

# Cannon Beach: The campaign is competitive but peaceful

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The new council will be faced with navigating some specific projects — such as developing the 55-acre parcel of land known as South Wind, rehabilitating an aging water and wastewater system and addressing a deteriorating City Hall — as well as the ever-green task of managing a tourism industry that brings both benefits and challenges.

Since being appointed to the City Council five years ago, many of the same issues that inspired Benefield to serve remain. One is to preserve the community character that attracted him to Cannon Beach.

“I flew out to the coast, and drove through every town,” he said. “When I got to Cannon Beach, I loved it because it had the appearance of a village. But now it’s becoming a resort.”

At the crux is a lack of affordable housing, Benefield said. It’s an issue the council attempted to tackle a few times during his last term. Plans to introduce park model homes at the city’s RV park have been stalled amid city staff turnover. The council, including Benefield, voted down zoning code amendments pitched as a way to encourage workforce housing, finding them ineffective at building housing the average worker could afford.

“I don’t have a clear answer. I think we’re in that holding pattern because we don’t have the answers,” Benefield said. “But I don’t think it’s just the city’s problem.”

If elected to another term, Benefield would support directing lodging tax dollars away from promotion efforts and putting the money into public art, building trails and buying the former Cannon Beach Elementary School as an event center.

While in favor of the chamber’s efforts to market during the offseason, he questions its effectiveness in driving tourism away from summer months.

“People are going to see the promotion and come when they want, which is summer,”

Benefield said. “It’s just too crowded.”

## A listening ear

While this is her first bid for City Council, Risley is no stranger to local politics. Over the course of three decades, she has served on several boards and committees, including the Cannon Beach and Clatsop County planning commissions, the Oregon State Parks and Recreation Commission and the chamber board.

As a member of public art committees, supporting the town’s art identity and legacy would be a priority for Risley. Other goals include working more collaboratively with the chamber and exploring solutions for a new City Hall. As a member of the parks committee, preserving the integrity of the Ecola Creek Forest Reserve would also be on her agenda.

As a former chamber board member, Risley sees the value in promoting Cannon Beach to tourists, but as a councilor she would work with the state to try and expand what projects can be funded through the lodging tax.

“We’ve got quite a bit in the coffers, but we’re stuck with a formula on how to spend it,” she said. “I think when a good thing gets too good you need to rethink, and that’s why I’m talking about the Legislature.”

If elected, Risley’s main goal would be to be a sounding board for her constituents.

“I love this place because there’s a spirit of independence and cooperation with each other,” she said. “When we work together we can accomplish so much, so I want to hear what’s on your mind.”

## Finding a balance

For his first bid for public office, Swedenborg hopes to be a voice for people busy running businesses and raising families — a cross section of the community he feels often isn’t well-represented.

Born and raised in Cannon Beach, Swedenborg worked in Los Angeles and Bend in technology sales and management with Hewlett-Packard before moving back to the area to take

over operations at The Waves Oceanfront Lodging.

Remembering the small and sleepy Cannon Beach of his childhood, in conjunction with the reality of a booming tourism industry today, is what inspired his campaign slogan: “Manage the future, respect the past.”

“I think we really need to look at the character balance of Cannon Beach. Create policy that allows for some change and also will help create balance by allowing younger families to live here and work here,” he said.

Creating that balance includes supporting paid parking and a food and beverage tax to help bring in revenue that, unlike the lodging tax, wouldn’t be restricted to mostly tourism purposes.

Swedenborg is the strongest advocate for tourism promotion in the offseason out of the candidates, and argues that, in comparison with other tourism-based cities, the amount spent on promotion is small.

“I do feel Cannon Beach has to have some kind of promotion,” he said. “The only way we’re going to grow the transient lodging dollars we use to run the city is by growing business in the shoulder season.”

Swedenborg suggests a better way to manage lodging tax dollars diverted to the Tourism and Arts Commission and the Chamber of Commerce destination marketing budget would be to lump it all into one fund and have it be managed by an oversight committee that would vote on how the money should be used.

“I think the way we do it today there are lots of duplicate efforts. The city gives money to one event in town, and then the city gives money to the chamber and they use some of that money to market that same event. I think there are some synergies to be gained by looking at how that is managed at a city level,” he said.

## Different approaches

While all of the candidates listed housing as a top priority, their approach to address it dif-

fered. All of the candidates said employers should do more to develop housing for workers.

As a business owner, Swedenborg is directly impacted by the employee shortage related to the lack of workforce housing, and has had to provide lodging on a small scale for employees for years, he said.

Benefield said the city should move forward with the park model project and incentivize accessory dwelling units. He also believes regulating vacation rentals is a way to begin addressing the housing shortage. He supports a proposal about to go before the Planning Commission that would eliminate the five-year rental permit that allows some homeowners nightly rentals.

“Our volunteer base is disappearing. Because of higher costs, young people are moving out, and the older folks are getting tired. The young people who are here are working two to three jobs,” Benefield said. “We’ve displaced our younger families with tourists. We need people invested in the community, not just their properties.”

Risley believes her real

estate background gives her key insights into the complex realities of building costs, zoning and other housing issues, she said. She joins Benefield in supporting more accessory dwelling units in limited areas, but believes the place to start is to crack down on unlicensed properties and make sure lodging taxes are collected.

“Things have changed in real estate. People buying these expensive homes don’t need any other income,” Risley said. “I don’t see people opening up these properties for workforce housing.”

Establishing emergency services at South Wind is also a priority for the candidates, though each differ on what development should be prioritized.

In a place where land is at a premium, Swedenborg and Benefield both advocate using a portion of South Wind property for workforce housing.

Risley, however, said her primary vision for the land is to relocate the Cannon Beach Academy, a charter school.

“I think everyone is expecting to see us put a school on

this property,” she said.

As discussions of development unfold, the issue of whether the city should financially get involved with financing a school building has split the City Council. Benefield believes the city should not take on the cost of building any part of a school building, as he feels the financial burden is the responsibility of Seaside School District.

Risley and Swedenborg, however, would be willing to direct some city resources into building a dual-purpose structure that could be a school as well as a supplies storage and evacuation area, seeing it as an investment in the youth and the city.

The campaign is competitive but peaceful, with candidates describing it so far as a race between three people who all love Cannon Beach. No matter their disagreements, there’s a certain unspoken rule to stay friendly in a town of 1,700 people, Benefield said.

“Because no matter what, you’ll end up running into them at the coffee shop the next day,” he said.

# Robles: ‘I feel this place is home. I like the rain, too.’

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friends, Robles said. During his work in Idaho, Robles also met Krueger, a developer behind several apartment and housing projects on the North Coast.

“He liked how I do my work,” Robles said of Krueger, who encouraged him to start his own business, expand into other aspects of housing construction and eventually relocate to the North Coast.

His new company, Brothers Wood Finishes, pays homage to his friend Torres. It was difficult to prove himself to developers and homeowners on the North Coast initially, he said, but he has slowly built a reputation and an expanded

customer base.

Still in the throes of summer construction, Robles now employs 15 to 20 people doing painting, siding and woodwork on the Pacific Rim Apartments, a two-building, 68-unit complex scheduled to open this winter.

Robles has been expanding his reach into home remodels in hopes of keeping more of his employees working when the weather fouls and outside construction slows.

“I tell my guys to save money, because winter can be hard,” he said.

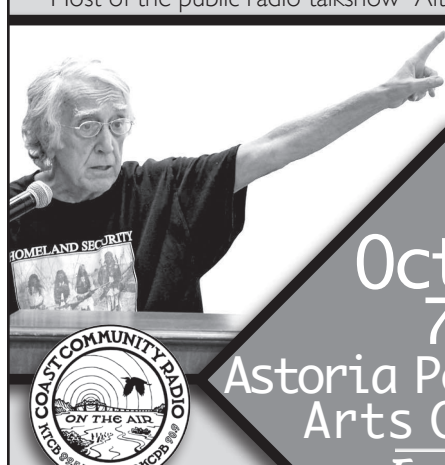
Robles’ journey has not been without its challenges. His first wife died in a car crash several years ago, along with one of their two daughters. He

and his second wife recently separated after she did not like the weather of the North Coast and moved back to Idaho with another daughter.

Robles spent 15 months trying to gain custody of a son taken from a previous girlfriend by the state in Idaho and placed into foster care, he said. The two now live in Astoria, regularly visiting his family in Idaho and the beach, which reminds him of Manzanillo.

“I feel this place is home,” he said. “I like the rain, too.”

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