

COMMENTARY

Records quest shows disclosure doesn't come easy – or cheap

Getting facts from Malheur County officials about public business is getting expensive.

We could use your help.

At the Enterprise, our news team has been dogged about tracking the county's foray into industrial development.

As they say, we follow the money. And that's not easy.

The Malheur County commissioners have taken a vow of silence. Judge Dan Joyce, and Commissioners Larry Wilson and Don Hodge, unhappy with the Enterprise's reporting, now don't talk to our reporters or respond to written questions.

Greg Smith, the county's economic development director, too has gone silent.

That is their right. No law requires a public official to answer media questions.

To get around that wall of silence, we've had to get creative on the behalf of local citizens.

Let me share what's been going on.

Malheur County officials want to put up one and maybe two industrial parks in Nyssa. This is in addition to the Treasure Valley Reload Center that the state is funding.

The land the county wants to use is bare farmland. Transforming that into industrial base requires new streets and new services such as sewer and water.

The county has indicated in its documents – that we obtained from the state – that developing this project could require as much as \$14 million beyond \$2 million it has already borrowed.

Where's the county going to get that money? We've been trying to find out for you more than two months.

On Nov. 1, reporter Pat Caldwell sent questions to Greg Smith, the county's economic development director, including: "Once the Farmer property is bought, where will the money come from for water, sewer, streets?" Smith didn't answer.

On Nov. 7, Caldwell sent questions to Malheur County Judge Dan Joyce about the county going into debt to buy farmland and about plans to buy

Zaitz Writes

– By Les Zaitz
Malheur Enterprise



a second piece of industrial ground in Nyssa.

Caldwell wrote: "The cost of getting sewer, water and natural gas services to the Nyssa Industries property was estimated at \$5.3 million. Where do you expect Malheur County to get the money?"

Joyce didn't answer.

On Dec. 12, Caldwell individually emailed Joyce, Hodge and Wilson. He asked about the \$14 million listed on government forms as coming from "Malheur County" to develop one industrial park. "What is the intended source of this money from the county budget?" Caldwell asked.

Joyce didn't respond.

Wilson didn't respond.

Hodge didn't respond.

At a public hearing in late December, Wilson suggested to the public that he had no idea where the Enterprise came up with the \$14 million figure. We sent him a copy of the county's own paperwork with that information but he didn't respond to our questions.

Public interest in this is high, judging by meeting participation and other measures. Local citizens want to understand the money side of this – and what they get out of these deals.

The Enterprise crew has relied on the public records law to get records that help tell the story.

We have paid dearly. Smith's agency in 2019 made the Enterprise pay a total of \$1,018 before releasing public documents in 12 requests.

On Dec. 30, we submitted another request to Smith, attempting to find out what was behind the \$14 million figure and other details. A week later, Smith confirmed he had the records we wanted – but it would cost \$300 to get them. (His company is paid \$15,000 a month to run the county agency.)

As a veteran of public records

fight, we see this as Malheur County's attempt to blunt our reporting by making it too costly to seek government records.

The law allows government agencies to reduce or entirely waive the cost of

providing documents when releasing them serves the public interest. We have asked Smith for that waiver with every request. He has ignored the request and the law in each instance. We paid.

If Smith thought he would price us out of the business of finding the truth, he miscalculated.

And here's where you come in.

These records fees are a big expense for a small outfit like the Enterprise. Unlike county officials, we don't have a deep public treasury to dip into. When we pay for public information, that means some other need of our news operation goes unmet.

So, we are announcing "Dollars for Disclosure."

We're asking citizens to donate for a public records fund. We'll use the money to dig deeper, to keep requesting records, to pay the county's fees and perhaps pay for legal help to fight county secrecy.

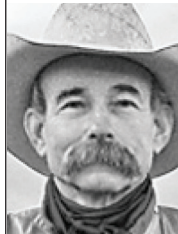
You can join this effort by donating online at malheurenterprise.com/donate. You can send a check made out to the Malheur Enterprise, marked for the Disclosure Fund (PO Box 310, Vale OR 97918).

Even \$10 would help, and a lot of small donations would be another message to county officials: the public wants the truth. The more we raise, the more we can do.

If you want to be listed as a partner in Dollars for Disclosure, let us know. Note, however, that this is not like a charity donation.

With your support, we'll pursue more government records, using our journalistic expertise and outside legal talent to keep going until we all know what the county is up to.

Les Zaitz is editor and publisher of the Enterprise. Email: les@malheurenterprise.com.



ON THE EDGE OF COMMON SENSE

By Baxter Black, DVM

For burgers, this test's a real whopper

No doubt most of you in the livestock business have a certain "family affection" for the fast food chains. Particularly those restaurants whose main attraction is the often disguised but still All American hamburger. It also is true that each of us has his own particular favorite.

Organizations like the National Restaurant Association have attempted surveys to compare the merits of each burger. Readers, you will be pleased to know that the Coyote Cowboy Co. (me) has conducted its own survey. This survey was taken with an international consultant on had to advise: A Canadian Chianina breeder.

The burgers compared were the Double Whopper (hereinafter referred to as the WHOP), the Big Mac (the MAC) and Wendy's Double Burger (the BURG). Each was ordered on a rainy night with iced tea.

The highlights of the survey are as follows:

Patty Evaluation

1. TRANSPARENCY – The BURG was the only patty you could see through.
2. YIELD PERCENTAGE (Meat/offal ratio) – The BURG again had the highest yield percentage.
3. PATTY PULL TEST (for tensile strength) – The WHOP showed the resistance to tearing.
4. CIRCUMFERENTIAL PERFECTION – The MAC displayed the roundest patty.
5. SEAWORTHINESS – Both the WHOP and the BURG sank in the iced tea while the MAC floated.

Condiments

1. COLOR COORDINATION – The BURG showed a certain flair with mustard, tomato and lettuce although style points were given to the MAC for the special sauce.

Bun Evaluation

1. SWILL ASSIMILATION TEST – Measured in BAU (bun absorption units) – The BURG scored well against the others in the second round. With ketchup it rated 8 BAU.
2. SESAME SEED COUNT – The WHOP won hands down with 42 seeds per bun.
3. LIGHT REFRACTION – None reflected light well enough to transmit Morse code messages over long distances.
4. AERODYNAMICS – The WHOP recorded the longest flight distance but was penalized for slicing to the right.

Conclusion

In our survey found each hamburger to have its own peculiar advantages. The BURG rated high in BAUs and color coordination but would be less suitable than the MAC if dropped in water. Neither would be as good as the WHOP if there was ever an ALL-BEEF Frisbee throw in the Summer Olympics.

I hope the information presented here will in some small way contribute to the mounds of scientific data now available on the fast food hamburger. I'm forwarding the results to Consumer Reports.

BUSINESS BEAT

Welcome to 2020: Is your business ready for a new year?

By Andrea Testi
For the Enterprise

Is Your Business Ready for the New Year?

Happy New Year - Are you ready? Have you set your goals, reviewed 2019, celebrated what went really well and put a plan in place to grow your results in 2020?

To see if you are ready for 2020, check in on these three key areas of your business.

Goals - help you commit to a direction for your business. Remember a vision without a plan is a hallucination. If you have a vision for your business, and you keep it in your head, there is no way that vision to be realized.

Goals help you get clear on what you want and action steps move you in that direction. In order for that to happen you must write your goals down.

If you've never set goals start small. Write down three or four goals that you want to accomplish in 2020. Put them in the order you want to achieve them; listing your goal that is the most important to you first.

Be sure your goals are a mix of business and personal goals because your business and personal goals must be in alignment with each other.

Next, list the action steps you will take to achieve each goal. It is okay if you aren't sure on all the steps. To get started write down the next step you will take. This is the action that you will take based on what you know today. Do this for each of your goals.

After you have written down each of your goals and at least one action step for each, write down the date you



are going to start working on the goal and the date you want to complete the goal.

Finally, write down the date you will take the first action step to achieve your goal.

Marketing Plan - How are you going to market your business in 2020? What did you do this year that worked well? What did you do this year that didn't work?

Your marketing plan is similar to your goals, it helps you commit to a direction for your business and yes, it must be in writing.

To get started write down all the things you did this year to market your business.

Next circle the things that you know for sure generated new business.

Now look at the things you didn't circle and determine if they are a fit for your business. It is okay, and recommended, to remove things that don't work, aren't a good fit and do not generate new business. Mark off everything you are not going to do.

Next add opportunities that you discovered during the year that you want to add to your marketing plan for 2020.

Just like your goals, prioritize your marketing. What things in your marketing plan will you do each month? What marketing items are specific to certain months? Categorize your marketing by activities and events. List each activity/event and the action steps you will take to accomplish it.

Financial Plan - What is your financial plan for 2020? Have you put

together a projected income statement and cash flow for 2020?

To get started with your projected income statement, look at your monthly revenue (aka sales and income) for 2019 and write this down.

Next take a look at your cost of goods sold (what you paid for your products if you sell products) and write down your monthly costs of goods sold.

Subtract your monthly cost of goods sold from your monthly revenue to get your monthly gross profit. This gives you the top part of your financial equation.

Now write down your monthly tax deductible expenses. Once you have written down your monthly deductible expenses subtract them from your gross profit.

You need all 12 months broken down by month on one sheet of paper for a quick view. What months did you have a profit? What months did you have a loss? Now you can use your 2019 income statement and cash flow to put together your projected 2020 income statement and cash flow.

Now that you have reviewed these three key areas it is time to check in and see how you did. Are your goals set? Are your marketing and financial plans in writing and complete? Are you ready for 2020 or do you have work to do? If you are like most people you have work to do. Take action now and don't give one day away in 2020 without keeping you and your business on track for success.

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