

City Council Plants Tree Ordinance Idea

by K_Guice

The Bend City Council branched out at its last meeting on July 31, debating whether or not there is a need to create additional tree protection regulations.

The ordinance, proposed by City Councilor John Hummel, would be the first of its kind to affect both undeveloped and an individual homeowner's land.

"I think it was the intention of the council to address the concern from people that too many trees were being removed for development, said Mel Oberst, the director of Bend Community Development. "They saw that additional protection needs to be put into place."

City Councilor Chris Telfer didn't seem so sure, asking the council if this was really an issue, adding that, "We don't know that it is a problem."

"I know that trees have been cut down. If it is one, it is one too many," Hummel said in response.

While the councilors didn't agree on how big the issue was, they did agree that old ponderosa pine trees and a few select native trees that are over 10" in diameter would be protected.

"This is in its very infantile stages," said Oberst. "There was enough information and enough councilors for our staff to work on it as we can," he added.

"We are going to look at other city ordinances, look at our own ordinances, evaluate and then come back to the council for them to look at what we have come up with," Oberst said. The community would also be invited to get involved and offer their input.

Currently, the only protection that trees have is through the new rezoning laws that go into effect this September. "We have things in the new development codes," Oberst said.

"It requires the applicant/developer to inventory the trees and through the development review process the city and the developer will agree on the trees that need to be protected," he added.

From there, the developer is required to post a bond, which varies based on the trees size; flag the trees and then place a barrier around those that are to be protected.

If this new ordinance is passed, developers and home owners alike would need a permit to cut down specific trees of a certain size.

“It’s more difficult I think for the individual home owner who wants to cut down a few trees,” Oberst said. “It would be important that the city be proactive in its education and be open to special situations.”

For Telfer, not only does it raise concerns about people’s personal property rights, she said she hates to put more restrictions on individual homeowners.

However, Oberst said the trees are one of the great qualities about Bend. They offer real benefits for the city including: water retention, soil stabilization and a wildlife habitat. "The trees are considered a community wide asset."

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