

Residents and city clash over Gearhart fire station

Tsunami safety, park preservation among issues

By **BRENNA VISSER**
The Daily Astorian

GEARHART — Tensions ran high as Gearhart debated Thursday whether or not a new fire station should be built on the back half of Gearhart Park.

Residents expressed their discontent with the park even being considered as an option. The park honors Lesley Miller, the Gearhart legend who helped secure the land to be a park from the county in 1947.

"This is really our only open space," said Joy Sigler, who has lived in Gearhart since 1997. "And once it's gone, it's gone. I appreciate the amount of time and planning that went into this, but we are talking about a natural event that possibly wouldn't happen for another 100 years — that's 100 years without that open space."

But members of a firehouse committee said the park site offered the best chance for



R.J. Marx/The Daily Astorian

Gearhart's firehouse fails to meet modern standards or accommodate needed equipment.

safety in a Cascadia Subduction Zone event.

"When I first heard the park as an option, I thought no way," Firehouse Committee Co-chairman Jay Speakman said. "That's where I began with this issue."

But Speakman said research led "us to believe this is the best we have. There is no perfect solution."

Limited choices

About 70 residents packed the fire station to ask questions and raise concerns about the two-year process that evalu-

ated the merits and downfalls of nine different locations to replace the deteriorating station on Pacific Way.

After a series of geologic and economic evaluations, the fire station committee narrowed down the choices to either rebuilding at the current location or in the east half of the oceanfront park between Pacific Way and First Street.

Building a new fire station in the park means the station would be much less vulnerable to a tsunami, but residents are concerned about losing a community landmark.

could rise from 40 to 60 feet.

But this wasn't a part of the equation back in 2006, when the city failed to pass a \$3.75 million bond to build a new fire station. In 2015, the City Council reopened discussions about renovating or replacing the station, making it one of the city's top priorities.

With the park sitting at 48 feet above sea level compared with the 27 feet the fire station currently stands, City Administrator Chad Sweet said the park was the only centrally located space that wouldn't be inundated by water that the city could afford.

Other locations that met the first two criteria are either owned privately or prohibitively expensive.

Locations to the east were vulnerable to flooding from the Neacoxie. And if the fire station were on the hills all those services would be cut off from the town below without some form of bridge, Sweet said.

Sweet said if the plan were accepted it would cost the city between \$5 million to \$7 million, which would cover the cost of a new building, replacing a fire engine and renovations at City Hall to retrofit what would be the former offices of

the fire and police chiefs.

The lot including the building and parking would be about 54,500 square feet. Park enhancements could be part of the plan, Sweet said.

"We know there's some taking, but there would be giving back, too," he said.

Alternatives

Many residents expressed their discontent with the park even being considered as an option.

The land has a deed restriction that allows it only to be a park, and the city would have to ask Clatsop County's permission to lift the restriction before starting any projects.

But for some neighbors, it wasn't about just losing some land — it was about losing part of the character of the town.

City Councilor Dan Jesse warned that almost any other site would require the community to raise a considerable amount of money.

"I'm not convinced that if we put out a larger bond measure the community would support it," Jesse said.

Sweet said the public forum on Thursday was just one of many forums the city intends to hold about the issue.

Wright named COO of EO Media Group

EO Media Group

SALEM — Heidi Wright has been named chief operating officer of EO Media Group, which owns The Daily Astorian.

Wright succeeds John S. Perry, who is retiring after 44 years in the newspaper industry, including the last 12 with EO Media Group.

Wright comes to EO Media Group from Western Communications, owner of the Bend Bulletin and other newspapers in Oregon and California. She is Wescom's chief financial officer and human resources director. She will join EO Media Group in June.

Steve Forrester, the president and CEO of EO Media Group, announced Wright's hiring: "Our executive committee — composed of Kathryn Brown, Susan Forrester Rana and me — is pleased to find a successor to Perry with the leadership capabilities to help our company prosper in the digital age. Her prior experience with family-owned companies in our region is especially relevant."

Prior to joining Wescom, Wright was publisher of the Klamath Falls Herald and News, owned by Pioneer News Group. She also worked as a publisher in Montana for Lee Enterprises. She has an undergraduate degree and a master's in business administration from the University of Montana.

"Heidi has a lifetime of experience in the West," noted Brown. "Her experience at newspapers in Butte, Klamath Falls and Bend make her well-suited



Heidi Wright

to understand the communities that EO Media Group serves in rural Oregon and Washington — as well as the extraordinary reach of the Capital Press, our agricultural weekly."

As chief operating officer, Wright will direct the business operations of EO Media Group and supervise publishers and corporate staff. The company's headquarters are in Salem.

"It's an honor and privilege to be joining EO Media Group," said Wright. "While I will miss my friends and colleagues at Western Communications, I am excited to become a part of the EO Media Group family. My husband, Richard Schuurman, and I are looking forward to calling Salem home in the near future."

EO Media Group publications include: The Blue Mountain Eagle of John Day, Cannon Beach Gazette, Capital Press, Chinook Observer, Coast River Business Journal, The Daily Astorian, East Oregonian, Hermiston Herald, Oregon Coast Today, Seaside Signal and Wallowa County Chieftain.

Tiny house bill goes to state Senate

Bill requires specific standards

By **PETER WONG**
Capital Bureau

SALEM — Oregon's debate over tiny homes took one more step last week in the state House.

House Bill 2737 requires the Department of Consumer and Business Services, the parent of the state Building Codes Division, to adopt specific standards for such houses by January. Among them are standards drawn from the International Residential Code for lofts and ladders.

The bill's standards would expire automatically in 2024, after the Building Codes Division conducts its next periodic review of codes for state adoption.

State Rep. Paul Holvey, a Democrat from Eugene, said the bill emerged from a decision by the division in January 2016 that it would no longer issue certificates for such structures as "recreational vehicles."

Holvey, who leads the House Business and Labor Committee, said manufacturers sought a way to resolve the issue short of waiting several years for the next state review of building code changes.

"Usually the codes are adopted on an international level and start a process," Holvey said in an interview after the House voted 43-16 on the bill. "It's not common to put codes into legislation. But on this one piece, we did."

"With all the needs expressed out there, we thought it was prudent to go ahead down this road. We thought this was a good compromise — that tiny



Wikimedia Commons

The state Legislature is developing standards for tiny homes.

houses will meet all residential codes with one exception" for the lofts and ladders already specified in the bill.

Lower-cost housing

As the demand grows for lower-cost housing — and manufacturers seek to sell a new product — Holvey said Oregon is not the only state wrestling with how to regulate such homes.

Prompted by a manufacturer in his district, Rich's Portable Cabins and Tiny Homes in North Powder, Rep. Greg Barreto said Oregon is missing an economic opportunity.

"These homes are more robust than travel trailers," the Republican from Cove said during the House debate.

Rep. Janelle Bynum, D-Happy Valley, said there is interest in them for a more pressing reason — afford-

able shelters during a housing shortage.

"We do not have two years to talk about issues that we can solve today," said Bynum, one of the bill's two chief sponsors.

But opponents were determined to make their case.

Rep. Bill Kennemer, R-Oregon City, was the lone dissenter on an 8-1 vote by Holvey's committee to advance the bill.

He recalled a childhood home built by his father that caught fire and almost killed his mother and sister because of inadequate materials and faulty wiring.

He named a long list of

interests opposed to the bill.

Among them: Oregon Fire Chiefs Association, Oregon Building Officials Association, Oregon Home Builders Association, Associated General Contractors, Oregon Building and Construction Trades Council, International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers and the National Electrical Contractors Association.

Sufficient authority

Melanie Adams, Hillsboro's building director, also filed a statement of opposition but said cities already have sufficient authority to regulate such structures.

"I hope that our preoccupation with affordable housing would not lead to legislation that will mainstream the creation of unsafe living spaces," said Rep. Mark Johnson, R-Hood River.

Holvey, a carpenter and union representative when he became a legislator in 2004, said later that licensed contractors still would be required to do electrical and plumbing work on the houses.

Holvey said the list of opponents is long not because they are opposed to tiny homes, but they are involved in the building code review process "and they do a thorough job."

The Capital Bureau is a collaboration between EO Media Group and Pamplin Media Group.

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