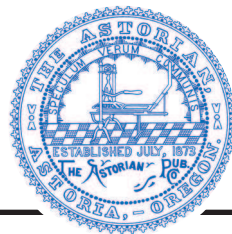


# OPINION



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## SOUTHERN EXPOSURE

# Mapping the Big One in Gearhart

**G**earhart isn't underwater, but new maps swathed in shades of blue delineate degrees of submersion.

Residents are faced with daunting existential choices to determine what level of risk they want to prepare for. It could impact not only high-profile issues like where to place the firehouse or emergency buildings, but where businesses operate and homes are built.

After receiving a state grant from the Department of Land Conservation and Development to prepare for big events, the city is working on ways to improve resiliency in the aftermath of a Cascadia Subduction Zone event.

### Mapping the future

At its February meeting, the Planning Commission considered model language provided by the state's Department of Geology and Mineral Industries to update the comprehensive plan and land use regulations. Revised maps provide guidance

on what to expect, if not the date the tsunami will hit. Historical trends suggest within the next 15 years.



**R.J. MARX**

Goals are to improve readiness and make Gearhart more resilient after a tsunami by establishing standards to be applied in

the review and authorization of land use in areas subject to tsunami hazards, City Planner Carole Connell said at the commission meeting.

The numbers are discouraging, if not numbing: 95 percent of Gearhart will be vulnerable to inundation from a "L" magnitude local tsunami event.

Worse, the entire city would be impacted by an "XXL" event.

That leaves residents and planners alike faced with some huge asterisks when it comes to making decisions, especially with key locations — the Gearhart Elementary School building, firehouse, city park — under discussion for critical safety needs and emergency infrastructure.

### Region faces threat

In the Seaside School District, voters had limited choices where to construct a campus outside the tsunami zone, but with the donation of land in the Southeast Hills and an approval from voters, students can expect firm footing in fall 2020.

Cannon Beach, which is also facing the unsettling projection of its own demise, is holding similar discussions as it looks for a new location — or locations — outside of the tsunami zone for a new City Hall and police station.

Cannon Beach has sites that Gearhart might consider a luxury, out of the tsunami zone at South Wind and near the RV Park, both offering greater protection and potential for future relocation.

Gearhart doesn't have similar options — but that's not a reason to give up on safer, more versatile public safety buildings.

### A coastal effort

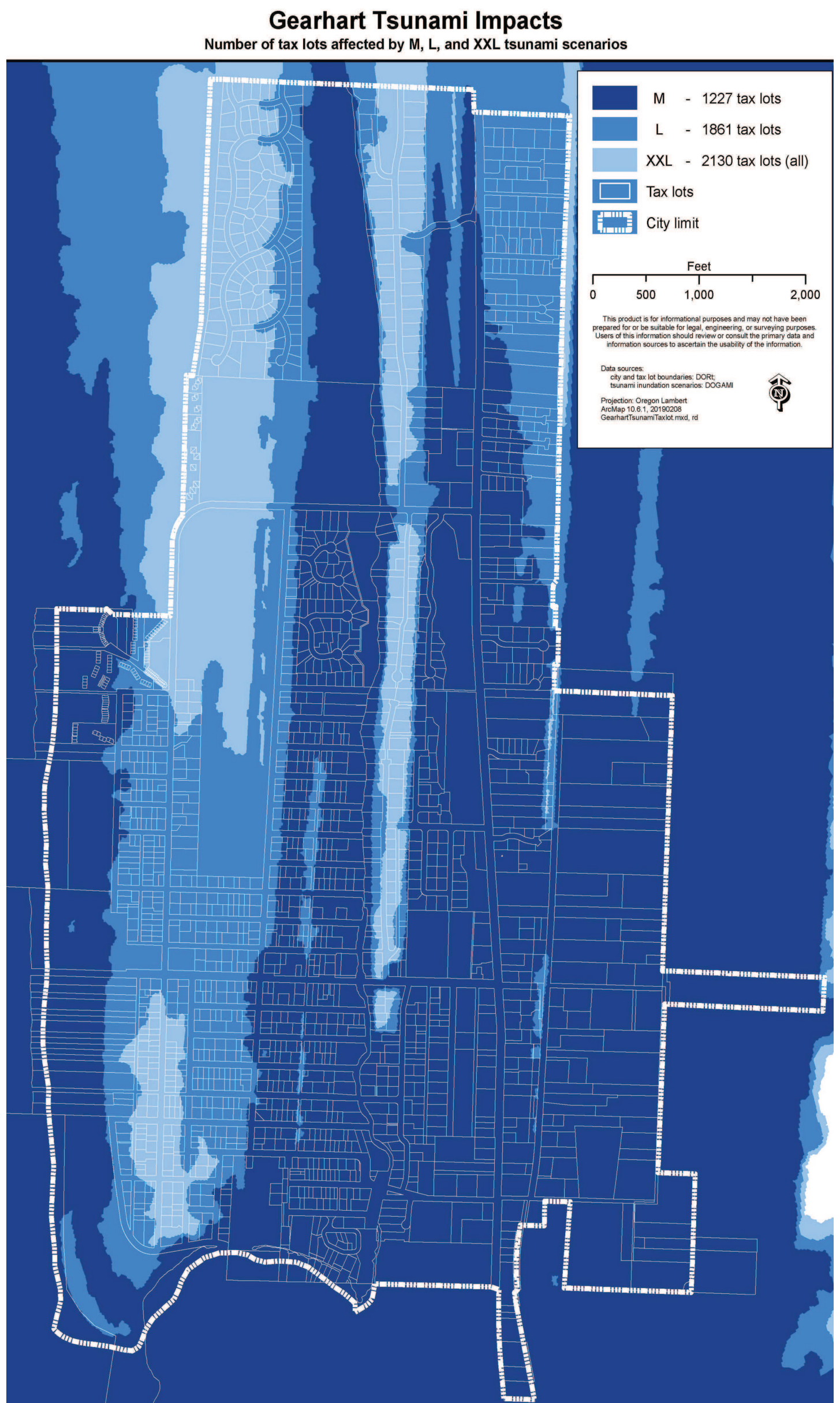
Gearhart received \$14,000 from the state to help address tsunami evacuation routes and needs, and to identify evacuation improvement projects, the Department of Land Conservation and Development's Coastal Shores Specialist Meg Reed said in late February.

Along with Gearhart, the state is collaborating with 10 other coastal jurisdictions through two federal grants provided by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration on this project, the closest communities being Rockaway Beach, Tillamook County and Newport, with participation as far south as North Bend and Port Orford.

These communities expressed interest in addressing their individual tsunami risk, Reed said.

Department of Land Conservation and Development staff provide technical and financial support to the city to prioritize long-term planning related to the Cascadia Subduction Zone earthquake and tsunami event.

By identifying projects now and prioritizing them in a plan, communities will be able to take advantage of grant funds when they arise more readily, such as FEMA hazard mitigation assistance funds.



City of Gearhart

### All of Gearhart could feel the impact of the most severe tsunami.

There are no consequences from the state for not adopting a tsunami hazard overlay zone.

### Exception

Proposed code language includes three main points, Reed said.

New rules could limit certain types of critical and essential facilities — police stations, hospitals, schools — from being built in the tsunami inundation zone, she said.

That zone is up for the city to decide. DOGAMI has five mapped tsunami zones: small, medium, large, extra-large, and extra-extra large based on the variability of the size of the next earthquake. The community can make a decision based on the acceptable level of risk.

The goal is to provide options to provide incentives for development within

the tsunami inundation zone that results in lower risk exposure.

These provisions would not apply to single-family dwellings, existing developments or uses. All of Gearhart's proposed firehouse sites are compromised and vulnerable to varying degrees.

For new, dense development projects, evacuation improvements would be a requirement of the overall development design. A new subdivision could be required to include pedestrian evacuation connections, signage or other improvements to improve "evacuation connectivity" for those in the new development.

"For example, a new hotel with a vertical evacuation structure built into its roof might get a waiver on building height limitations because of its tsunami-resilient design," Reed said.

That doesn't mean residents shouldn't

pick the safest scenario. According to draft language, sites can win approval if "there are no reasonable lower-risk alternative sites available for the proposed use."

"The city is well aware of this as far as the fire station goes," Reed said. "The city needs an exception because there is no other place."

While the standards have yet to be adopted, planning commissioners expect that they will be passed by the city prior to the construction of a proposed fire station.

A hearing will present rewritten code language to the public March 14.

"If we stay on schedule for the grant, it will be adopted by June 30," Connell said.

*R.J. Marx is editor of the Seaside Signal and Cannon Beach Gazette, and covers South County for The Daily Astorian.*

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