

Affordable housing, trust are key concerns

By Lyra Fontaine
Cannon Beach Gazette

The “community livability report” provides opinions of a representative sample of 296 Cannon Beach residents and has a 4 percent margin of error. The city was rated high on community characteristics, city services and opportunities to volunteer, and low on education opportunities, employment opportunities and health services.

The city developing a special event facility was not important for 35 percent of respondents and somewhat important for 33 percent.

The survey can help the city know what to spend money and time on, Councilor Mike Benefield said. “Affordable housing stood out,” Councilor Melissa Cadwallader said. “This isn’t seen as a good community for fam-



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The city heard concerns about safety.

ilies. That tells me the type of housing we need is not just one-bedroom and studio, but family-type affordable housing.”

Confidence in city government was good or excellent for 35 percent of respondents.

“We need to build our trust with the community,” Councilor Wendy Higgins said. “That’s the biggest thing that hit me.”

Recent public hearings caused a “huge public outcry,” Benefield said. The low rating

also followed some residents expressing dissatisfaction with the idea of a strategic plan and survey, Cadwallader said.

Mayor Sam Steidel was among them. He said the citizen survey was “not the tool I wanted to use,” adding that responses are “skewed” since they followed contentious council decisions.

Retaining the city’s culture was important to all councilors and staff interviewed.

Steidel said he would like to see a conversation with second homeowners, who mostly did not respond to the survey.

“I wasn’t always supportive at first, but I know we’re going to see major results because of this,” Higgins said after priorities were set.

Grassick said the planning sessions help him understand council priorities, which he can now implement and communicate to his staff.

Planning sessions hope to meet citizen concerns

Survey from Page 1A

About 75 percent of survey respondents indicated it was essential or every important that the city assist with the development of additional affordable housing.

Most people who work in Cannon Beach, including service industry workers and city employees, live outside the city because they cannot afford it, councilors and staff said. Many said the absence of affordable housing and a school were interwoven issues.

Some recent overnight campers have been employees of Cannon Beach businesses who were unable to find a place in town to live, Police Chief Jason Schermerhorn said.

“When people live in town, they take pride in their community and get involved,” he added.

Haystack Rock Awareness Program employees are renting rooms or unable to find housing, program coordinator Melissa Keyser said, adding that affordable housing would increase workplace stability.

Emergency management

With a looming earthquake and tsunami, city staff and coun-

cilors discussed the non-seismically secure water plant, mass care and needing a long-term recovery plan.

The group said they want citizens to be informed, safe, confident and healthy. The city should have enough supplies to take care of the population plus 25 percent more, Kucera said.

The city will aim for a mass care site — an open and accessible area without infrastructure — at South Wind by the end of 2018.

The city also set goals of creating a water purification system by the end of 2017, hiring an emergency management program manager by mid-2017 and acquiring better emergency communications assets by 2018. By 2019, the city aims to have 100 emergency-certified residents, recruit more Medical Reserve Corps members and protect computer information in an off-site facility. In five years, the city hopes to have a long-term recovery plan.

Infrastructure planning

The city’s five-year goals include saving \$2 million in reserve to relocate “essential services” to South Wind, and for ratepayers to support utility operations, maintenance and capital improvements,

since the city’s general fund subsidizes utility funds.

Public Works Director Dan Grassick said it would take years for the city to be able to move critical services, like police, to South Wind, due to the expense of adding roads and other infrastructure.

The city will aim to create 50 parking spaces by 2017, have water and wastewater capital improvements by 2017 and adopt a transportation system plan by 2018.

Councilors said they have heard about or experienced lack of parking for years in downtown and local streets.

The city will make a final decision on whether to purchase the elementary school site by the end of 2016.

The group debated the purchase, which is included the upcoming year’s budget, although there is no consensus on how it will be used. The site is currently undergoing an environmental study.

Some said the city’s need to purchase the school seemed less urgent than other priorities discussed, while others pointed out that the site could be a valuable asset to the city. The former school has “sentiment attached to it,” Steidel said, recalling how the choir used to sing inside it.

Relationship with community

Cannon Beach was rated a good or excellent place to live by 87 percent of sample residents, but only 35 percent of respondents positively rated their confidence in city government.

Goals set include improving the “confidence in local government” rating to 45 percent and improving “overall direction” by 10 percent within two years.

“Natural environment” and “community engagement” are priorities for the community within the next two years, residents responded.

The room discussed how to further protect and educate people on the environment, such as with eco-tourism.

The city’s administrative goals included having a state-compliant public records retention program by 2017, adopting financial policy and update the employee handbook by 2017, and hiring a human resources employee.

Other goals discussed were regular committee member trainings, volunteer appreciation, more regional government meetings and mentoring people interested in running for council.

Capital projects, utility increases, potential school purchase passed

Budget from Page 1A

Elementary school purchase

The budget includes a \$665,000 loan for the potential purchase and remediation of the former Cannon Beach elementary school site.

The site is currently undergoing a phase one environmental assessment to determine whether there is contamination or other risks, Kucera said. The decision on whether to purchase the school will be discussed within the following months.

The proposed \$1.7 million for the Fir Street pedestrian bridge project was removed because the city did not receive the state grant needed to build the bridge. However, the budget included \$150,000 to rehabilitate the Fir Street vehicle bridge by fall.

The committee removed the proposed \$100,000 for the Second Street Plaza project.

Utility increases

The committee approved increases on monthly utility

charges: 7 percent for water, 5 percent for wastewater and 3 percent for storm drain.

The committee also approved utility rate studies for water, wastewater and storm drain to ensure the enterprise funds become self-supporting.

The general fund currently subsidizes enterprise funds, which include utilities. Cannon Beach water rates are 30 to 60 percent of those in Astoria, Warrenton and Seaside, Kucera said.

The committee approved \$125,000 for the City Hall remodel phase one, \$135,000 for water plans and \$250,000 for the second phase of the city’s RV park infrastructure project.

The budget also included computer equipment and server upgrades, a new police four-wheel drive vehicle and a new roof for the Public Works building.

Funds for tourism

The committee approved more than \$426,000 of transient room tax distribution for the Chamber of Commerce.

In the approved budget,

more money was put into ending fund balances, funds for the next fiscal year that may be spent the current fiscal year during an emergency, than in contingency, which allows more flexibility in when

it can be spent.

It is preferable for the city to “go through hoops” to spend money, some budget committee members said at the May 18 meeting. The fiscal year begins July 1.

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