

IN BRIEF

Gearhart zeroes in on Highlands firehouse site

GEARHART — City Attorney Peter Watts provided an update on a shift in direction for the city's proposed firehouse and resiliency station.

"It really feels like everything's falling together," Watts said at Wednesday's City Council meeting. "I am working on putting together a written agreement regarding the Cottages property, which is where we will be putting our firehouse."

He said he expects to have the agreement ready for the council's review at their next meeting.

The city is working with planners to bring the 30-acre Cottages at Gearhart subdivision off of Highlands Lane into the city's urban growth boundary. As long as the land remains in Clatsop County, developers are limited to two lots per acre. If they come into the Gearhart urban growth boundary, developers could build on four lots per acre.

The elevation at the Highlands site is between 70 feet to 72 feet, 10 feet higher than the High Point site on North Marion Avenue.

Residents and city officials have sought for years to replace Gearhart's firehouse, which was constructed in 1958 and is considered vulnerable in a Cascadia Subduction Zone earthquake and tsunami.

Gearhart responds to mismatched pipe lawsuit

GEARHART — A lawsuit against the city over a homeowner's mismatched pipes moved ahead in Clatsop County Circuit Court. The city filed a response in late April, stating the complaint fails to "assert ultimate facts sufficient to constitute a claim for relief against the city."

"There's no easy solution to the problem," City Attorney Peter Watts said at Wednesday's City Council meeting.

A complaint filed in Circuit Court claims the city is responsible for mismatched stormwater pipes offset by 5 inches, causing water to escape from the gap in the pipes, which created a sinkhole on Julie Hamilton's Fifer Heights Road property.

Hamilton wants \$50,000 in damages and the city to permanently repair the mismatched pipes. The city continuously foregoes fixing the root of the issue in favor of cheap, temporary measures that do not last, she said in court documents.

Watts said the system was engineered before the property was annexed into the city. The developer was likely responsible, but sold the property and is now dead.

"We are sympathetic to the homeowner," Watts said. "There is no obvious solution, but the good news is that our insurance carrier is handling it, so we don't have to worry about it quite as much."

— *The Astorian*

ON THE RECORD

Strangulation

• Judith Anne Elder, 54, of Seaside, was arraigned Thursday on charges of strangulation, assault in the fourth degree, harassment and attempted assault in the fourth degree.

PUBLIC MEETINGS

TUESDAY

Sunset Empire Park and Recreation District, 5:15 p.m., work session; 7 p.m., budget committee meeting, 1225 Avenue A., Seaside.

Cannon Beach City Council, 6 p.m., special meeting and work session, (electronic meeting).

Lewis & Clark Fire Department Board, 6 p.m., board and budget meeting, main fire station, 34571 U.S. Highway 101 Business.

Seaside Planning Commission, 6 p.m., 989 Broadway.

Warrenton City Commission, 6 p.m., City Hall, 225 S. Main Ave.

Clatsop Community College Board, 6:30 p.m., (electronic meeting).

WEDNESDAY

Clatsop Soil and Water Conservation District Board, 10 a.m., (electronic meeting).

Clatsop County Budget Committee, 1 p.m., (electronic meeting).

Clatsop County Board of Commissioners, 6 p.m., (electronic meeting).

Warrenton School District Budget Committee, 6 p.m., (electronic meeting).

Astoria School District Board, 7 p.m., (electronic meeting).

THURSDAY

Seaside Civic and Convention Center Commission, 5 p.m., 415 First Ave.

Warrenton Planning Commission, 6 p.m., City Hall, 225 S. Main Ave.

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Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

Astoria High School students head to prom after taking photos at the Astoria Column on Saturday evening. Prom was held beneath a large tent at CMH Field.

Longtime Seaside educator to retire

Brown relished her many roles

By KATHERINE LACAZE
For The Astorian

SEASIDE — Since 1990, Sande Brown has filled a variety of roles in the Seaside School District: teacher, assistant principal, principal and, most recently, director for curriculum and the English as a second language program.

"They were all the right place to be at that point in time," she said. "I loved being with students, I loved being principal. ... I love the three communities: Gearhart, Cannon Beach and Seaside."

At different times, she was principal of all three of the school district's elementary schools, including the former Cannon Beach Elementary School and Gearhart Elementary School.

"I've been really lucky to work in areas I'm passionate about," Brown said.

Now, she is preparing to move into full-time retirement. Her resignation, which is effective June 30, was approved by the school



Katherine Lacaze/For The Astorian
Sande Brown is retiring from the Seaside School District.

board in March.

Brown originally retired in 2016 before accepting her part-time position for what she intended to be six years. Her retirement at that time felt different than it does now — less final. When she first retired, she was exhausted, but "not really done with education," she said.

"I thought I could be a part of education and make change in education from a different perspective," Brown said.

One part of her job has been to choose new curriculum. Each year, school districts in Oregon adopt new curricula for a particular content area that they can use for

the next seven years. Eventually, they cycle through each subject.

On top of that, Brown has been responsible for coordinating music, art, English language arts and summer programs, as well as science, technology, engineering and mathematics programs. She has also worked with those involved in English as a second language and efforts to develop partnerships with external agencies.

"I have a really varied position, which is really fun for sure," she said. Yet, the job has "become so much bigger than half time."

That is part of the reason she is leaving a year earlier than planned. It enables the school district to create a full-time assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction to address these growing duties and responsibilities.

"It's a great opportunity for the district and will help us as we work to achieve the goals of the strategic plan," Brown said. "I am happy to move aside so that the someone can be in place full time for next fall."

Additionally, Brown is retiring — for good this time, she adds — because she feels ready to pursue

other activities and focuses.

"I still love doing my job, and it has been an honor to serve the families of the Seaside district, but I also want to do things like spend more time with grandchildren, and take some trips, read some books," she said.

She anticipates community service will also be part of her retirement. She serves on the board of Consejo Hispano, formerly the Lower Columbia Hispanic Council.

Brown feels the school district is in good hands under Superintendent Susan Penrod, and she's enjoyed the collaborative efforts of her fellow educators.

"We all work as one big team to move students forward and support them in their education," she said.

Additionally, several of the projects relating to equity, teaching strategies and educational excellence that Brown helped spearhead are being done with the help of outside consultants who can help a small district move forward. Because of that, she has confidence they will continue to progress under the future administrator.

"Those are things that meet our strategic plan goals," she said.

Orca pod shows 'signs for optimism'

By LYNDA V. MAPES
Seattle Times

She was a mother who happened to be an orca, whose plight resonated around the world as she clung to her dead calf, refusing to let it go.

Mother orca Tahlequah, J35, brought front and center the extinction crisis threatening the southern resident killer whales that frequent Puget Sound. There are only 75 left.

She swam through the Salish Sea for 17 days and more than 1,000 miles in the summer of 2018, in what many interpreted as a journey of grief. It's possible she never let the calf go; when it was last photographed by scientists at the Center for Whale Research, the calf was falling apart.

But having just celebrated Mother's Day, there is some cause for cautious optimism for some of the most famous mothers in the region, on whom the future of this fragile population of orcas depends.

Since Tahlequah lost her calf that lived only one half-hour, she has birthed another, J57, a male born in September 2020 — and still going strong. Two more calves also have been born to J pod, J56, a female born in 2019, and J58, a female born in 2020.

"There are signs for optimism; in general over the last several years J pod is in better condition than in much of the last decade," said John Durban, a professor at Oregon State University and research associate with an orca health monitoring project led by Holly Fearnbach of SR3, a science and research and marine mammal rescue nonprofit.

Using a drone flown more than 100 feet above the whales, they take photographs to document the orcas' body condition. And lately, what they are seeing in J pod generally is improvement.

"There is hope in our images," Durban said. "But it is fragile."

After all, the region was celebrating a baby boom of southern residents in 2015 with five births — but three of those calves and two of the mothers subsequently died.

By the summer of 2018, J50, not even 4 years old, was wasting away, spurring an attempt at an international rescue effort, even as mother orca Tahlequah was clinging to her dead calf.

But since then a birth to L pod, L124 born in May 2019, and L125, born in February 2021, as well as the three J pod calves, have given the region something to root for:

not only the new orca babies, but also their moms.

To a greater degree than in many other animals, including humans, the southern resident orcas put family first. Their society is matriarchal, with the pods led by grandmothers and mothers.

Every baby brings both hope and risk for the population, as the mother undergoes the most costly and risky stage of her life, carrying, birthing and nursing her baby.

Published peer-reviewed research led by Sam Wasser at the Center for Conservation Biology at the University of Washington has found two thirds of southern resident orca pregnancies are lost because of nutritional stress.

The southern residents eat primarily Chinook salmon, which mostly are in decline throughout the orcas' foraging range.

The sharing never stops; orca moms care for their young lifelong.

When adult male orcas lose their mother their own chances at survival are diminished. "He has a higher chance of mortality, even in the prime of life," Durban said. "Some of that may be emotional, but it is also direct for support from their mothers they are dependent on."

Orca society is one of the few animal communities on Earth, in addition to humans, in which mothers persist decades into their post-reproductive years. These grandmother orcas play a crucial role in the pods, with the ecological knowledge they carry

of where to find fish, particularly when times are lean.

L25 is the oldest orca grandmother left. Durban and Fearnbach last photographed her last September. In 2019, she also was photographed by whale watchers all the way down south of San Francisco — where she had taken her family to fish for Chinook.

Born in about 1928, L25 learned the foraging routes of the southern residents from her grandmother — in a time before many of the major dams in the Northwest were built and the Columbia and Lower Snake rivers were still free flowing — and when winter Chinook, unique in the world, were still abundant in California's Sacramento River.

She knew an environment of cleaner, quieter, more abundant waters.

L25, J35 and the other orca grandmothers and mothers still work to feed their extended families, now in a vastly changed world.

Today two of the 10 most endangered animals protected by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration are the southern resident orcas and California winter Chinook. Twin monarchs, in a struggle for survival.

Yet there is hope.

"We are encouraged that in the last two years J pod has in general been in better body condition than over much of the last decade," Durban said. "We hope it continues and these calves can thrive. Every calf counts in a population this small."

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