



PRIORITIES FOR MANAGING THE GROWTH OF TOURISM IN BEND

Can Bend's policies handle the impacts of tourism?

Bend is growing up and its policy infrastructure needs to grow up with it. The Bend Neighborhood Coalition believes that growth and livability aren't incompatible, and that includes a growth in tourism. To keep both goals in sight, though, Bend needs to learn from best practices in other cities and adopt policies that support both growth and quality of life.

The key is to identify ways to reduce potential conflicts among non-residential uses and residential areas. There are five such opportunities related to tourism that deserve attention:

- 1) Short term rentals: Current policies have not worked to decrease the density of vacation rentals. Instead, they have created two classes of properties — those with non-conforming permits that transfer upon sale and those without such entitlements. The City Council needs to revisit this issue and phase out the old permits, as other cities in Oregon and elsewhere are doing. Then the density limits in the current code will have a chance to restore neighborhoods that have been affected the most by vacation rentals.
- 2) Sound levels: Bend has set decibel limits that exceed those of most cities, including Austin, Texas, “the live music capital of the world”. Sound levels in Bend can be twice as loud as in Portland. Other cities require a permit for outdoor amplified music, while Bend allows virtually any commercial or mixed use property to become an event venue. And, event organizers know there is almost no enforcement. The City Council should lower sound levels, add an outdoor entertainment permit, and shift enforcement responsibility from the police to a staff sound technician.
- 3) Noise and special event permits: Almost all applications to be excused from complying with sound and parking requirements have been approved. These variances benefit the private revenue-generating interests of specific companies at the expense of their neighbors (including nearby businesses), and often affect the same neighborhoods repeatedly. Variances should be granted sparingly, should be spread out geographically, and should be used for events that have a community focus, not a private commercial focus. And, criteria for evaluating and limiting applications should be made a part of the ordinances governing these permits.
- 4) Tourism promotion: Bend offers a variety of assets that appeal to a broad range of visitors. Family reunions, destination weddings, corporate retreats, and other group and family outings provide a way for people to sample Bend and perhaps decide to relocate themselves and their businesses. We support the efforts of Visit Bend to expand its appeal to new market segments and position the City as more than a drinking town. Consistent with that focus, it's time to phase out prizes for completing the Ale Trail. Incentivizing alcohol consumption by making it a competitive activity is unacceptable and unnecessary. Many regions provide maps to vineyards, breweries, or distilleries without the prizes.
- 5) Entertainment district: Bend's long-range planning needs to include a vision for one or more areas where outdoor amplified music and late-night entertainment is concentrated and allowed to prosper under more relaxed guidelines. Entertainment districts of various sorts have been successful in other cities and would help in Bend by relocating activities that are incompatible with nearby residential areas (and college campuses). Getting the right businesses in the right place is key to compatibility. Visit Bend could help with this effort by using some of its resources for long-range planning to explore this and other ideas to accommodate more tourists in the future without generating additional conflicts.