

OPINION

theAstorian

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Cannot afford to wait

The citizens of Gearhart will be voting on the future of our Gearhart current fire station. The “no” voters have made their campaign about the cost of \$14.5 million and taxes. If you have been following the correspondence of letters to the paper, or in mailings, it has been shown how minimal the tax impact will really be.

What the “no” voters have not addressed is how the cost to build a new fire station has consistently increased. In just two years, the cost has gone from a \$10.5 million bond, proposed in 2020, to a \$13.5 million bond in 2021.

The \$13 million bond was challenged by the “no” voters and caused the city to miss a ballot deadline. The city won the challenge on all counts. However, due to that challenge, we now are looking at a \$14.5 million bond.

So if not now, when? Every year we delay, we all know what is inevitable. The cost to replace our current fire station, which was built in 1958 by volunteers, of concrete blocks, will only continue to increase.

By the way, in 2006, a \$3.75 million bond to rebuild on the current site failed. Vote “yes” on Measure 4-213.

BETTY SMITH
Gearhart

Time of need

To all good people here, as a Gearhart resident, I speak. The other day was a frightening one for my husband and I. It began with the New York City shootings, where we have family members living and working. They remain safe.

But mid-morning, a dear friend of ours had a major health crisis in his cottage, which we discovered after checking on him. We called 911, and I specifically requested the Gearhart firefighters, who arrived in less than 5 minutes.

They were immediate, competent, professional and precise. Seeing them walk through the door was such a comforting moment, because I knew they could help someone precious to us. It was like the Marines had landed — and you knew they could take care of things.

In our fear and strength, I felt both gratitude for them, along with healthy anger about those here who engage in petty commentary about their future facilities. I’m not interested in a political debate here. I will ignore any, should it be foolishly offered.

But I am here to say how much I value the good women and men who were there in time of need, and came through. Our friend has a long recovery, but they were the crucial link to saving him. Thank you for being our lifeline.

DELORES and RANDALL SULLIVAN
Gearhart

Valued

Humans excel in environments where they receive support and appreciation. The police and fire personnel work very hard to protect our city of Gearhart.

I would ask our citizens to show their gratitude by voting for the new fire and police station bond. We need to let them know they are valued.

SHARON KLOEPFER
Gearhart

Wholeheartedly

Wholeheartedly support Measure 4-213, and want to encourage others to join me with a “yes” vote on May 17.

In 2020, we hired a chimney cleaning and inspection at our home on N. Cottage Avenue in Gearhart. We were shocked and horrified when chimney inspector revealed we had been living with a fire hazard, and our chimney was in need of a full interior rebuild. Each time we lit a fire we were in danger.

Our box rebuild was scheduled for a future date into 2022. Six months later, we were awakened in the night by flashing emergency lights responding nearby. An accidental house fire was fully underway, with flames moving dangerously along the shake roof ridge line.

Were it not for the rapid response of the Gearhart Volunteer Fire Department, there surely would have been



expanded damage, loss and tragedy. Their execution was nothing short of heroic.

It is inexcusable that we relegate our volunteer firefighters to the unsafe, unhealthy and inadequate facility that they currently operate in. I find it appalling that the worthiness of providing an adequate and well-equipped facility for our firefighters and police is being questioned.

As citizens, we should proudly support providing a high quality facility for our local fire and police departments to work in and provide essential public safety to all our citizens.

How can this type of provision be possible without the support and contribution of everyone they serve?

MAXINE JOHNSON
Gearhart

Ready to act

I have been reading many good and heartfelt letters to your newspaper regarding the need (or not) of the proposed fire station for Gearhart. I would like to write this one from a different perspective.

Responding to a current critical event is not the only reason to vote “yes” for this station. As one of the original members of the Gearhart Community Emergency Response Team, I studied, trained and remain ready to act in case of an emergency, whether it be some kind of weather event, a tsunami or any other local emergency of any size or complexity.

We need ongoing training with professional trainers, many of whom are volunteer firefighters or locally hired staff of the Gearhart Volunteer Fire Department.

As many of us are also ham radio operators, we are available to facilitate communications when all else fails, and practice regularly with our local fire department, county officials and other volunteer ham radio operators.

The lack of space, amenities and other conditions of the current fire station for training purposes hampers our ability to be prepared and resilient in the case of an emergency.

When an emergency situation occurs, that is no time to be wishing that your CERT is not trained and available to assist the firefighters and the residents of our town. Please vote “yes” for the fire station bond measure.

PAT WOLLNER
Gearhart

Ironic

I find it ironic that many of the vocal minority opposed to approving Measure 4-213 are among our community’s most vulnerable citizens.

Will it take the voters of Gearhart having to place a 911 call to acknowledge the necessity of supporting the ballot measure? I hope not, because I have had to call 911 for both family and strangers. If you haven’t had to make that call, it doesn’t mean it won’t ever happen.

When the world is crumbling in

front of you, and you have the support of our first responders arriving, the relief and gratitude is overwhelming. The professionalism, dedication and support they bring to our community is to be commended.

Look in the mirror — we are all vulnerable. I know firsthand how quickly lives can be impacted in an emergency. Car accidents, heart attacks, strokes, suicide attempts, drug overdose, vehicle vs. pedestrian, falls, on-the-job accidents, drowning, gas leaks, burglar alarms, car theft.

Who do you call? Nine-one-one. Who are our first responders? The Gearhart Volunteer Fire Department and Gearhart Police Department. They do not have the facilities to do their jobs effectively and safely. Only you, the voter, have the power to empower them!

Our first responders are always there for us, whether you know it, or not. Our community should support our first responders in providing them with a safe, well equipped, fire and police station our community can be proud of. I urge you, be there for them. Support our firemen and police by voting “yes.”

SHEILA NOLAN
Gearhart

Plan well

The evidence of growth is all around us these days. An empty cul-de-sac close to me, long unbuilt on, no longer hosts the elk herd’s overnight stays. Instead, it’s growing new houses!

I miss seeing the Gearhart volunteer firefighters practicing drills there on an evening. My gosh, they work hard! I am very proud of our group of firefighters. They deserve the best support we can give them. They earn it every day with their commitment to their mission and to the continuing education that they need to do it well.

The current firehouse was built 64 years ago, in 1958, and I don’t think anyone seriously argues that it is adequate today. Sixty-four years is a long time; our new facility for fire and police will also need to serve for many years.

Decisions we make now will reverberate for decades. I find it difficult to imagine what Gearhart will be like in the year 2072, 50 years from now, but I hope right now that we plan well and optimistically.

The investment in our town that we decide to make now will provide benefits throughout the lifetime of the facility. And history suggests that lifetime may be quite long! Let’s make the best investment we can in the future of Gearhart. Please vote “yes” on Measure 4-213.

JANET ELLIOTT
Gearhart

Absolutely essential

Emergency alert! I was in the military for 20 years, became chief of security in the city of Rochester, New York, Police Department, and was coordinator for Monroe County, New York, Emergency Management for 22 years.

My entire 42-year professional experience has been in law enforcement and emergency management. My firsthand experience confirms a resilient facility with functional communication systems, and other critical equipment, is absolutely essential in any emergency.

It does not matter if the emergency is fire, airplane crash, hurricane, earthquake, terrorism, war, tsunami or pandemic. Without the right tools and equipment, even the most dedicated first responder will be unable to do his or her job.

Gearhart is going to spend millions on a new facility. Shouldn’t it be in the safest location possible? We understand the desire to continue the tradition of a Fourth of July parade and hot dogs downtown, but neither of those require a police and fire station downtown.

I hear a few people saying the federal government and military will come and save us when disaster strikes. Yes, they will come, but not immediately. The military will likely have other primary missions, and may only turn their attention to Gearhart after that mission is completed.

Our community needs to be prepared to function for weeks on its own, and be able to communicate with the outside world. Without the right facility and equipment, this can’t happen.

Support the necessary infrastructure to keep the citizens and first responders safe. Vote “yes” on Measure 4-213.

SCOTT CALLAHAN
Gearhart

Viable and sensible

Gearhart Ordinance 924, the tsunami overlay zone ordinance, was signed into city law in August 2019. It prohibits building critical infrastructure, such as fire and police stations, schools and hospitals, in the inundation zone as long as there is an option available that is a safer, better location. That safer, better location is at Highlands Lane.

Holding on to hope of building a new firehouse at the current location does nothing but work at delaying an inevitable process. And that process is building at Highlands Lane.

Delays only lead to increased costs, as evidenced by the lawsuit brought against the city last year, challenging the wording of the bond at that time. The judge dismissed each point challenged. That lawsuit cost all of us in increased costs due to time lost. What a blow this senseless lawsuit has been to taxpayers!

Let’s stay focused on building a modern new fire and police station at the viable and sensible Highlands site. Let’s also consider how the existing site can be utilized to create a more vibrant downtown.

We can have the best of both worlds. Downtown activity, but a resilient police and fire station that can help us get back on our feet when disaster hits. Please join me in voting “yes” for Measure 4-213.

JEANNE MARK
Gearhart

Need to respond

While I have all due respect for Preston Devereaux and the years he volunteered with the Gearhart Volunteer Fire Department and the months he served as chief, I need to respond to his April 23 letter in The Astorian.

In 2006, opponents claimed the proposed \$3.75 million bond measure for a fire station and City Hall had too many bells and whistles and was unnecessary. The bond failed.

Almost five years ago, the city proposed a station at the park, which included extending it into the dunes to make it bigger. Opposition caused the proposal to fail.

The city tried to keep it close to town at Marion and 13th, the High Point location. After months of due diligence, opposition worked behind the scenes and the owners decided not to sell.

The new owners of the Highlands Lane property offered to transfer ownership of 5 acres to the city for a new fire and police station at a 65-foot elevation. The Highlands location protects the equipment necessary to begin recovery. A tsunami will restrict responsiveness until water levels recede. Once volunteers have taken care of their families, they will proceed to the station to help our community.

The current location on Pacific Way is not large enough for a new station and Ordinance 924 doesn’t allow it. The fire department responds to significantly more calls and has higher training and regulatory requirements. The fire department of 2022 is not the same as the fire department of the 1990s.

Now is the time! Vote “yes” on Measure 4-213.

RANDALL C. COMO
Assistant chief, Gearhart Volunteer Fire Department

LETTERS WELCOME

Letters should be exclusive to The Astorian. Letters should be fewer than 250 words and must include the writer’s name, address and phone number. You will be contacted to confirm authorship. All letters are subject to editing for space, grammar and factual accuracy. Only two letters per writer are allowed each month. Letters written in response

to other letter writers should address the issue at hand and should refer to the headline and date the letter was published. Discourse should be civil. Send via email to editor@dailyastorian.com, online at bit.ly/astorianletters, in person at 949 Exchange St. in Astoria or mail to Letters to the Editor, P.O. Box 210, Astoria, OR., 97103.