



Danny Miller/The Daily Astorian

A southeast urban renewal plan could help Seaside schools and other infrastructure improvements.

Seaside: 'It really is about improving what we already have'

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think people are necessarily against development — we just want it to be smart," Maria Pincetich, a resident, said in the hearing.

City councilors said there were multiple public meetings on the issue.

"Urban renewal is a proven tool in Seaside for infrastructure. How many enjoy the North Holladay boulevard? If we didn't have urban renewal money we wouldn't be able to do that," City Councilor Tita Montero said. "Seaside will benefit to have the south entry to the city not look like a scumbag."

How it works

Urban renewal is a financing program authorized under state law and implemented locally allowing the use of property tax revenues from city and regional taxing districts to grow the economy in blighted or underdeveloped areas.

The Turnaround and Prom, the city's sewage plant, 12th Avenue improvements and construction of a new library are the products of past urban renewal plans.

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.

Property taxes don't raise for the individual. Instead, a portion of what people are already paying will go to urban renewal rather than to other taxing districts, urban renewal consultant Elaine Howard said.

The urban renewal district plans to fund projects like road and sewer system needs for the new Seaside school campus, storefront redesign, property acquisition, and most notably, an estimated \$45 million for bridge improvements at avenues A, G, S and U.

"We are very committed to the concept of urban renewal," Mayor Jay Barber said. "It really is about improving what we already have, and without urban-renewal we would not have the financial resources to complete those projects."

Community concerns

One of the aspects Pincetich took issue with was the idea of annexing 32 acres of unincorporated forest land as a part of the new district. She said she was involved in discussions about expanding the urban growth boundary, which was tabled last summer.

"The (Portland State University) population statistics have been published and cites negligible growth for Clatsop County. Why the urban growth expansion?" Pincetich said.

City Manager Mark Winstanley said that 32 acres out of the 560 acres in the entire plan was included in the urban renewal district so that the city could possibly have another point of entry to build road, water or sewer infrastructure to the school site.

"I think there has been some confusion between the urban growth boundary expansion and the urban renewal district. They are two distinct things," he said. "It's not about increasing the size of the city."

However, city councilors received written testimony hours before the hearing from Sean Malone, an attorney with the Oregon Coast Alliance, who asserts that by including this property in the urban renewal district the city is not in compliance with its comprehensive plan.

Malone wrote that the comprehensive plan says forestlands "shall be conserved for forest uses," and argued that "this policy would not be served in any way by using the property for the school district."

Winstanley, as well as the City Council, declined to comment on Malone's testimony because they did not have a chance to read it before the meeting.

Traffic and development

Others were concerned about improvement projects on Wahanna Road and Spruce Street bringing more traffic into otherwise quiet residential areas. Residents also feared language in the plan allowing eminent domain, an act that allows a city to buy property for fair market value in order to complete an infrastructure project.

"We have a very quiet neighborhood," said James Hall, who lives on Cooper Street. "This could create a lot more traffic and effect the general peacefulness of our neighborhood."

Winstanley said Seaside has never used eminent domain in urban renewal projects in the past 32 years, and said residents should not worry about that changing this time around.

City Councilor Steve Wright also noted that developing roads to the new school site was not just up to the city, but of the transportation advisory commission and the school district, and that this was an ongoing discussion.

Public involvement

After the hourlong hearing, there was still a sense from some residents that their voices were still not being heard.

Pincetich said it's not just about the number of public meetings held, but the number of public comment periods to allow the public to interact with the city.

"There was one hearing on the conformance to the comprehensive plan, but until now no public hearings about the actual merits of the plan," she said.

Reunion: Chicks found near Ilwaco High

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organization based just outside Astoria, sees at least one gull a week — sometimes more — and between six and 13 bald eagles a year. Last week, a handful of pelicans clustered in the corner of one enclosure. Birds come to the center malnourished, stranded, abandoned, injured. In the nine years Saranpaa has been there, he has only seen a dozen osprey.

People found the two chicks a day apart near Ilwaco High School. If they hadn't been found, they would have starved or died from exposure, Saranpaa said.

Osprey are a conservation success story, rebounding from population crashes in the 1950s and 1970s linked to the use of pesticides like DDT. There are a number of nests around Ilwaco High School. Nearby Black Lake, stocked regularly with fish, the fields and the surrounding woods are attractive habitat to these birds known for their long wings and exquisite dives for fish.

Osprey are protected under the federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act. It is illegal to remove a nest if it contains eggs or chicks. However, if a nest is empty, people are allowed remove it.

An Ocean Beach School District maintenance crew had removed one osprey nest from a set of stadium lights the day the first chick was found, said Superintendent Jenny Risner. Before they removed the nest, they had watched it for several weeks to make sure it was empty, she said.

Osprey often build their large nests on man-made structures like the Ilwaco football stadium lights. They've also been known to build nests on communication towers and distribution poles. Most of the time, people can wait until the nesting season is over and remove the nest after the osprey have



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Josh Saranpaa of the Wildlife Center of the North Coast, right, and volunteer Bill Elliott carry a crate containing two rehabilitated osprey just prior to their release back into the wild in Ilwaco over the weekend.



Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian
Josh Saranpaa with the Wildlife Center of the North Coast watches as one of two rehabilitated osprey starts to leave a crate before taking off seconds later.

left. But, if a nest's location threatens human safety or the birds' safety, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service spokesman

Rylan Suehisa said the agency can issue a depredation permit. Rehabilitation groups will take the birds to raise and release them and crews will remove the nest.

Release

At Ilwaco High School, the two young birds, so eager to get out of the cage earlier, now eyed the field suspiciously. They settled down at the back of the cage and refused to budge.

Todd took out binoculars and scanned the treetops. Saranpaa jiggled the cage gently. The osprey chicks just hunched their shoulders.

Saranpaa reached in and slowly, carefully pulled one chick out. The chick sprawled on the grass, cocking its head to glare at the volunteers. Then, in a blink, it was off, flying low over the ground and then soaring above the field. Saranpaa reached in for the second bird.

Soon both osprey were circling the field, still a little clumsy on their newfound wings. One of them emitted a piercing baby bird's cry. Saranpaa and the volunteers watched, happy to see the birds fly but nervous about their chances of survival if the parents were gone.

Then suddenly two adult osprey appeared above the trees. One carried a small fish in its talons. They cried at the younger birds and soared around them. Soon, all four osprey were gone, heading in the direction of the lake.

"That was a good one," Saranpaa said, visibly relieved as he carried the dog cage back to his car. "That's what we were hoping for."

Several days later, Todd reported that she and Elliott watched four osprey — two adults and two juveniles — fly around Black Lake. One of the young birds had just caught a fish.

Flag: Club has more than 100 members

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for any bad publicity that was caused for them. I take responsibility," Pitman said. "If I had a better understanding of the situation and what was going on at the time, I would've responded differently. I don't want to add fuel to the fire or add fuel to the hatred."

'A bit of a challenge'

Sons of Beaches was one of nearly 100 entries at the Grand Land Parade. A small number of judges usually have about an hour to study the floats — not the trailing vehicles — and question designers, Travers said.

"I could see how they could miss that," Travers said. "It's a bit of a challenge. It really is."

Travers witnessed the parade on Duane Street across from Fort George Brewery and never saw a flag anywhere near the float.

"I've got to be honest, I was surprised," he said.

The Regatta may consider revoking the group's award at some point, though it likely would not happen for at least a few weeks, Travers said.

Pitman, 55, lives in a rural area south of Seaside and served in the U.S. Navy from 1979 to 1981. He and his family, who he said comes from a mixed-race background, owned the Pier 11 Feed Store and Restaurant in Astoria from 1977 to 2003.

Since the Sons of Beaches was founded in 2010, its float — Confederate decals and all — has been a fixture in multiple local festivities. Earlier this summer, it earned the award for best patriotic entry at the Fourth of July parade in Warrenton.

Intended as a tribute

Many members of the Sons of Beaches are either military veterans or active-duty service members. Pitman insists the Confederate flag and decals were not displayed as political or racial symbols but were intended instead to be tributes to veterans.

The most recognizable



Sons of Beaches

Sons of Beaches, an off-road enthusiast group, won the Admiral's Award in the Astoria Regatta's Grand Land Parade on Saturday. The club has been criticized for displaying Confederate symbols.

version of the Confederate emblem was flown as a battle flag during the Civil War. The Confederate government adopted different versions that largely employ the same logo.

The original use as a battle flag, rather than as a symbol for the policies adopted by the Confederate government, made it worthy of placement alongside others flown in U.S. wars, Pitman said. He also alluded to the fact that American citizens, regardless of whether they supported the Union or the Confederacy, were related to people who fought on the losing side of the war.

"There's bigger issues than one battle flag that was used more than 150 years ago," Pitman said. "I just know that the Civil War was part of our history and shouldn't be ignored. That part of our nation's history is being shamed."

Volunteers

The Sons of Beaches club, which includes more than 100 members, takes shifts voluntarily patrolling beaches on off-road vehicles. On patrols, they rescue cars trapped in sand, pick up trash and sometimes help maintain trails. The club also holds charity events.

"It's a moral shot in the arm and a boost of energy that

makes you feel good," Pitman said.

Pitman founded the Sons of Beaches in 2010. He said some previous off-road clubs had bad reputations in the community after tearing up trails and even finding themselves in the crosshairs of the Internal Revenue Service.

"I'm trying to completely steer away from that negative image," Pitman said.

Pitman said he did not grasp the negative attention the Confederate symbols at the parade were causing until Sunday. The club held an event at the Seaside Factory Outlet Center to benefit Oregon Health & Science University's Doernbecher Children's Hospital in Portland, and a Confederate flag was on display.

At one point, a man who had just parked his car walked over to the display and accosted club members. The flag was removed after some intense back-and-forth exchanges.

While expressing his regret that the symbols had caused a high degree of negative attention, Pitman joked about the promotional value it added to the club. As of Monday afternoon, he said, the club lost one member but gained eight as a result of the controversy.

Rejects racism

Pitman said both he and the club reject racism, claiming he once denied a membership application to someone who had previous connections to the Ku Klux Klan.

"When they call me racist, they don't have a clue," Pitman said.

He said the Confederate flag, widely seen as a symbol of African-American enslavement, was "chosen by groups to be racist." However, Pitman said the group has decided to no longer fly the flag.

"Good, rational adults can come to a rational decision that still respects our veterans, and our club is willing to do that," Pitman said.

The Astoria Regatta, meanwhile, is exploring legal options to limit similar displays in the future. Travers said he considered those possibilities before the parade this year based on backlash other parades around the country had received. But he said it is difficult to work through free-speech issues on short notice.

"I didn't realize we didn't have it as tight as we would like it until too late in the game," Travers said.

As for next year? "Now I'm most certainly going to do it."