

Higgins, Cadwallader look back on two terms of service

City Council will have two vacant spots

By Lyra Fontaine
Cannon Beach Gazette



Wendy Higgins



Melissa Cadwallader

With a limit of eight continuous years for Cannon Beach councilors, Melissa Cadwallader and Wendy Higgins end their City Council terms in January, leaving two vacant spots on November's ballot.

June 1 is the first day local candidates can declare candidacy for November's general election. Cadwallader and Higgins, both elected in 2008, shared their council experiences and hopes for coming months.

Higgins was Chamber of Commerce president before the business community encouraged her to run for office. As The Ocean Lodge's general manager for 14 years, she has balanced a full-time job with councilor duties.

Cadwallader, now Council President, was appointed to fill

the acreage in 2010 through clever trade-offs.

"It was a very creative way of getting an additional 800 at an affordable price to make sure that we had 1,000 acres that we were in control of around our water source for our city," Cadwallader said. "I'm pleased to have been a part of that team."

Higgins said she is also proud of serving on the council that started the Tourism and Arts Commission and approved a lodging tax increase "to help advertise and promote our community."

Strategic plan

During their last months on council, Cadwallader and Higgins look forward to the strategic plan.

Cadwallader said she hopes the plan will "get some meat on its bones" and become a reality. With citizen surveys out and facilitators interviewing department heads, she said it is "in the process of happening."

"Doing the strategic plan is huge because we've nev-

er done that before," Higgins said. "I think having direction and a road map to pass on to the next incoming councilors will make it a little bit easier."

Higgins also said she hopes that the council will work on "raising up leaders to take our places."

Affordable housing

The affordable workforce housing issue has always been a priority for Higgins. "I know that one won't be resolved by the time I leave, but hopefully it will stay in the queue."

Cadwallader said she still stands by issues she stood for in 2008. This includes "maintaining the uniqueness of Cannon Beach as both a residential and resort community, with resources for the child, the family and the honored citizen."

"I think this is still a major issue," she said. "Since I initially ran for office eight years ago, the scale between community and destination resort I think has shifted more into the destination resort and our community core has become smaller."

Rental rules need some tweaking

Rentals from Page 1A

If a violation is uncovered, the city does not allow the homeowner to rent it out until the problem is corrected, City Manager Kucera said. "Almost all of them want to correct them and get back into business."

However, the current contracted building official is only able to inspect homes for 10 hours per week.

Kucera said he hopes to hire a building official, who would also enforce code, by July 1. Staff proposed that the employee work 24 hours a week and three times a week.

The city budget for the next fiscal year could include the addition of a building official.

"It's easy to jump the conclusion that there's the source of the affordable housing problem," Barnes said of the city's short-term rentals. "I don't know if that's necessarily true because I don't know if all 194 of those dwelling units would convert to long term rentals or permanent occupancy."

However, the 10 percent of short-term rentals "has an effect" on housing availability, Barnes said. "That's a not insignificant fraction of our homes that are in this program now."

Several councilors said that short-term rentals make up at least 20 percent of the city's number of second homes.

Kucera said there are more

housing units than households, which are about 760, suggesting that a large portion of housing units, about 60 percent, are second homes or not currently occupied by the resident.

New limits?

Renting homes to vacationers can be more lucrative than renting them out long-term, Councilor Mike Benefield said, and the owner retains access to the home.

"With the marketing that we've done for Cannon Beach, rents for a weekend are greater than a person who lives here can afford for a month," Benefield said. "So if you rent two weekends twice

a month, you'll never make it available for residents. I think that's a problem."

He added, "I don't know how we can overcome that."

Mayor Sam Steidel said that 10 percent of the city's housing stock is a "good number" of short-term rentals for the city.

Councilor George Vetter said attempts to offset people using homes as short-term rentals are "fighting against the wind."

"I don't think that we can expect to turn this town into a residential community where we don't have people coming here for second homes," Vetter said. "It's the nature of where we live."

Sites avoid rules

Homeowners who rent out their home for periods of less than 30 days must be in the short-term rental program, which consists of three sub-programs.

Transient rentals, limited to 92 permits, include about 58 transient rentals grandfathered into the program, and 26 lottery transient rentals that expire after five years. The lottery transient rental sub-program is growing, Barnes said, with 150 names on the list.

The program also includes about 110 vacation home rentals that have a 14-day limit. Permits are not capped for these rentals.

However, Barnes said people not in the permit program are renting out their homes on websites and are likely not paying room taxes. "I don't know if that's a big number but the point is I really don't know."

Enforcing short-term rental regulations on sites like Airbnb can be difficult.

It's also challenging to monitor noise, parking and other issues that stem from short-term renters in second homes, several councilors said.

The city's short-term rental code states that the purpose of regulations are "to protect the character of the city's residential neighborhoods" and to make sure short-term rentals "will be compatible with surrounding residential areas and will not materially alter the neighborhoods in which they are located."

Barnes recalled a Design Review Board meeting last year when a resident said she was the only homeowner on her block who lived there full-time.

Housing impact

The City Council also discussed the lack of affordable housing available in Cannon Beach, and possibly placing further limits on short-term rentals.

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