

Seaside campus plan clears first hurdle

Planning Commission sends recommendation to council

By R.J. Marx
Cannon Beach Gazette

The Seaside School District cleared a major hurdle Aug. 1. Members of the city’s Planning Commission provided a recommendation that could lead to the building of a new school campus outside of the tsunami inundation zone.

By voting to recommend approval of the district’s request for an expansion of the urban growth boundary, the commission paved the way for rezoning 40 acres of the property and annexing an additional 49-acre portion of the property, located at Seaside Heights Elementary School, 2000 Spruce Drive.

“This is one of the key pieces in moving the schools up onto the new property,” former superintendent and member of the district’s construction oversight committee Doug Dougherty said after the meeting. “This is a major step.”

Planning goals

Although a conceptual plan for the site was included in the district’s submission, this was not a request to approve a development plan for the site, according to a city staff report.

The request, headed to the City Council, would make amendments to the comprehensive plan, zoning ordinance and zoning map necessary for the school district to prepare a conditional use request for an institutional development plan for the campus.

Consultant Greg Winterowd of Winterbrook Planning said the school’s request addresses relevant criteria of statewide planning goals, the Seaside comprehensive plan and the Clatsop County comprehensive plan.

The proposed location is the only site that meets all seven city criteria, he said, and the only site with access to a major collector street, South Wahanna Road.

“Once we get approval, we know we have the proper zoning, the intent is to finish the development plan, show them what this development plan is and then really focus on impacts,” Winterowd said.

Supporters

Educators, school board members, government officials, former students and others stressed the urgency of the commission’s decision, the result of what Dougherty said was a result of more than 25 years of research into the Cascadia Subduction Zone.

Dougherty said studies could not tell exactly when a Cascadia would occur, but it’s “highly likely to occur by 2060. It’s very important this get done as quickly as possible.”

Patrick Wingard of the Department of Land Conservation and Development and Oregon Coastal Management Program evaluated the proposal in terms of statewide planning goals, particularly those relating to tsunami inundation zones and urban and rural uses.

“We support the proposal because they’ve shown the proper rationale and justification to show the locational and need requirements laid out in statewide planning goals,” Wingard said.

Seaside High School Principal Jeff Roberts called the school the “hub of the community,” and encouraged commissioners to “do what is best for kids” by approving the application.

Recent Seaside grad Brad Rzewnicki said he saw no other option than moving the schools to the new campus. “I think this new school will promote even greater learning for the staff as well as other students,” he said.

Gearhart’s Mayor Matt Brown, speaking as a district resident, said he was supportive of the zone change.

Brown called the move an “investment” into the communities of Gearhart, Seaside and Cannon Beach fitting into the criteria outlined for the urban growth boundary amendment.

Chairman of the school district’s board of directors Steve Phillips said the campus would provide an emergency, higher elevation refuge if a tsunami or natural disasters.

“There are a lot of positives to this and I encourage you to move forward and allow us to continue our planning,” Phillips said.

Concerns

Issues raised during public testimony included concerns about traffic on Spruce Drive, Wahanna and Cooper Road, a side street occasionally used as a cut-through.

Wingard asked for assurances that future development of existing school properties — Gearhart Elementary School, Seaside High School and Broadway Middle School — would not be rezoned for higher density uses.

Coordinator of the Necanicum Watershed Council Mellyssa Graeper asked that any new road consider waterways and wetlands.

District bus driver Allan Erickson drew attention to potential traffic bottlenecks of Avenue S and Wahanna Road, as well vulnerability of the city’s bus barn and maintenance facility in the case of a catastrophic event.

Commissioners told district officials they would like to see traffic measures — including stop signs, lower speed limits and limits on left-hand turns in some locations — discussed in future applications.

Unanimous vote

Commissioners considered holding the hearing open for another month, but ultimately decided to take an immediate vote.

“I don’t see any testimony coming that would change my mind as to how I’m going to vote here,” Commissioner Richard Ridout said in asking for a vote.

“The concerns are valid, but that will be taken care of at a later date,” Commissioner Lou Neubecker said.



PHOTOS BY KATHERINE LACAZE/FOR CANNON BEACH GAZETTE

Sixth-grader Desi Ramirez (left) and eighth-grader Kolyn Lachica work on creating a water infiltration system during a free two-day STEM-related summer camp held at the Heights Elementary School in Seaside on July 12 and 13. The camp was one in a series along the coast put on by Oregon State University in partnership with the Oregon Coast STEM Hub and local site hosts.

Camp builds students’ STEM skills

By Katherine Lacaze
For Cannon Beach Gazette

Science, technology, engineering and mathematics are more than just classroom subjects. They are areas of study, primarily rooted in problem-solving, that pervade everyday life.

For some young students, however, those naturally interconnected disciplines, especially engineering, can be intimidating, dull or inaccessible. That’s why the Oregon Coast STEM Hub and Oregon State University approach them through a series of mobile science and engineering summer camps, offered to middle schoolers along the coast.

The Seaside School District played host to one such day camp, held July 12 and 13 at The Heights Elementary School. More than a dozen local students who are entering sixth to ninth grade this fall explored science and engineering through several hands-on activities, such as developing water infiltration systems, creating wind turbines and building handmade speakers.

“In a lot of small, rural communities, they’re not going to have classes with many of these activities,” said Rachel Johnson, a senior bioengineering major at OSU.

Johnson was one of four OSU students facilitating Seaside’s Center for Outreach in Science and Engineering for Youth Mobile Science and Engineering Camp, operated by the Precollege Programs at OSU in partnership with the Oregon Coast STEM Hub.

Gearhart Elementary School fifth-grade teacher Erica Acton served as the local host. Students from the Seaside School District could participate in the camp, which included lunch and materials, at no cost.

Stress-free environment

The mobile summer camps — which so far have been held in Tillamook, Lincoln



Rachel Johnson, a camp leader and bio engineering major at Oregon State University, talks with local students while they worked on building a water infiltration system during a STEM-related summer camp.

City, Astoria and Seaside, and next will travel to Coquille and Brookings — offer several benefits, according to Johnson. The campers are in a comfortable, familiar environment with their friends and peers from school. Additionally, the camp is an outlet where they can learn STEM-related information without the pressure of impending tests or homework assignments.

Sometimes, Johnson said, students will show up feeling reluctant about the idea of doing “more school,” so to speak. During the two days of camp, however, the instructors have the pleasure of showing the campers how enjoyable it can be to engage the STEM topics by providing hands-on application.

When it comes to building and retaining children’s interest in STEM topics at the middle-school age, that’s “a big step in the right direction,” said camp instructor Apoorva Ayyagari, another senior bioengineering major at OSU.

“It’s an easier way to piece together information that’s being thrown at you,” she said.

‘Just problem-solving’

Most students are exposed to science, math and technology by the time they are entering ninth grade, but engineering can be a more elusive subject

how creativity varies considerably from school to school, and even from student to student.

During the first activity, students were put into teams, and each team had to use plastic pipe and connectors to build a freestanding dog sculpture. This activity helped them warm up to the idea of engineering as problem-solving, as well as group work and sharing and listening to others’ ideas.

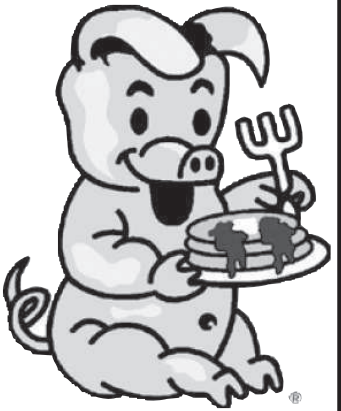
One group chose to have their dog sitting, instead of standing on all fours. Although unconventional and surprising compared to the structures made by other groups, it wasn’t “a wrong answer within the specifications of the problem,” Acton said. Similarly, when the students build solar-powered cars from kits, “not a single car looks the same,” Ayyagari said.

In general, the young students seem more apt to exercise creative thinking and personalized approaches than adults, Johnson said, adding, “They don’t see the obstacles we see.”

In another activity, held on the second day of camp, the instructors talked to the students about college admissions and the professions available in the STEM disciplines. The purpose, Ayyagari said, was “to encourage them to pursue education after high school and inform them on the benefit of doing so.”

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