

Worthy Brewing's owner is 'crestfallen' by canceled mural plans

By MORGAN OWEN The Bulletin Mar 3, 2024



A rendering of what Worthy Brewing's ReWild mural would have looked like when installed at the Burgers and Beers location in Downtown Bend. Courtesy of Worthy Brewing

Worthy Brewing's plan for a mural — which depicts a bald eagle, beaver, wolf, grizzly bear and spotted owl and the word "ReWild" framed by salmon — has been put on hold at its Beers & Burgers location in downtown Bend due to a neighbor's complaint, says Roger Worthington, the building's owner.

"I am very supportive of art and murals in Downtown Bend," Dietz told The Bulletin. "That being said, I support art that does not offend, provoke or divide our community. My hope is that moving forward, Roger and I can agree on a mural."

Dietz did not elaborate on what part of the design he takes issue with specifically, but Worthington said Dietz was originally supportive of preliminary designs. It was only recently, when Worthington sent Dietz the final design, that the disagreement began.

“I don’t want to put words in his mouth, but he didn’t like the word ‘ReWild’ and he didn’t like the depiction of the timber wolf and spotted owl. I don’t have an exact quote, but he said something to the effect of ‘I don’t want to offend virtuous farmers and loggers,’” said Worthington.

While neighbor approval is not required by the city of Bend, Worthington said he won’t be able to install the mural, which is painted on plywood, unless his neighbor grants temporary access to his property.

Because neighbor Bob Dietz is allegedly refusing to cooperate based on the mural’s design, there is no way Worthington can continue with the project.

In Oregon and other rural areas of the western United States, both the wolf and spotted owl have come to represent the contentious relationship between ranchers and loggers and environmentalists. Ranchers and livestock owners often oppose wolf-reintroduction because they resent the intrinsic threat to their livestock. Similarly, efforts to preserve the spotted owl population caused protections in old-growth forests that many assert threatened the logging industry.

Worthington said he tried to compromise with Dietz by suggesting alternative phrases for the mural, such as “Keep Oregon Native” and “Native Oregonians.” But when Dietz suggested Worthington just paint over the wolf and owl, he decided that was one compromise too many.

“Not in a million years. I’d rather cut off my arm than censor my own art just to appease his bizarre sensibilities,” Worthington said. “These are endangered species ... I was really taken with the idea that (the mural) provokes you into thinking about where humans fit in the cycle of life and about how we can live our life in balance with nature so that nature itself can flourish,” Worthington said.

The mural — which is finished and ready for installation — will likely be transferred to Worthy Brewing’s other location on the east side of town, Worthington said. While



An in-progress image of the Worthy Brewing mural's spotted owl, one of the points of contention between Roger Worthington and neighboring property owner, Bob Dietz. Courtesy of Worthy Brewing



Artist Karen Eland paints the timber wolf in the Worthy Brewing mural, one of the points of contention between Roger Worthington and neighboring property owner, Bob Dietz

Worthington is “crestfallen” by the situation, he agrees that he would like to work with Dietz on a “less provocative” mural to cover the blank wall.

Still, Worthington is concerned about the broader implications of Dietz’s alleged censorship.

“The stark reality is that we are not all like-minded. There are some people with property rights that will assert those in a way that may be contrary to the public interest or to our public image,” Worthington said.

“Once you start entering this slippery slope where does it end? I think it’s worthy of a public discussion.”