

Seaside: Additions, changes to plan can come at any time

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Using tax increment financing, funding comes through increases in assessed values of local properties. As new development arrives and existing properties are improved, assessments rise and see property tax increases. Property taxes on the growth in assessed value in the urban renewal area are frozen and increases are allocated to the city's urban renewal agency and not the taxing districts. Subsequent improvements can lead to higher home values and in turn higher assessments, ultimately generating more funds for the urban renewal district.

"As the assessed value grows in the district, only the urban renewal agencies can tax against that increase," City

Manager Mark Winstanley said. "The other agencies don't get that."

Southeast Seaside's infrastructure goals, prepared in a May goal-setting session, include a pedestrian bike bridge, parks projects and upgrades to unincorporated properties in the area. Because part of the land is owned by the county, those areas would need to be annexed into the city. Annexation would require approval from the Clatsop County Board of Commissioners.

"Typically, counties are very supportive if you're doing infrastructure," Elaine Howard of Howard Consultants said. "And 90-something percent of your plan is infrastructure."

Spending decisions can be changed as long as their cost

does not exceed the debt the agency can incur, Howard said.

The city is limited to projects listed in the city's urban renewal plan.

Members of the commission considered both 20- and 25-year scenarios.

A 20-year timeline would have yielded a maximum indebtedness of \$37.6 million; maximum indebtedness using a 25-year urban renewal district reaches \$62.4 million.

"It's a marked difference between 20 and 25 years," Winstanley said.

Bridge upgrades by themselves could consume a large portion of the project fund, Howard said. "You've got those bridge repairs, which really may be a top priority," Howard said. "But they're \$26 million. That's a lot of money.

I'm not sure how much the city can add to that — but that's what causes the angst in looking at the projects in the 20- to 25-year time frame."

Urban renewal funds for school infrastructure of \$8.7 million are targeted to improve transportation, bring a sewer system to the new campus site, improve water storage at the school site and acquire land as needed for right-of-way for streets and utilities.

"This is a situation where the school district is developing in a huge way, but by forming this urban renewal agency

we have an opportunity to share in the costs rather than put it all on them," Winstanley said. "For every dollar we don't have to pay on public improvements that are a requirement for development, we can spend it on the kids. And that's an opportunity for us."

Up to \$7.5 million is targeted for building improvements and business assistance in the area, according to Howard.

Additions or changes to the plan can come at any time.

"This gives us the most flexibility in my mind, and

the most options," City Councilor Steve Wright said of the 25-year plan unanimously endorsed by Seaside Improvement Commission members.

City staff and consultants plan a briefing with the county Board of Commissioners on Tuesday and will seek county approval at the commission's July 26 meeting in Astoria.

Seaside's Planning Commission will review the plan for conformance to the city's comprehensive plan, Howard said. The City Council will hold a formal hearing Aug. 14.

Port: Balanced budget proposed

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John Raichl, his replacement Frank Spence, Cindy Daly and committee Chairman Richard Lee wanted to recommend the budget. But Port Commissioners Stephen Fulton and Bill Hunsinger, who have been critical of Port staff and management, blocked the move. Fulton voted "no" and Hunsinger abstained.

Budget cuts, attorney raises

"To keep the Port solvent, I think we have to go through this line by line, and make cuts in this budget," Hunsinger said, claiming the Port does not have the funds to match any grants it might receive.

The budget staff proposed is balanced and includes the match for several state and federal grants. Staff proposed \$100,000 for legal expenses in the coming year, a significant drop from past budgets. But Hunsinger claimed the Port would need much more, saying the Port has potential

legal issues regarding its Pier 3 stormwater system and an Oregon State Bar investigation into an anonymous complaint filed against Port Property and Contracts Director Shane Jensen.

Fulton recommended about \$368,000 worth of cuts, including a \$200,000 reduction in the Port's staffing. He also called for an additional \$200,000 to be allocated for a legal fund. The Port is involved in two active lawsuits surrounding the Astoria Riverwalk Inn, one as a defendant being sued by the spurned potential operator Param Hotel Corp., and another as a plaintiff suing the heavily indebted former operator, Brad Smithart.

Stormwater

Fulton also called for the budget committee to eliminate any revenue from the cost-share staff has proposed to charge tenants being serviced by the Pier 3 stormwater treatment project once it becomes operational. Fulton, who along with Hunsinger has opposed

the plan, claims there is no basis for charging tenants.

Port Executive Director Jim Knight said that although nobody likes the additional cost, there are no tenants in the area affected by the stormwater denying their responsibility to help pay for stormwater treatment. "Why would they not pay, unless there are commissioners encouraging them not to pay?" he asked.

In other news:

- Lee announced his resignation from the budget committee. He took over earlier this year as chairman for John Lansing, who resigned after Fulton called him a stooge of the staff. Lee said he's disappointed in the Port Commission's lack of oversight on limiting staffing costs, and said the budget committee's role is not just to rubber stamp staff's budget.

- Daly announced her resignation, as well, saying the next Port Commission should choose the next budget committee, adding her name would be back in the running.

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Published: June 8th, 2017

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