

Dining room gets a makeover at conference center

Board asks for more windows street-side

By Dani Palmer
Cannon Beach Gazette

Thousands of visitors flock to Cannon Beach each year to spiritually recharge and retreat at the Christian Conference Center. Next year, they may be able to do so — at least at mealtime — in a brand new building.

Staff plan to start constructing a new dining hall this fall.

“This is a substantial new building replacing a smaller, old building,” City Planner Mark Barnes said at Sept. 24’s Design Review Board meeting.

A 20,177-square-foot structure will replace the existing one built in 1948. It’s “rotting” and doesn’t meet current codes, Christian Center Executive Director Jeff Carlsen said.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

An artist rendering of the Christian Conference Center’s new dining hall.

The building is also too small for increasing crowds.

“Unfortunately the dining room and kitchen have not been increased to match the times,” Carlsen added.

The current hall was designed for 150 guests with a maximum

capacity of 300. The new one will seat about 425.

The project is an estimated \$3.4 million, but Carlsen said volunteer labor will help cut down costs.

The “first big step” is finalizing engineering plans, he said. Construction will then proceed as money is donated.

“This is a huge project,” Carlsen said. “A lot of detail is involved.”

The new building will feature four guest rooms along with a larger kitchen and dining room. It was designed to “fit in” with the Conference Center’s other buildings, though it’ll introduce more stone into its design, like that around the bell tower.

“One of the things our guests love is what we call the bell tower,” Carlsen said. “We actually have a plan to move that and bring it back into play as we do the landscaping.”

Design Review Board Chairman Mike Morgan said he’d like to see the lawn preserved, but added he understands there is limited land.

Board member Sandi Lundy said the building was designed to be beautiful on the inside without much consideration for what Cannon Beach residents will have to see on the outside. The back of the building facing town will have few windows, “like the back of a restaurant, where deliveries would take place,” Lundy added.

Anything center staff “can do to break up the wall will make a big difference,” Morgan said.

The board approved the design with a request for more windows.

“I think it’s a well-thought-out plan,” board member Todd Rowley said. “I understand your (Lundy’s) concern, but I think with these renditions, it will be nice looking.”

Source of high bacteria readings in local waterways remains elusive

Groups seek to notify the public faster

By Dani Palmer
Cannon Beach Gazette

With bacteria levels in local waterways remaining high, environmental groups are asking Cannon Beach officials to notify the public faster.

The Ecola Creek Watershed Council and Surfrider Foundation offered their assistance during a September work session. They also asked city officials to dig deeper for a cause as data indicates a possible problem with sewage infrastructure.

Cannon Beach has a history of high bacteria test results, especially after rain washes waterways out, but field coordinator for Surfrider’s Blue Water Task Force Ryan Cruse said testers have seen “a constant pattern of high readings” since May, “with some exceptionally high and unsafe readings occurring this summer during dry weather.”

“People need to be warned when the levels are elevated, and infrastructure should be tested to rule out human waste as a source,” Watershed Council President Mike Manzulli said.

The Watershed Council is concerned for the health of all human and pet residents and visitors, he said. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, exposure to fecal bacteria can cause symptoms such as nausea, diarrhea, stomach cramps, chills and fever. Skin rashes may also occur.

The spill

On July 20, an 11,000-gallon sewage spill in Cannon Beach led to cordoning off some of the area.

While Manzulli said not enough was done to notify the public via the city’s website or media outlets, City Manager Brant Kucera said the Public Works Department followed the state’s guidelines “to the letter.”

The Oregon Beach Monitoring Program tests popular beaches in the summer and issues alerts when enterococcus levels are above the state safety threshold in marine waters. Enterococcus is an indicator of potential fecal mat-

ter contamination. July’s spill didn’t reach marine waters, Public Works Director Dan Grassick said, so no advisory was issued.

Councilor Mike Benefield added that the city’s response may not have been “satisfactory to all,” but staff immediately took care of the problem, removing polluted sand and cordoning off the area.

But Manzulli said beach signage could be better. In California, for example, there are signs that clearly state contamination could be hazardous to health. “The Watershed Council would like the city to go above the state requirements and notify the public when the streams and creeks have elevated enterococcus readings,” Manzulli said.

Reports to local media would be “a good way to get the word out,” Manzulli said, along with email or text notifications to those who want to be alerted.

Portland officials report spills over 40 gallons to media outlets and local authorities, according to the city’s Sewer Release Response Plan.

Manzulli said he has seen people of all ages and their pets play in possibly contaminated outfall water, especially at Gower Street and Chisana Creek.

Beach outfalls aren’t the “best place to be playing,” but Grassick said he too has seen it. He said signs at the outfalls provide ample warnings to the public that untreated drainage water may be contaminated with animal waste. The signs advise beach visitors to stay out of the water and to wash carefully should they do so.

Cannon Beach Mayor Sam Steidel agreed that officials should work on better notifying the public. He didn’t discover July’s spill until he encountered Manzulli on a beach walk.

“I always think about it in terms of we have thousands of visitors everyday in the summer,” Grassick said. “Making sure they’re safe is a high priority for us. We don’t take this lightly.”

But staff also don’t want to unnecessarily worry the public, he added.

High readings

The Watershed Council and Surfrider Foundation are concerned about more than the spill. Surfrider recorded six cases of high bacteria readings over the summer, including two over 3,000 organisms per 100 milliliters in August, way above the 158 organisms safety threshold. The latest high reading was recorded on Sept. 9 at 292 organisms per 100 milliliters.

The Oregon Beach Monitoring Program has the sole power to issue them through a partnership with the Department of Environmental Quality, and it didn’t test in Cannon Beach every week.

Only one health advisory was issued this summer, according to officials.

“Surfrider uses a similar analysis method, but since their sample collectors and equipment has not been vetted by DEQ, we are unable to issue advisories from these data,” OBMP Coordinator Tara Chetock said.

However, she added that Surfrider’s data is “a great resource.” The group uses the same testing methods with data often utilized “to inform management decisions at the statewide level” and target OBMP’s limited testing, Cruse said.

“When situations like this arise, OBMP will often resample after a high reading or ask the city to collect samples and issue the appropriate messaging to the public,” Chetock added.

Cannon Beach stopped its own water quality testing program in July because staff didn’t find any flaws in the wastewater system. Grassick said contaminants were determined to be non-human in nature, though a source was never discovered.

Manzulli disagreed. He said the tests staff used to indicate a human presence are inconclusive.

Grassick noted that he is curious what causes high readings in the ocean even when outfall water doesn’t reach the surf, indicating a source unrelated to humans.

He added he would like to discuss health risks to both animals and pets.

Collaboration

“The most frustrating aspect of all this is that the city has told the Watershed Council and general public for years that the infrastructure is fine and the problem is the seagulls, the elk and the random dirty diaper. This summer’s sewage spill shows the opposite,” Manzulli said. “If the city had said, ‘Well it’s the elk, the seagulls and maybe our infrastructure,’ the city would have likely discovered that the spill alarm and pump station run off the same power source and the city could have fixed the prob-

lem years ago. The spill would have been avoided or greatly reduced in size.”

He added Surfrider and the Watershed Council are eager to assist officials in making improvements. There are grants available the groups can help apply for, Manzulli said.

By the end of the work session, Steidel said the high readings were a topic the Public Works Committee should discuss and the City Council asked for an update in six months.

“We want to work with you,” Manzulli told city councilors. “We want to help.”

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