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For Immediate Release

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Minnesota Promenade Concept Investigated as part of the Future Vision for Downtown Bend

Bend, Oregon –

Established in 1903, Downtown Bend has seen many changes in the last 100 years. The most recent significant investment in Downtown Bend was made in the 1990's when the City of Bend used urban renewal dollars to fund revitalization efforts. Over two decades later, it has once again become paramount to invest in the future of the historic core of our city.

Downtown Bend serves many roles in our community. It is the largest employer in Bend, the number one tourist destination, the civic and cultural hub for our community, and it serves as an economic driver for the entire of the city of Bend. By investing in Downtown Bend, we are not only preserving our history, we are building our future.

As the organization with the greatest expertise in Downtown Bend, the Downtown Bend Business Association is leading a conversation about creating a future vision for the heart of our city. The Downtown Bend Business Association (DBBA) is a small nonprofit with the mission to increase the vitality of Downtown Bend by enhancing the experience, image, and lifestyle of the Downtown Bend Economic Improvement District.

The idea of pedestrian promenades in Downtown Bend is not a new idea. The desires for more walkable spaces, community gathering areas, and a downtown that moves just a little bit slower have been present for years. The DBBA has, for the last several years, received these requests from the public, hosted merchant meetings on the topic, and outlined plans for how these spaces could be used to benefit not only downtown stakeholders, but the Bend community at large. You might remember in 2019, prior to covid, that the DBBA wrote a grant to create a Holiday Lane on the block of Minnesota between Wall and Bond streets.

Now, two years later, at the request of the City of Bend, the DBBA has begun to research what it would take to create a permanent pedestrian promenade on this same block of Minnesota Ave. The DBBA Board of Directors created a committee, hired SZABO Landscape Architecture to design renderings, researched promenade history and development,

and engaged in one-on-one personal conversations with peer cities that have been successful with promenade creation. After these initial steps were taken, the DBBA brought this data to a meeting with Minnesota Ave business and building owners to solicit their feedback, concerns, and suggestions.

“We appreciate the thoughtfulness and insight that our stakeholders have supplied,” says Aisling, Executive Director of the DBBA, *“and all of it lines up with the data we have collected from our research and conversations with peer cities. It is clear that the development of public space, such as a pedestrian promenade, takes significant research and development and ongoing sustainable funding sources.”*

The DBBA is presenting to City Council, today, Wednesday June 16th, to share their findings and recommend next steps. These recommended next steps include funding a comprehensive planning effort to develop an overall future vision for Downtown Bend, including the creation of pedestrian spaces such as Minnesota Ave, connecting Downtown Bend to the BCD, increasing bike and pedestrian access, developing new parking facilities, increasing public art – and more. The DBBA will suggest collaborative ideas to model the use of Minnesota Ave in vibrant ways while further research and development is completed on the Minnesota Promenade project’s feasibility. The DBBA will also request that City Council commit to partnering with the DBBA to prioritize building public restrooms in the downtown core as a first step towards having the necessary infrastructure to accommodate more guests to Downtown Bend, such as a promenade would be designed to do.

“It’s so exciting to see our community using their creativity to imagine what Downtown Bend could look like in 10, 20, 50 plus years.” says Aisling, *“We are happy to provide our thoughts on what is needed to assure the success of these ideas.”*

More information on this project can be found on the DBBA’s website, www.downtownbend.org.