

Falling into place: Logging makes way for Seaside's new schools

By Brenna Visser
Cannon Beach Gazette

The new Seaside School District campus sits 200 to 300 feet above sea level with a panoramic view of the Pacific Ocean.

The breathtaking beauty is not only a reminder of life on the coast, but the earthquake and tsunami danger that prompted the move to higher ground. "Yes, this view is nice, but the nicest thing about this is our schools not being wiped out by a big wave," Seaside School District Superintendent Sheila Roley said. "We needed new schools, but safety for all kids was the catalyst."

Forty-two acres of the city's largely wooded backdrop have been logged and cleared so far to make way for the schools. On a tour through a maze of logging roads Thursday, June 29, to check progress, school board members saw an undefined field of

stumps, interrupted only by loggers and equipment loading the last of the timber.

The property is part of an 80-acre site given to the school district by Weyerhaeuser, which will sell the timber to local distributors.

"It's simply breathtaking," school board member Lori Lum said.

In the zone

In 1999, the state published earthquake hazard maps showing Cannon Beach and Gearhart elementary schools, Broadway Middle School and Seaside High School would all be severely damaged in a major earthquake and tsunami. These schools were also identified as having a high potential for collapse.

In November, Seaside voters passed a \$99.7 million bond to solve the problem.

The bond came three years after a failed \$128.8 million plan. The scaled-back proposal eliminated an auditorium,



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The project to move Seaside schools to higher ground has been in the works for nearly three decades.

covered bleachers, long-term emergency shelters and a varsity playing field.

Advocates of the new proposal, including the Vote Yes For Our Local Schools

group, presented a sustained campaign to promote the bond, which they said was necessary, not only for the safety of the students, but also because of the condition of the schools. Gearhart Elementary School, Broadway Middle School and Seaside High School were built with expected lifespans of 45 to 50 years. Each has been used beyond that span.

With Weyerhaeuser's land gift of 80 acres in the East Hills, along with favorable interest rates and a likelihood of limited matching funds from the state, proponents said "this was the best time" to pass the bond.

Making it stable

Only about 8 more acres of school district-owned property are left to be logged, which will eliminate the wooded barrier between Seaside Heights Elementary and the rest of the campus property. The rest of the unlogged property will

serve as buffers for surrounding streams, Seaside School District Superintendent Emeritus Doug Dougherty said.

Now that the trees have been cleared, the district has a clearer picture of what the land actually looks like and can proceed with more detailed architectural designs. Over the summer, soil surveys will be conducted to illuminate smaller slopes and contours of the hillside, which will help guide building stabilization techniques, Dougherty said.

While building into a hillside will be a challenge, Dougherty said the inclinometer — an 80-foot underground sensor that monitors slide activity — showed no evidence of landslides in this section of the hillside in four years.

"I'm excited for each stage of this process. I've been working on this for 25 years, and it is exciting to see this finally happening," Dougherty said.

Academy hopes to gain occupancy permit by August deadline

Academy from Page 1A

Kucera or interim City Manager Jason Schermerhorn said there were any discussions to consider removing the building.

This still leaves the academy about a month to address a series of mold, compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act and fire code problems to meet Seaside School District's Aug. 15 deadline to gain an occupancy permit.

Significant issues

The city-commissioned report done by Douglas Dick from On the Level Inspection Concepts Inc. found significant issues to address, including mold permeating the south wall, certain ramps and bathrooms that aren't ADA compliant and the lack of a fire alarm system. A cost estimate done by O'Brien & Company Inc. totaled more than \$250,000, based on Dick's list of suggested renovations to make the school safe.

In his report, Dick attributed many of the code issues to the fact the building was built by volunteers in 1987.

O'Brien & Company Inc.'s estimate differs drastically



SUBMITTED PHOTO

The former Cannon Beach Preschool and Children's Center needs significant repairs to become the new home to the Cannon Beach Academy.

from a \$75,000 bid given by Coaster Construction to the academy. Barnes said the difference lies in the fact the city asked Dick to evaluate the property in a short amount of time and to consider all the "worst case scenarios" that renovating this building could bring. Another factor that drives down cost is the fact much of the labor will be volunteered by community members, Kucera said.

Because of the tight deadline needs of the academy, the city wanted an assessment of the property earlier than the

city's new building official Alton Butler could start work in mid-June, Barnes said.

"Since the city is acting as the landlord with this property, we asked for a worst-case scenario type estimate," Barnes said. "There will likely be a diversion from this report in Alton's correction letter (for the building permit)."

Some parts of Dick's report are smaller items that don't need to be addressed immediately to open, or projects that could have negotiable cost and solutions, Dick said. Now that the academy

has submitted official layout plans with the building permit application, Butler can assess whether or not the academy's plans to address these issues are safe and code compliant.

But some are non-negotiable. In one part of the building, Dick reported the smell of mold so strong that he asked city officials touring with him to leave the room for safety concerns.

"The smell of mold was so dramatic," Dick said. "When you get that kind of smelling mold, your ducts could be full of mold. You could have environmental issues you are not even aware of yet."

Cannon Beach Academy Executive Director Amy Moore said she did a walk through with Butler and Coaster Construction to evaluate the reality of these non-negotiable renovations, but said she

found his report to be written in "very dramatic language."

"Because of the history behind the building, we want to try to do all we can to preserve it and put it back into use for a good cause," Moore said.

Nominal rent

One way the academy will save money for these renovations is in their rent check to the city. City councilors granted the academy's request to rent the space for \$1 the first year, to be renegotiated after one year.

Rent started at \$2,000, and then eventually was negotiated down to \$1,000 a year before tonight, Schermerhorn said. Academy board members argued \$1 rent was fair because the building was a gift to the city upon which it pays no property taxes, and

necessary because it would allow the school afford significant renovations that would in turn improve the value of the property.

While the agreement was passed unanimously, councilor Mike Benefield questioned the academy's request, and asked board members whether or not they felt they had the financial resources to operate the school successfully.

"We need to get on our feet," Cannon Beach Academy board president Kellye Dewey said. "We've been hiring teachers and buying curriculum. We will continue to fundraise, but we don't want our director to be fundraising all day. We want her in the classrooms."

"Give us a chance, and we can show you what we can do for the community," Moore added.



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