

# City Hall: 'What we do needs to be accessible to the public'

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about the building in a tsunami or earthquake. The building would be vulnerable to a minor seismic event or a medium-to-large sized tsunami, St. Denis said.

Making the building resistant to a major earthquake would be a priority no matter which location is chosen. But some, like City Councilor George Vetter, see placing the new City Hall at South Wind as the gateway to finally developing the property that has sat vacant since 2013.

Higher costs associated with developing South Wind, such as buying highway access and installing new utilities from scratch, could be offset by selling the land on where City Hall sits on Gower, Vetter argues — land that could be priced at a premium given its proximity to Hemlock Street.

Installing utilities for a City Hall at South Wind could be the catalyst for other development, such as a new school building, he said.

"I think if we keep (City Hall) here, we are abandoning the South Wind site," Vetter said. "The City Council needs to take the lead to go up there. I don't see how we could get



The attic of Cannon Beach City Hall is used for storage.

Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

a bond measure here and then get another for development at South Wind. We're turning our backs on South Wind if we don't take this opportunity."

St. Denis said he understood Vetter's argument, but cautioned that no matter the location, a City Hall serving a town the size of Cannon Beach

will never be big enough to be considered a long-term shelter after a disaster.

"I don't want to give the impression to people that they

can go there and stay there for two weeks," St. Denis said.

Others, like City Councilor Mike Benefield and Mayor Sam Steidel, believe there's an

inherent value in keeping City Hall in the heart of town. Most of the structural issues could be addressed at the existing location for the majority of seismic and tsunami events, they believe.

"What we do needs to be accessible to the public," Steidel said. "It's important to town character to have City Hall at the center."

Benefield also fears moving City Hall to South Wind had the possibility of being "an uneconomic decision made just because we happen to own the land."

Steidel is asking the architecture firm to study a third option — placing the police station at South Wind. Critical supplies and services could be stored and conducted while keeping City Hall accessible in town.

"Having police up there fits better for what we purchased the 55 acres for," Steidel said.

No decisions will be made until after the City Council receives SRG's price estimates for each scenario. A public comment period will be open in January before city councilors make the final location decision mid-February to meet the May ballot deadline, St. Denis said.

# Gearhart: Property owners will have a second shot at approval on Nov. 7

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"I don't think unless you live out there day to day, you don't see what's going on," Graff said. "The people who live out there live out there for a reason, they like the rural lifestyle. I don't think they want a development plopped down and disrupting their quality of life."

Palmberg Paving Inc., the owner, wants to rezone 498 McCormick Gardens Road in advance of a sale.

The change, from rural agricultural to residential, could deliver 10 parcels on 7.5 buildable acres, about 20 percent of the nearly 30-acre site.

Developers would have different options available to them, said Li Allgood, of Otak, a consultant to the owner. "Some might want to do rentals, others single-family homes, others multifamily homes," she said.

Heidi Palmberg Snidow said she and her family made



Windermere Realty

A lake on the Palmberg property in Gearhart.

a "difficult decision" to market the property after owning it for more than 60 years.

The family will not be part of the development process.

"It's strictly to do a zone change that would have to be reviewed," Snidow said. "We have lived and worked in this community and are really a part of it. We do feel it's important to maintain its charm and culture."

Allgood said she recognizes future development could alter the character of the neighborhood. "We can't deny that won't change," she said. "But it's a great spot, near the commercial services on Highway 101. You can walk to services, you can walk to downtown from the location."

Planning commissioners weighed criteria based on the city's comprehensive plan,

community character and local housing needs.

Letters, staff reports and outside analysis provided information on soil, traffic and housing.

So did residents and commissioners.

Affordability is an issue for Virginia Dideum, the chairwoman of the Planning Commission.

There would be no guarantee the homes would be

"affordable housing," Dideum said. "And what is affordable to me is not affordable to someone else."

McCormick Gardens Road resident Brand Dichter pointed to potential risk in a tsunami or earthquake, including liquefaction.

Current zoning protects the area "much better" than a medium residential zone, Commissioner David Smith said, and will "also protect what little control we have on traffic on Highway 101."

Rebecca Rutledge, who lives on McCormick Gardens Road, said she understands the need for housing, but asked for consideration of poor drainage and flooding on the property.

Jack Zimmerman, a City Council candidate, sought to determine the "extent of contamination" on the property from previous uses.

The state Department of Environmental Quality deemed all lots "safe for residential,"

Allgood said. "There may be contamination, but that level is low enough that it won't affect occupancy."

Dideum also asked for an updated Department of Environmental Quality report — the submitted document is dated 2006. Drainage, she said, "only gets worse."

"Mucky peat," described in a soil report on the site, oozes water all the time, she added. "You cannot build on it," she said.

The property would be "overexcavated" to replace topsoil with new fill, Allgood responded.

"The site is indeed safe for residential development," she said. "The question is the level of development and the types of development."

The Planning Commission unanimously recommended a denial of the rezoning request.

The property owners will have a second shot at approval at the City Council on Nov. 7.

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