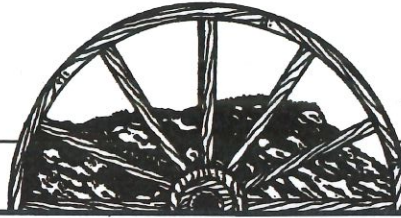


GARY BELL
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CITY OF



LA GRANDE

THE HUB OF NORTHEASTERN OREGON

November 29, 2021

Downtown Merchants and Community Partners,

The City Manager received a letter signed by a number of local business leaders expressing concern, even frustration, in the areas in and around some of our downtown properties. The letter talked about circumstances of vandalism, trespassing, and other activities that serve to cause one to feel unsafe. He asked me to share some information following a recent meeting with members of our downtown business community about what steps we have already taken and what you, as members of the community, can do to help us collectively address the concerns.

Our hope is that this may serve to reassure you and your employees that we do hear you and that you have my personal commitment, and that of the City of La Grande and the La Grande Police Department, to do all we can within our resource limitations to provide for the safety and felt security within our downtown and our community.

One focal point is Max Square. Over the past couple of years, we have seen an increase in activity at the Park that required the City to make changes. In partnership with the Parks Department and Library, among others, some of the measures we have put in place are removing the picnic tables, pruned low hanging branches and made other landscaping enhancements so there is more visibility; turning off the power outlets except during events; and adjusting the hours that free Wi-Fi is available at the Cook Memorial Library and from adjacent businesses. Our police officers have provided special consideration to these matters, inasmuch as we can, in an effort to have a positive impact. Our efforts have included communication, extra attention through focused patrols (including foot patrols), and even enforcement, including arrests for criminal law violations and for those in need of assistance, connecting them with our partner agencies when appropriate. One constraint that we are facing is a recent court ruling that prohibits the City from enforcing Ordinances that prohibit sleeping in public places, which has been addressed through legislative action by the State of Oregon and will impact what actions we can take moving forward. That said, these restrictions do not apply to your private property, which I will touch on later in this letter.

I think it's appropriate to share that our mission at the police department is to ethically protect the lives, property and quality of life of the La Grande community to the best of our ability, while respecting the constitutional rights of all persons. We will deliver competent and professional service with honor, integrity and fairness while morally seeking truth and justice. Our foundational core values at the police department, such as treating others the way we would want ourselves or members of our family to be treated, guide the actions of our officers as we deliver services within the community.

We are committed to continue our efforts to do what we can, however, I do have an ask of you. We need your help. We also need your understanding that we must prioritize all of our calls for service, so there are times we simply are unable to provide as much and as quick of attention to some things that we would like to. We need you to be willing to call the police department and report when someone is clearly violating the law, creating a hazard, trespassing on your private property, or a situation that makes you or others feel unsafe. If we don't receive calls, it makes it very difficult for us to help. Also, please understand that if a call is made and an officer responds, the officer's duty is to assess the facts of any situation on an individual basis to determine an appropriate and lawful response.

The partnerships we enjoy are extremely valuable and I genuinely appreciate your willingness to share this information. I encourage you to contact the police department if you have questions, or to report a situation that is causing you concern... even if you don't know what the police may be able to do to help. Our officers stand ready to assess the nature of the situation and provide options and/or advice in an effort to work toward solving problems together.

We are also planning to host a forum for our downtown businesses to share the information in this letter and provide an opportunity to answer questions that you may have. We will be following up with details once we have set the date and time.

As a reminder:

- **In an emergency call 911**
- In all other situations and/or for information, please call the police department business phone number, which is 541-963-1017

Respectfully and all my best,



Gary Bell
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La Grande Police Department

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