

SEASIDE

School district renews focus on Broadway Field

Under orders to improve equity

By KATHERINE LACAZE
For The Astorian

SEASIDE — After a survey and geological testing, the Seaside School District Board is moving away from Wahanna Field as the potential location for a new softball complex and instead focusing on Broadway Field.

“Wahanna Field doesn’t provide a good development location for this facility,” consultant Brian Hardebeck, of Day CPM Services, told the school board during a meeting last week.

The new or upgraded facility must meet requirements outlined in a resolution with the U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights to provide more equity between girls and boys sports facilities. The school district has until June 2023 to complete the project.

In February, the school board voted to focus on Wahanna as the top candidate for the new facility, while not ruling out three other viable options. This sparked further investigation into the site, which included a regular survey, geologic testing and a wetlands delineation study.

“We were a little disappointed in the results we received, primarily from the geologic testing,” Hardebeck said. “Findings there were not conducive to recommendation of further development on that property.”

The soil doesn’t have enough lateral resistivity to handle foundation loading for construction, with a rock layer that wouldn’t be stable over the short term, “let alone the long term,” he said.

“The geotechnical concerns are pretty crucial,” added Josh Modin, with ZCS Engineering. Additionally, the wetlands study revealed wetlands in anticipated areas and encroaching on the playing field itself, which could create unsafe surfaces for the softball players, he said.

Upon receiving these results, the team tentatively moved on to the second option: Broadway Field. They met with leadership from the city’s planning department and Sunset Empire Park and Recreation District in early April.

“Everyone is onboard to try to make this a nice complex as an option for the community and for the school district,” Hardebeck said.

The main concern with

this site is whether a field of adequate size will fit — a determination that can be made quickly.

“There is a range of dimensions allowed as per (the Oregon School Activities Association),” Modin said, adding the field outlined in the rough diagram presented at the meeting portrayed the maximum size. “That’s part of why doing another test-fit run is so important: to make sure we can fit this on this site. We’re pretty confident we can if we utilize that range, not just the maximum.”

Broadway Field presents several advantages, including an established parking lot; existing infrastructure for water, power and other utilities; and a concession stand and bathing cages. The site also doesn’t pose wetlands or geological concerns.

“There are a few less hoops to jump through,” Modin said.

Board member Chris Corder voiced concerns about rushing the process and questioned the viability of Broadway Field because of concerns about the complex fitting there.

“I’d love for it to be at Broadway, because it’s amazing,” he said. “But also, are we going to shove something into a spot that’s not going to be a great facility for years and years and years to come?”

Several factors are influencing the softball complex project, including budget and timeline.

“We’re running out of time and options,” school board member Mark Truax said.

Another site on the table is the city’s property by the old Seaside High School, referred to as the North 40. The school district would have to negotiate a new intergovernmental agreement with the city to develop on the property.

Additionally, they would need to add a storm drainage system and build a new parking lot, bathrooms, concessions, bathing cages and other infrastructure. Giving a rough estimate, Modin projected the North 40 could be about \$1 million more to develop than Broadway Field, making the latter option the “most economical and the most desired from the community.”

“We’re trying to fix this the right way, so that you’ve got a facility that will last you,” he said.

At the meeting, the board approved for the consulting team to move forward with investigatory work on Broadway Field and potentially the North 40, with Broadway being the preferred location.

Port: The consent judgment puts an obligation on the Port to work toward getting the remediation completed

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“This was quite the process. Obviously there were a lot of parties involved, including Oregon DEQ,” Isom said. “Our hope was this would move forward a little quicker.”

Reaching a solution was one of his first big pushes when he was hired as executive director in 2019, Isom said.

Both Isom and Anna Coates, a project manager from the Department of Environmental Quality who has overseen much of the negotiations, reviews and studies involving the contamination, expressed anticipation about moving toward cleanup.

“It’s very exciting because what they’re going to do next is actually start doing the design,” Coates said. “Up to this point, they’ve been doing investigations and trying to figure out how bad the contamination is and how extensive it is and negotiating between the different parties. Now they’re going to be doing work plans to clean it up and that’s great.”

The consent judgment, which took about two years to get negotiated and approved, puts an obligation on the Port to work toward getting the remediation completed.

With a large obstacle overcome, the Port can look to permitting, acquiring grants and engineering the cleanup plan with long-time environmental consultant, Maul Foster & Alongi, of Vancouver, Washington.

‘Dark cloud’

At the site between Pier 2 and Pier 3, Coates noted that contamination was substantial enough at first to cause harm to people and wildlife.

Soil, sediment and groundwater contamination, as well as the discharging of groundwater into surface water, were all found in slip 2 in initial studies. Intrusion of soil vapor — when vapors come out of the soil and into the air — was also determined to be taking place under the Port’s old office building.

“The worst part of it was the sheen in the surface water,” Coates said. “There’s not much of that left, but that of course is a direct impact to any ... types of smaller animals. The vapor intrusion into the building was (also) fairly significant.”

A number of minor projects were conducted over the years, including pumping out contaminants, the removal of underground storage tanks, the rerouting of the Port’s stormwater system and tactics to catch hydrocarbons leaching into the river. The projects have reduced the overall levels of petroleum in the groundwater and lowered the environmental risk, but the most recent tests concluded that contamination still exists.

In dealing with the contamination and facing the ensuing financial costs, the



Lydia Ely/The Astorian

The Port of Astoria expects permitting for a cleanup plan to take up the next 18 to 24 months.

Port pursued several court cases against former attorneys and insurers regarding insurance policies.

The Port settled with its former environmental law specialist for \$300,000 in 2012, claiming that he made no efforts to find pre-1986 policies that would have provided contamination coverage.

For similar issues, the Port also settled with another former attorney for \$50,000 and several insurance agencies for \$550,000.

Thane Tienson, an environmental attorney who was representing the Port in the matter, died of a heart attack last year.

Tienson’s law partner, David Blount, who also represented the Port, recently retired.

“It feels like this issue of AOC4 has been this dark cloud that has been hanging over the Port for a long time and we knew we had this liability hanging over our heads,” Isom said. “To get to the point where we are getting these things taken care of and we’re moving the organization forward I think is important.”

Next steps

After a number of potential solutions were broached over the course of negotiations, the Port, oil companies and the Department of Environmental Quality eventually agreed upon a broad scheme to tackle the contamination in 2019.

The selected plan will include excavation of the contaminated soil and the installation of a permeable cap and a reactive barrier to prevent groundwater from reaching the surface water. Specifics of the plan still need to be designed.

In 2020, the Port settled with the oil companies for \$2.9 million. The settlement details that McCall will pay the Port \$1.55 million and Exxon \$1.35 million, with the Port defending and indemnifying the oil companies against future claims regarding the cleanup.

While the total cost of the project is not yet set in stone, the Port still expects to shell out a significant amount as monitoring becomes necessary over time.

Isom said the agency would be aggressive in pursuing grants for the project.

The Port, in a partnership with the city, recently adopted a master plan for redevelopment in Uniontown, just down the waterfront from the contamination.

City Councilor Tom Brownson said during a City Council meeting this month that the cleanup was a long time coming and “that’s not only important for the Port, it’s important for Astoria because that’s a piece of property that can be developed and used for something more productive.”

Isom noted that environmental cleanup was the priority for the contaminated area, with or without future development.

In the meantime, Isom expects permitting to take up the next 18 to 24 months, with construction beginning shortly after.

“This is a message that we do take our role as good stewards of the environment seriously ... It further helps to develop the trust within the community that the Port can be relied upon and we’re being responsible managers of this public asset,” Isom said.



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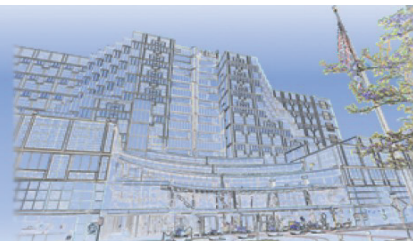
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Volunteer drivers are needed to pick up veterans at their home, take them to their local appointment and bring them home from the appointment. There also are times when a veteran will need to be taken to an appointment in Portland and returned home. Volunteer drivers are reimbursed for the miles they drive.

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