

Bridge: Span should survive an earthquake



The Fir Street Bridge is expected to fail during an earthquake or tsunami.

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The Emergency Preparedness Committee developed options and asked permission to seek the grant in the amount of \$1.8 million. If awarded under Connect Oregon’s multimodal transportation funding program, the city will have to provide a 30 percent match.

Officials set aside \$100,000 from the roads repair and replacement fund in 2013 to build a new bridge.

If Cannon Beach receives the grant, Grassick suggested the city use OBEC Engineering Consultants to build upon its 2011 bridge study and help select the specific design and location. The Emergency Preparedness Committee closely examined locations near Fir Street and NeCus’ Park.

Grassick said the pedestrian bridge would have to be no less than 30 feet away from the traffic bridge, 10 feet wide to accommodate the mass of people who would cross it and would likely be built with 100-foot-deep piling filled with concrete to withstand sand liquefaction.

Mayor Sam Steidel and Councilor George Vetter asked about replacing or retrofitting the current bridge.

Grassick said the pedestrian bridge is more realistic cost-wise. A traffic bridge would cost between \$5 and \$6 million, and there isn’t as much assistance available for its type.

A new pedestrian bridge would have a 95 percent chance of surviving a quake, he added.

In 1964, a 9.2 magnitude earthquake in Alaska caused a tsunami that wiped out the Fir Street Bridge. Nine were killed in Alaska during the quake, but no deaths were reported in Oregon, according to the West Coast and Alaska Tsunami Warning Center.

A distant tsunami typically provides hours of warning. In the case of a local tsunami off the Oregon coast, the public would have about 20 minutes to evacuate.

According to an Oregon State University study, there is a 40 percent chance for a major Cascadia Subduction Zone earthquake off the Oregon coast in the next 50 years. It is estimated that at least 1,080 people would head toward the Fir Street Bridge on a typical summer day in the case of an earthquake.

“Our No. 1 priority is to save lives,” Emergency Preparedness Committee Chair Carolyn Adamson wrote in a letter to the council. “I believe this proposal will do that.”

The council voted 4-1 to seek the Connect Oregon grant. Steidel was the lone no.

Grant applications are due Nov. 20 and will be awarded next year.

R.J. Marx/The Daily Astorian

Gearhart: City filed for an injunction to halt events

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He said other activities were not singled out for prohibition in an area “consistent with residential neighborhoods, such as churches, schools and community centers,” as the residential code describes.

Watts said in the past, Smith had reached settlement agreements with the city after she had pleaded guilty to the zoning citations. This summer, however, she pleaded not guilty.

At hearings, Smith’s attorney Dan Kearns argued the city’s code failed to specifically prohibit renting out the barn for weddings.

“The city is bound to fairly advise its citizens of what its code requires and prohibits,” Kearns said during October trial proceedings.

On Wednesday night, Watts addressed the judge’s ruling and recommended adopting new language within the code.

“Judge Orr, in his ruling, which was pretty comprehensive, made one possible suggestion,” Watts said. “That was, if the council didn’t want a use to be allowed outright, then there was a presumption that it would require a conditional use permit. That language is not in the code presently because

30 years ago it wasn’t put in the code.”

Spell out uses

Watts said new language should spell prohibited uses out more specifically. Since elected officials could not spell out every prohibited use, he recommended new wording to list every activity allowed and permitted, with the additional provision that if not specifically allowed or prohibited, the activity would be presumed to need a conditional use permit, or be prohibited.

Without such language, Orr, other judges, or the state’s Land Use Board of Appeals could open the city to “a panoply” of commercial uses in the city’s residential zone.

Charges brought against Smith under the city’s building code remain pending, and will go before the City Council later this month. The two building violations carry potential penalties of \$5,000 each.

Watts said Orr’s ruling only dealt with the commercial use of the barn for weddings in the residential zone.

“She did not indicate she had an occupancy permit or the other permits,” Watts said.

Neither Smith nor her attorney attended Wednesday’s council meeting.

Injunction sought

According to the city manager, there are six separate violation dates since June. “What’s our next step? The city’s heading for an injunction that would prevent future events in the barn,” Sweet said. “It’s going to be up to a Circuit Court judge to grant a remedy.”

Sweet said an injunction was filed about a month ago in Clatsop County court, and Smith was served for these building permit violations last week.

“Of course all along the city’s been trying to find resolution to the ongoing issues in order to resolve this,” Watts said. “The city’s always been interested in further discussions. Regardless, she does not have an occupancy permit and other permits and inspections you’d expect from a commercial business.”

“It would be great if everyone came to a resolution so that there was a safe, insured venue that people could safely enjoy and the city did not have to worry about the potential liability of an uninsured venue without permits,” Watts added. “I would hope everyone would work toward that. We would love a final resolution on this.”

The building violations are scheduled to go before the City Council Nov. 16.



City Councilors Kerry Smith, Sue Lorain and Paulina Cockrum at the Gearhart City Council meeting Wednesday.

R.J. Marx/The Daily Astorian

Town hall: Patients can have lengthy delays in getting help

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“The report is going to be done in a format to support change,” said Lynne Saxton, the director of the Oregon Health Authority.

Saxton said the idea is “not an indictment of what’s currently being done, but also a continuous look at how we can constantly be improving quality.”

Oregon has struggled to provide adequate care for mental illness. In Clatsop County, where the state has identified problems for more than a decade, patients can experience lengthy delays to get access to acute psychiatric care and frustration in obtaining other mental health services.

The suicide of a 54-year-old woman with a history of mental illness who jumped off the Astoria Bridge in April has put a public spotlight on the gaps in the mental health safety net.

Cities and counties have complained about a lack of federal and state funding for behavioral health, which leaves local government, law enforcement and health care providers vulnerable.

The town hall was devoted to the stories of consumers and others with experience with the mental health system, while public officials and mental health providers were invited to listen. The audience included Sumner Watkins, the executive director of Clatsop Behavioral Healthcare, a private provider under contract with Clatsop County, and Astoria Police Chief Brad Johnston, who has been open about the burden often placed on law enforcement.

Gelser, D-Corvallis, who called for the town hall forums, said she has heard consistent concerns about access and the stigma of seeking help for mental illness.

“It takes too long for people to access services and to be

able to sustain services once they access them,” Gelser said. “Even when people have identified that they’re very ill, even when they have been able to overcome that stigma to ask for help, that help is not always available to them.”

The state senator, the chairwoman of the Senate Committee on Human Services and Early Childhood, which has oversight over mental health, said “I think everybody knows that we need some changes and improvements in the system.”

“It was important to me that we didn’t do that by getting a bunch of policymakers and providers around a table at Mahonia Hall to decide what would work for consumers. I think this piece is a really important part of the puzzle.

“We need to know, despite what we think we’re doing, what is the experience that people are having out there on the ground?”

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