of directors too, that are in the exact same business," said DeYoung.

Padilla answered by saying when SOREDI's charter was created in 1987 it prohibited lobbying other than for something statewide as a general business concern. Padilla had mentioned that members of the Cow Creek and Coquille tribes were on SOREDI's board.

"Where are you on the tribal casino in Medford?" asked Baertschiger.

"We're neutral on that also. Both tribes, Cow Creek and Coquille are members of our board of directors. So what happened with the Coquille tribe in Jackson County...they didn't get the casino so they are building the Margarita, the hotel instead which is a regular business, not a casino.

"Why didn't they get their casino? Was the other tribe on your board of directors involved? Asked DeYoung.

"I don't know about that sir. They're just members of SOREDI, members of the board of directors so we have equality. That's a federal decision. We don't track that necessarily," said Padilla.

Baertschiger asked if the Flying Lark ever came up at a board meeting.

"No, no," said Padilla.

During her report on SOREDI's activities, requested by Commissioner Darin Fowler who wasn't there, Padilla said she is working with several businesses that indicated an interest in locating in Josephine County. A food manufacturing business, a bio-science company, wood product companies and a company that creates health supplements are looking at this area, Padilla said. Because marijuana is still against federal law SOREDI can't be involved in helping marijuana businesses develop.

Padilla didn't answer Baertschiger's "why would a company come here" question directly.

"Thank you for sharing those thoughts. It is more and more challenging for us. The companies that are listed here, they all need to be in a critical location to serve their markets north and south so our proximity to California, despite all of our negative factors you mention, still causes them to want to be in our region. Those are the ones we see," she said.

"Do we know how many have looked at Oregon and said 'No, no, no, I ain't going there,'" said Baertschiger.

Padilla said they do ask business to state why they rejected Oregon after an inquiry but they don't always share that information. She said the state has lost some businesses because of "onerous labor laws, taxation or just the lack of incentives given to businesses to locate here.

"Plus the fact that hard narcotics are legal," said Baertschiger. "And marijuana."

They all agreed building restrictions, lack of affordable housing and labor shortages make it hard to attract businesses as well.

DeYoung also blamed the homeless for making Oregon look unattractive.

"I just sat through a two-day symposium on homelessness and it doesn't seem that anybody wants to do anything about it that's substantial. They want to turn their backs on it and to me all they gotta do is

come to Grants Pass and see the homeless and the bums and everything else and I wouldn't want to move here."

"And read the Courier," said Baertschiger.

That set DeYoung off again.

"And read the Courier. Right. And you know when we have an organization that in order to count the homeless once a year, invites every homeless person to Riverside Park so they can get their teeth fixed and their hair cut and a shave and their dog neutered and all the other stuff...they get a free sleeping bag and a new cell phone and charger and all this stuff we hand out to them is all down in Riverside Park so that becomes their park. We did that. We did that year after year. That became their clubhouse and now we can't get em out of there and nobody wants to do anything about it because they don't want to hurt anybody's feelings and so now when we have anything going on we really don't have a whole bunch to crow about cause we haven't fixed the problems that we have because we've got such a big heart. And I think when you have some pretty good size businesses that all of a sudden one day say "you know this place isn't worth fighting for anymore. I was born and raised here and I'm not going to leave. I'm not going anywhere. But I don't have a business here anymore. I had a business and I would stay just because I could be very low-key...it's not a big business requires a lot of activity, but when you start losing, and I guess to the...liberal...it doesn't matter whether business goes away or not. Well they can leave, I don't really care and the only thing that's saving the liberal's thought process is that California is even worse than we are. People are trying to get out of California and now they're in Beatty Texas (which is actually a ghost town) so they are the invading force, invading Texas and invading Colorado, Utah, they're invading Arizona and New Mexico. They're getting the hell out of the eastern I-5 corridor because we have really not been business friendly for a long, long time. We say we are. And then we put up all of these things against them that keep businesses from wanting to come here. Housing. We don't have any housing so you move here...."

"There's no doubt many challenges," said Padilla.

DeYoung used an example from the past to insinuate there may be members of SOREDI's board that sabotage some businesses because they don't want the competition. He recounted a time when a Grants Pass city councilor, who owned two Arctic Circle restaurants, said "as long as I'm on the city council there will be no McDonald's in Grants Pass."

"I don't think that's true," Padilla countered. "We're an eight-member board that's private and public so I have not seen that. I would say that competition from their viewpoint is good."

"Well, you know at the end of the day business is commerce and commerce is prosperity. And if we don't have that, you know, I've just watched the state of Oregon just make it harder and I've been in this town for 45 years too and I've watched it make it harder and harder so how do we get to prosperity? Maybe that's what's happening. Maybe we're losing our prosperity and that's where the homelessness is coming from. Maybe we're actually losing prosperity in Oregon. I don't know. I just know I don't like what I'm seeing. It makes it harder on businesses and like I said, business is commerce and commerce is prosperity," said Baertschiger.

Padilla said that's why SOREDI exists, to promote business in Oregon. She said Fowler has been representing Josephine County on the board and his replacement will fill that seat.

DeYoung complained that Josephine County gets ignored when it comes to "visuals" off Interstate 5. ODOT gave Roseburg nice, manicured off-ramps, he said, while all Grants Pass got was an overpass re-decking with unsightly pipes left hanging from the project.

"Our exits are ugly," said DeYoung. Padilla had no reply to that.

"We're doing the best we can in our circumstances. Hopefully things will change at the state level. That will help us immensely," she said as she gathered up her papers and headed for the door.

Baertschiger adjourned the meeting.

Weekly Business Session June 1

With DeYoung attending by Zoom from his office, Baertschiger started the meeting by opening a public hearing on the budget. Finance Director Sandy Novak was present to answer any questions. She said the budget is on the county's website and a copy is in the Josephine Community Library. There was little comment on the budget and no public comment so the public hearing was closed and the budget approved for the fiscal year 22-23. By law the budget has to be balanced so it represents severe cuts in the Sheriff's Department even after the Commission ordered a \$300,000 loan from Roads and Bridges reserves last week.

The next public hearing opened comment on an agreement County Council Wally Hicks put together for the transfer of properties occupied and surrounding the Sportsman Park to the Sportsman Association which has run the shooting range for the last 50 years. Commissioners still haven't voted to give the property away but they have cited increased insurance costs to the taxpayers because of the firing range in a county park as the main reason for handing it off. Hicks said this is the second step in the transfer. Approval of the agreement doesn't finalize approval of the give-away. He told Commissioners the agreement is being gone over by Association members and their lawyer. Hicks said he has been unsuccessful in making contact with the Interior Department to find out if the federal grant Josephine County got for a water system out at the park years ago would have any impact on the transfer. He said he also contacted Rep. Cliff Bentz's office but hasn't heard from them either about the matter.

The only comment during this public hearing came from Mark Jones, who said he didn't see anywhere in the agreement that guarantees access to the range by law enforcement.

Hicks recited several paragraphs that did but it was revealed that law enforcement would be confined to a strip along Interstate 5, which isn't where their shooting range is.

Commissioners had County Property Manager Helene Lulich look it up to see just where the agreement put law enforcement. She called up a map and showed them that the strip along I-5 designated for them was nowhere near where their range actually sits on the property.

"We need to put back in there that their shooting range is accessible to them and can't be closed off. They can't say you don't have it here, you have to go to the strip along I-5 and of course shooting along I-5 is not a good idea," said DeYoung.

“Sounds like they got a couple of pieces of property mixed up so we’ll table this for now until we can add that language to the contract,” said Baertschiger. “Hopefully by next Wednesday.”

At that Baertschiger closed the public hearing and moved on to the lease agreement with TMB Racing, Travis Boersma’s company which leases the county property where his Flying Lark casino sits. Boersma asked that his monthly rent of \$22,000 be reduced while he figures out what to do with the casino built but can’t open since gambling outside tribal facilities is prohibited in Oregon. Commissioners agreed to let him make a lump sum payment of \$25,000 for the months of April through December 2022. At that point the abatement will go back to \$22,000 unless other arrangements are made.

DeYoung said he is embarrassed and saddened by Boersma’s plight. Fowler said he thinks about all the jobs taken away and Baertschiger said he hoped for better days to come.

No one spoke during Public Comments and the only thing that came up during Matters from Commissioners was praise for Boatnik and DeYoung telling everyone about the Indy 500 race he watched all day Sunday.

Thursday’s **Administrative Workshop** was another grant renewal approval for the Juvenile Justice Center and an executive session involving property discussions.

There was no **Bill and Herman Show** last week but our CD2 Congressman Cliff Bentz was on The Bill Meyer Show saying how he admired the Greater Idaho movement for trying to do something about how our state is led around by the nose by Portland progressives. On guns Bentz emphasized several times that he is a staunch supporter of the Second Amendment, a gun owner with a concealed carry permit and a member of the NRA. He echoed the Republican line that ignores guns in mass shootings and instead focuses on making schools more secure and spending more money on mental health. He said he hears talk of compromise in Congress but to him that means people will be giving up rights. On Ukraine Bentz called that country corrupt and that Putin has a point not wanting NATO at his back door. On the removal of dams on the Klamath River he said he is against that and said if Republicans get Congress back after mid-terms he has a strong chance of becoming the chair of the Water, Oceans and Wildlife subcommittee where “I can do more about this.” Of the primaries, Bentz said he is looking forward to getting a “friend” in Congress because he believes Lori Chavez-DeRemer, former Mayor of Happy Valley, a high-end planned community near Portland, will beat Jamie McCloud-Skinner who is “so far left you can’t even see her.” Currently Bentz is the only Republican from Oregon in the House who apparently doesn’t consider the Democrats from Oregon in the House his friends.

Bill Meyer also had state Sen. Dennis Linthicum (R-Klamath Falls) on, whose district realignment takes in Eagle Point and White City with a boundary up to east Medford. Linthicum, who was chair of the Republican Party of Oregon before he stepped down because of a disagreement with other members, believes Oregon is rife with voter fraud and the Democratic Party of Oregon is currently orchestrating a steal of the governor’s race with fake citizens to create a culture of fake votes. Linthicum hates voter-motor registration and says not everyone should be a registered voter. He is running around telling voters Democrats think they are deplorable and “will plunder you after the election.” Linthicum also said Democrats are taking away children’s innocence with an LGBTQ agenda in our school system.