

Cannon Beach Academy still fighting for a fall opening

Charter school claims district set 'artificial barriers'

By LYRA FONTAINE
EO Media Group

CANNON BEACH — Cannon Beach Academy representatives said they were "extremely disappointed" by the Seaside School District's decision to withdraw approval for the charter school's opening this fall.

They say the district erected unreasonable, "artificial barriers" to the academy's operation and should reconsider the decision.

Eight academy board members objected in a letter received by the school district last week. The school district withdrew approval last month based on the academy's failure to meet financial, enrollment and English as a Second Language requirements agreed upon in October.

The conditions, which were to be met by March, were intended to ensure that the academy would be "financially, structurally and academically ready" to open in the fall.

While acknowledging these conditions had not been met, academy board members asked the school district to "accept a certain level of uncertainty" relating to enrollment and staff.

The academy board offered to meet with the district to "further discuss how we can move forward to commence Cannon Beach operations for the 2016-17 school year."

The public charter school is prepared to appeal the district's decision and seek sponsorship by the Oregon State Board of Education if an agreement is not reached by April 11, board members wrote.

Long road

In 2013, community residents sought to bring a charter school to Cannon Beach, with the goal of hosting kindergartners through fifth-graders.

The school district denied the academy's proposal several times, citing the lack of an adequate location and not enough startup funds.

In October, the Seaside School District board of direc-



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David Vonada, of Tolovana Architects, presents the tentative site plan of the Cannon Beach Academy's temporary location, 171 Sunset Blvd., to the planning commission in 2015.

tors unanimously approved a three-year contract with Cannon Beach Academy. Under the conditions, the charter school would serve at least 44 kindergarten and first-grade students its first year. More grades could be added over time.

The charter school planned to open in fall at a temporary location at 171 Sunset Blvd., in a space that once housed the Cannon Beach Athletic Club.

'Artificial barriers'

In their letter, the academy board said they did not view the district's conditions as reasonable or appropriate when adopted. Board members were dismayed the district did not include the academy in reviewing and addressing the conditions before board approval.

However, the academy trusted the school district "would be reasonable" in considering the conditions.

The academy stated the conditions were imposed to "erect artificial barriers" to the charter school.

"We trust we are incorrect in drawing this conclusion," board members wrote.

One condition required the school have "all the money they need for the 2016-17 school year" in the bank, as well as a 10-percent contingency, amounting to about \$450,000.

The academy had \$145,798 by March 1, falling more than \$300,000 short.

Academy board members said the school "has reasonably and appropriately demonstrated financial stability based on its cash at hand, pledges, and the projected revenue that will come from public funding of the charter school."

Enrollment fell short

The academy also objected to the school district's condition of 22 students enrolled in a district kindergarten class.

Superintendent Doug Dougherty and Superintendent-elect Sheila Roley said without enough students, the district would be unable to make necessary adjustments in programs, class size and staffing.

The academy also lacked a state-approved English language learners program by proposing an outdated program, Dougherty and Roley wrote.

According to academy members, the academy had developed a program using information from the Oregon Department of Education that they "reasonably believed" to be state-approved, board members wrote. The error is "immaterial" and "easily corrected."

Academy board members said the district's decision was "neither reasonable or lawful."

Despite the March decision to revoke approval, Dougherty and Roley stated that the district remained committed to seeing the charter school up and running and that Cannon Beach Academy could begin operating in fall 2017, if it meets the conditions.

Oil group drops bid to repeal fuel standard

By HILLARY BORRUD
Capital Bureau

SALEM — An oil industry group announced Thursday it will abandon a bid to get voters to weaken or repeal Oregon's low-carbon fuel standard.

The Oregon Fuels Association had filed three initiatives targeting the law for the November ballot, but Paul Romain, the group's executive director, said it would have been difficult to succeed with that strategy.

"The problem with any initiative is you're asking people to ... vote 'yes,' to vote 'no,'" Romain said. "It's a very confusing message."

The Oregon Fuels Association represents gas stations and other fuel distributors.

Instead of a ballot initiative, Romain said the fuel industry will push lawmakers to make a 2017 transportation funding plan contingent upon changes or a repeal of the fuel standard. That's what Republicans did last year, and they could do so again next year because the Legislature can only raise the state gas tax with a three-fifths supermajority.

"We just felt the stronger position we had was saying, 'OK, you want money for a transportation package, then work with us,'" Romain said.

A repeal of the low-carbon fuel standard was part of a transportation funding plan negotiated last year by Gov. Kate Brown and a bipartisan group of lawmakers that included state Sen. Betsy Johnson, D-Scappoose. That deal died, however, after the state Department of Transportation

revealed the plan would not achieve the promised reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, which was a sticking point for environmentalists.

10 percent reduction

The fuel standard is supposed to reduce carbon emissions from transportation by 10 percent over a decade through a combination of cleaner biofuels blended into gas and diesel and a carbon credit exchange to reward owners of electric charging stations and other alternative fuel infrastructure. Lawmakers passed a bill last year to make the system permanent, and it took effect in January.

Even before the law, Oregon already required a 10 percent ethanol blend in gasoline and a 5 percent biodiesel blend in diesel.

"So far dozens of businesses, from a truck stop in Eugene to folks making fuel from landfill fumes, have signed up to generate credits from the sale of clean, renewable fuels," Jessica Moskovitz, communications director for the Oregon Environmental Council, wrote in an email. "Oregonians don't need to choose between clean air and good roads, we need both."

Significant challenges

Even without the ballot initiatives, the low-carbon fuel standard faces significant challenges. Although the standard took effect in January, the Oregon Environmental Commission voted in December to delay enforcement of the law until 2018. Commissioners said they wanted frequent updates on the supply and cost of alternative fuels and carbon credits.

The Department of Environmental Quality, which administers the program, also

changed one of its carbon emissions measurements last year to a value favored by the corn ethanol industry. The industry had threatened to join oil companies in attacking the law if the state did not abandon a calculation that attributed a greater carbon impact to corn ethanol.

Romain said the Department of Environmental Quality is once again changing aspects of the fuel standard, after the petroleum industry notified the agency some of the numbers were incorrect. Agency staff could not be reached for comment Thursday afternoon.

"The bottom line, the program isn't working," Romain said. "And you know, it may collapse of its own weight."

Moskovitz dismissed the idea that the program might be in trouble. "The program is working as it should by being updated as needed," Moskovitz wrote.

Millions in incentives

Meanwhile, the state is offering millions of dollars in incentives to governments and businesses that install fueling infrastructure or purchase fleets of vehicles that run on compressed natural gas, propane or other alternative fuels. Thursday was the deadline for businesses and governments to apply for \$3 million in state tax credits for alternative vehicle fleets, and the Department of Energy is also offering \$8 million in tax credits for charging stations, fuel compression and storage facilities and other transportation projects through September, according to agency press releases.

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