

Food tax: ‘It’s our decision that we have to make’

Continued from Page A1

have considered passing similar taxes to pay for infrastructure.

‘There’s time’

At a meeting last week, the City Council heard overwhelmingly from people in favor of the tax, who agreed with some city leaders that it was the best way to spread out the costs of infrastructure needs and emergency services fairly between visitors and residents.

The tax was small, they said, and most visitors, coming from places with statewide sales taxes, would be unlikely to notice.

But the food service industry rallied ahead of Wednesday’s special meeting and there were only a few present who spoke in favor of the tax.

Those against it listed a number of concerns. They said their businesses already exist on slim margins and the coronavirus pandemic took a heavy toll. Now, they are struggling to regain their footing and find workers. Some businesses were forced to restrict their hours or their capacity because they can’t secure enough employees. They worried that the tax would affect how people tipped staff.

With supply chain disruptions and workforce issues across a variety of industries, it has also been difficult to stock the products needed to create the goods they sell, added Deanna Hammond, the co-owner of Cannon Beach Bakery.

The pandemic is far from over and who knows how long these other effects will last, she told the City Council. She questioned why the tax needed to be passed now.

“There’s time,” she said, “but this isn’t the time.”

Others worried about how the tax would impact North Coast residents’ ability and interest in dining out in Cannon Beach. The businesses rely on locals during the offseason, but a tax could drive those customers elsewhere.

Some business owners asked the City Council to look into other ways to raise the money. They suggested paid parking or an increase to the local lodging tax.

Settlement: Majority of it will be put toward restoration projects

Continued from Page A1

Fishhawk Lake also agreed to construct a new fish ladder and spillway and repair an underdrain by 2023. The community pledged to develop a water quality plan by 2025.

“The last two years have been exceedingly challenging and we are looking forward to having the dispute with the state behind us so we can continue the progress made toward improving the ecosystem of this beautiful little lake,” Jeanne Scillely, Fishhawk Lake’s board president, said in a statement disclosing the settlement.

Earlier this year, the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality announced a \$439,200 penalty against the community, and while several natural resource agencies were planning to file separate claims, specific amounts were never disclosed. The agencies eventually came together and acted as one in discussions with Fishhawk Lake over the settlement.

According to Lauren Wirtis, a public affairs specialist for the state Department of Environmental Quality, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife’s concerns reflected the bulk of the \$3.7 million settlement.

The reservoir was formed in the 1960s by an

‘My vote is ‘no’

City Manager Bruce St. Denis said that city leaders have looked at several options since the prepared food tax was first discussed two years ago. The tax emerged as the best option in terms of the amount raised and the flexibility the city would have in how it used the money, he and City Councilor Mike Benefield said.

Mayor Sam Steidel supported the tax but wanted it to go to voters, as did City Councilor Robin Rislely. They said it was a huge decision with the potential for major impacts on businesses.

City Councilor Nancy McCarthy, however, was adamant that the decision should be made by the City Council. She believed it was the council’s job to ensure there was adequate funding for city projects and the health and safety needs of residents, visitors and city employees.

The prepared food tax is an extremely important decision, she said Wednesday. “And it’s our decision that we have to make,” she said.

Ogilvie was initially reluctant to put the matter to voters, as well, and he believed enacting the tax was the right decision.

On Wednesday, he also referenced a large organization that he expected would put its weight behind trying to defeat any local food tax proposal on the November ballot. The Oregon Restaurant and Lodging Association released a statement following the City Council’s last meeting saying the proposed tax was “unconscionable” at this time.

Given the association’s likely involvement, “that, to me, does not feel like a vote of the community,” Ogilvie said.

But when it came time to vote, Ogilvie paused for a long moment.

“I’m going to change my vote,” he said finally. He apologized to the people who had supported him in his earlier stance.

But, Ogilvie said, “I’m going to insist that this does go for a vote and that’s all I have to say. My vote is ‘no.’”

earthen dam and is considered state waters. A drainpipe through the dam feeds into Fishhawk Creek and the Nehalem River. The community drained the reservoir in August 2019 to fix a broken drain in the dam.

State biologists estimated that more than 30,000 fish were killed, including more than 20,500 endangered coho salmon.

Fishhawk Lake disputed the claim that the drawdown of the reservoir led to a large loss of fish.

“DEQ’s goal is certainly to protect air, land and water in Oregon,” Wirtis said. “Our goal is to make sure when people do projects like this, it is not about us saying ‘yes’ or us saying ‘no,’ it is about figuring out how we can do projects in ways that protect the environment.”

“So we always want to make sure that groups and agencies feel comfortable reaching out to our staff. We provide technical assistance and if there is any way we can help people be in compliance.”

According to Fishhawk Lake, the majority of the settlement will be put toward restoration projects.

“FLRC is committed to building upon its record of environmental stewardship and will seek to work collaboratively with the state moving forward,” Scillely said.



Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

A young buck grazes his way down a slope in Astoria.

Deer: ‘They are wild animals’

Continued from Page A1

ago. It is — yes — an almost daily record of the comings and goings of deer through her backyard and the grassy city-owned lot she shares with her neighbors on top of a hill.

Sharing antics

The Instagram account started as a way to share the deers’ antics with her husband when long work hours at a new job kept him away from home. The couple had been fascinated by the local urban deer ever since they toured the house they’d eventually buy and encountered a doe on the back deck.

The account draws people from all over. They ask questions or share their own deer anecdotes. For Milbradt, the regular observation and documentation of the backyard deer has been a calming, engaging activity, driving her to ask questions and look at everything a little more intently and purposefully.

At this point, she can recognize a number of individual deer by their appearances and, even more consistently, by their varied personalities and their behavior towards each other.

Milbradt and her husband have given their visitors descriptive names: “Bucky,” “The Stag,” “Betty,” “Mama,” “Spock,” “Heavy Breather.”

The lot behind their house makes for a unique viewing experience. The backyard falls away into a meadow that turns into a narrow strip of forested land.

This wooded area extends in both directions along the

backs of the neighborhood’s houses, an old plat established by the city maybe 100 years ago to act as a natural kind of storm drainage and landslide prevention measure as people built on the slide-prone slopes. It is one of many such city-owned plats around Astoria and a retreat for deer as they dip in and out of neighborhoods.

Milbradt grew up around animals and her father was an occasional hunter. She may not be interested in eating venison anymore, but she is very clear on one point: The deer are not pets. They are wild animals.

“It is key to respect that they are wild animals, despite how domestic they appear,” Milbradt said.

The distinction is not always so obvious to other residents.

A city ordinance forbids the feeding of most wildlife, but police officers fielded multiple complaints in early July about a woman in a South Slope neighborhood who was reportedly feeding the deer near her house.

The woman denied it. She told officers they could take her to court or throw her in jail. She didn’t care.

“Obviously, we’re not taking people to jail for this,” Deputy Police Chief Eric Halverson said. “We’re just trying to navigate the neighborhood complaints. ... We’d prefer to deal with these on the lowest possible level and not drag people to court.”

The woman was given a warning, no citations yet.

On average, Astoria police respond to fewer than 100 deer-related calls most years. Since the start of

2020 and into 2021, police have fielded roughly 110 deer calls to date. Many of the calls have to do with deer hit by cars.

There are usually only a handful of feeding complaints a year. When it comes to wildlife feeding complaints in general, police are more likely to hear about an issue involving raccoons rather than deer.

More common are calls in the early spring and summer from people worried about abandoned fawns.

Halverson knows from watching deer on his own property that fawns are rarely abandoned. A mother deer will leave her baby tucked away in different places sometimes for an entire day. She always seems to know where to find it again.

“They are certainly not abandoned and people shouldn’t be trying to pick them up or remove them,” Halverson said. “They should let them be and nature will do what nature does.”

The worst thing someone can do for a deer is to try to capture it, Milbradt agrees.

‘Privileged to observe that life cycle’

People who interact with Milbradt’s Instagram account sometimes post questions about injured or sick deer or fawns that appear to be abandoned. They care so much; they want to help.

There was a woman who worried about a doe with a broken front leg. Milbradt passed along what hunters had told her: The joke that

all a deer needs is one good leg.

It seems to be true, though. Milbradt has seen deer weather rough injuries and somehow thrive.

But fawns do get hit by cars as they dash across streets. They get injured. They get sick. They are born at the wrong time — when a heat wave hits, maybe. They die.

“It’s kind of a hard lesson to learn, but we are also so privileged to observe that life cycle,” Milbradt said.

Milbradt was resigning herself to the sad side of this life cycle with Liesl. There just didn’t seem to be a fawn alive out there despite the doe’s behavior.

Then, on Wednesday, a lightly spotted fawn suddenly stepped into the meadow from the exact spot where Liesl had focused so much attention. Neck bobbing and tail wagging, it ventured across the lot and joined its mother.

Milbradt noticed a worrying white mark, possibly some kind of wound, on one of its eyes. It was similar to an injury she’d seen on a buck nicknamed “Willy.” He was one of the first deer that got Milbradt interested in researching the animals in more depth.

For Willy, the wound got progressively worse until the buck’s eye was bulging out of its socket. Willy lost weight and energy and finally disappeared for good in June 2020. It worries Milbradt to see a similar mark on Liesl’s fawn.

Still, watching the deer has taught her about resilience. She can’t help but be a little bit optimistic.

Fireworks: Sales are giving people ‘a double message’

Continued from Page A1

Enforcement boils down to a shortage of officers “chasing fireworks,” Ham said. “I’m chasing so many other calls for service that are priority over fireworks that I don’t have enough people. To go out and enforce a kid with a sparkler when I’ve got somebody blowing off rockets that are booming bigger than our sanctioned show — I’d have a hard time writing that ticket.”

“If we saw them, we took them,” Fire Chief Joey Daniels said. “It’s not easy — we can take them from one group and by the time they move, there’s another group there.”

Banning fireworks on the beach could push people elsewhere, Daniels said. “Where are they going to go? I don’t want to encourage people to try to hide from us in the woods or behind people’s houses and lighting them on the porch or in their backyards.”

Earlier this month, residents in Gearhart also urged their city to ban fireworks, citing noise, threats to wildlife and pets and fire danger.

In Cannon Beach, which banned all fireworks last

FIREWORKS ARE NOT ALLOWED AT ANY TIME IN NATIONAL PARKS AND FORESTS, ON BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT LANDS, ON U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE PROPERTIES, ON ALL OREGON DEPARTMENT OF FORESTRY PROTECTED LANDS, ON STATE BEACHES OR IN STATE PARKS AND CAMPGROUNDS.

September, fines can run to \$5,000. Seaside’s fines are about \$700, Ham said.

Seaside and Cannon Beach are different communities and bring different issues, the police chief said. “It’s taken a few years for them to really get it going to where they’re citing everybody that they come across and spreading that word that it’s not welcome here. Everything’s outlawed.”

Banning fireworks on the beach also relies on the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department and the state fire marshal’s office, Daniels said.

Fireworks are not allowed at any time in national parks and forests, on Bureau of Land Management lands, on

works — ones that don’t fly or explode.

Legal fireworks are sold in Seaside once a year, before the July Fourth holiday. Those sales are giving people “a double message,” City Councilor Tita Montero said.

Seeing fireworks for sale, visitors may assume they are legal on the beach.

The idea of drones and lasers may be very expensive as an upfront cost, but over time it is less expensive than \$40,000 a year on fireworks, Montero said. “Also it’s much more ecological, it’s an opportunity for us to have multiple occasions of light shows in our sky,” she said.

She asked city councilors to form a committee to look into a ban on fireworks and fireworks sales.

A laser or drone display could give Seaside an opportunity “to do the right thing for the right reasons,” Montero said.

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