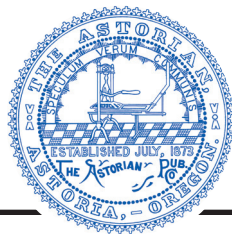


OPINION



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editor@dailyastorian.com

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KARI BORGEN
Publisher

DERRICK DePLEDGE
Editor

SHANNON ARLINT
Circulation Manager

JOHN D. BRUIJN
Production Manager

CARL EARL
Systems Manager

OUR VIEW

Our choices for ballot measures

A new food tax in Cannon Beach and a bond measure for schools in Knappa are on the November ballot.

With all ballot questions that require consumers or residents to pay more out of pocket, the burden rests with the local government to justify the reasons.

We look at whether the government functions effectively, whether there is a demonstrated need and whether the objective is worth the extra cost to taxpayers.

'No' on Cannon Beach food tax

In Cannon Beach, the City Council has asked voters to consider a 5% tax on prepared food sold at restaurants and other venues.

A city consultant projected that most of the \$1.7 million in annual revenue generated from Measure 4-210 would come from visitors. The money would be used by the Cannon Beach Rural Fire Protection District for emergency response and to help finance a new City Hall and other city infrastructure.

Fire Chief Marc Reckmann has made a compelling case over the past few years that a significant share of emergency response calls are tied to visitors. In 2020, recognizing the stress being placed on the fire district, we supported a five-year local option tax to pay for a second commanding officer, building repairs and equipment replacement.

We would be inclined to support a food tax if there was a clear, bright line directing the revenue to the fire district for emergency response.

But there is not.

The City Council chose to muddy the question by bringing in a new City Hall and other city infrastructure.

Cannon Beach probably needs a new City Hall. The city should spell out the cost and the pluses and minuses and ask voters for a bond measure to finance the project. Property taxes are a more suitable way to pay for this type of city infrastructure than a sales tax. Gearhart is going through this pro-



Many restaurant owners have opposed a food tax in Cannon Beach.

Lydia Ely/The Astorian

cess to finance a new firehouse.

We also think the City Council fumbled the rollout of the food tax. In July, the council voted 3 to 2 to impose the new tax by city ordinance. A week later, City Councilor Brandon Ogilvie switched his vote, sending the question to voters instead.

This indecision sent a message that the idea was not fully cooked.

We believe food and beverage taxes are reasonable steps for cities to take to help offset the local impacts of tourism. Ashland and Yachats have taken this approach. Newport has a tax on the November ballot. We suspect other cities will follow because of the legal constraints on how lodging taxes can be spent beyond tourism promotion.

In Cannon Beach, we think restaurant owners and other opponents have exaggerated the potential impacts of a food tax. The town is among the most popular upscale destinations on the coast. Anyone who can afford to go out or visit is not going to stop because they

have to pay a few dollars more for meals.

But we do hear the anxiety about the timing. We are just emerging from the worst stretch of the coronavirus pandemic. A labor shortage has complicated our economic recovery. A new tax adds another layer of uncertainty.

The city and the fire district should regroup and return in a year or two with a food tax more closely aligned to emergency response.

In the meantime, vote "no."

'Yes' on Knappa school bond

In Knappa, the school district has recommended a \$14 million bond measure to help finance a range of school improvements. If Measure 4-212 is approved by voters, the school district would also be able to tap a \$4 million state grant, expanding the outlay to \$18 million.

The average bond rate for property owners is estimated at \$2.20 per \$1,000 of assessed value. The bonds would mature in 25 years.

We are mindful about adding to the property tax burden, particularly in rural areas. But the rate would be 3 cents less than the bonds used to help improve the high school that were paid off in June.

This is a sensible investment.

The bond money would help the school district attack critical repair and maintenance issues. Many of the improvements would be targeted toward middle school students. The district hopes to replace old portable classrooms and create a science lab and learning hub. A new gym is planned at Hilda Lahti Elementary School. There could be space for the new preschool program.

A citizen committee would review the spending.

Over the past several years, voters have wisely chosen to approve bond measures for school improvements in Astoria, Warrenton and Seaside. Knappa schools should not be left behind.

Vote "yes."

SOUTHERN EXPOSURE

Gearhart seeks post office independence

GEARHART — Confusion between addresses in Seaside and Gearhart is driving an attempt to bring a new ZIP code to Gearhart. Gearhart residents hope to persuade the U.S. Postal Service to issue a new ZIP code to the city in order to prevent delivery mix-ups and delays.

"If I'm ordering online and I give my ZIP code and I say Gearhart, and they, on the other end of the line, they say, 'No, it's Seaside,' and you have to explain the whole thing," City Councilor Reita Fackerell said.

Gearhart postal clerk Karynn Kozij described the situation as "massive confusion."

"Companies send out text messages saying their packages are being held at 97138," Kozij said. "A lot of my customers who are new to the area, not knowing that I have their package here at Gearhart, go to Seaside by mistake."

Not only homeowners, but businesses that rely on property addresses could benefit from the change, including real estate agents and emergency responders.

City Councilor Brent Warren, a proponent of the change, said numbered streets and lettered streets — in Gearhart, they are streets; in Seaside, they are avenues — are especially troublesome.



The Gearhart Post Office on Pacific Way.

"It creates delays in the mail," Warren said. "And obviously, when things are misdirected, they have to be fixed and researched, so that's problematic."

Gearhart will present a resolution to U.S. Rep. Suzanne Bonamici and regional postal officials seeking a new ZIP code and an independent post office.

Gearhart became a contract sta-

tion of Seaside in 1961, when the post office struggled with outdated equipment, crowded facilities, underpaid workers and an ineffective management structure. The decision saved the post office about \$1,700 a year.

The Gearhart Post Office moved in 1995 from a space in the Pacific Way Cafe to its location at 546 Pacific Way. In 2003,

the city attempted to address the ZIP code issue with a request to a coordinator for the regional district.

Many coastal communities with populations considerably smaller than Gearhart have been assigned their own unique ZIP codes, staff wrote in the draft resolution presented to the City Council at the October meeting.

It is possible to request a ZIP code boundary review by writing to the district manager for the region, Bonamici's district representative, Ali Mayeda, wrote Warren. "The boundary review process requires any municipality and community group seeking a ZIP code change to submit the request in writing to the manager of the district, with any rationale and justification," she wrote. "This request can only be made once every 10 years."

Mayeda asked the city to prepare and send a request to the congresswoman's office. The district manager must provide a determination within 60 days, and the Postal Service conducts a formal survey of customers who would be affected.

If a simple majority of respondents support the change, the Postal Service usually grants an approval, she said.

"I can't see the downside to this, so I would ask that we adopt the resolution and get going on it," Warren said.

R.J. Marx is the South County reporter for The Astorian and the editor of the Seaside Signal.



R.J. MARX