

For those wheelchair-bound, new program offers solution

Program moves along in Cannon Beach

By Brenna Visser
Cannon Beach Gazette

Cannon Beach will soon join the small but growing number of communities on the Oregon Coast that offer beach accessible wheelchairs.

It's an idea that has been in the works for several years. The Cannon Beach Chamber of Commerce and the Haystack Rock Awareness Program joined forces to purchase the first beach accessible wheelchair, which are chairs with 4- to 5-inch-wide tires that ride on top of sand.

The goal is to eventually have two wheelchairs at Tolovana State Park and two at the Gower Street beach entrances available to the public to check out for free. The city will follow Manzanita and Seaside as the third on the coast to provide any type of beach wheelchair, and the second to provide them for free as a public service.

Pooka Rice, the outreach coordinator for the Haystack Rock Awareness Program, said the group got involved earlier this year to help write grants and facilitate a program. The group is at the center of many school field trips and educational programs, and Rice said that she wanted to make sure anyone who wanted to participate in these activities could have access.

"There is a hugely underserved population," Rice said. "I am a caregiver for disabled people myself. It is so important this program exists so kids (with disabilities) can be included."

Travel Oregon Chairman Ryan Snyder, who was part of the initial push two years ago, said after developing Cannon Beach's program that he hopes to work with Travel Oregon to make beach wheelchair access a coastwide reality.

"Today is Cannon Beach. But this is a topic I plan to bring up at the Travel Oregon level. Regardless of mobility, you should be able to experience the Oregon Coast line."

Serving a need

Manzanita, a town south of Cannon Beach, has had three beach wheelchairs available for use for more than 10 years. The outreach was provided by a local



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While many Oregon beaches are not accessible to individuals using wheelchairs, communities like Seaside and Cannon Beach are making access easier.



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Cannon Beach will soon join Manzanita and Seaside as the only coastal communities to offer beach accessible wheelchairs.

business before the owner retired and donated the wheelchairs to the city, which now operates the service from the Visitors Center.

Dan Haag, the coordinator of the Visitors Center, said the center receives numerous calls and emails asking about beach wheelchairs.

"If we had 100 chairs I don't think it would be enough," Haag said.

The city, he said, plans to look into investing in one or two more chairs. He said having a city next door provide similar access will be invaluable.

"I'm excited Cannon Beach is on board. I hope more city entities get at least one or two, because that makes a difference in a lot of lives," Haag said. "It means everyone from kids with a bro-

ken foot to grandma and grandpa can go to the beach."

Court Carrier, the executive director of the Cannon Beach Chamber of Commerce, said the chamber frequently receives requests for wheelchairs, as well.

"We're anxiously moving ahead on this," he said. "It's so important."

Making it happen

Passion for the wheelchair project has been around for years. Last year, the chamber and others in the community came to the City Council for support, Carrier said.

The first wheelchair was purchased with donations from the chamber, Snyder and other local contributors. But with each wheelchair costing about \$2,500, significant fundraising from donations, grants and corporate sponsors will be needed to pay for three more chairs and the installation of the sheds where they will be stored, Rice said.

The vision is to build code-protected storage sheds where wheelchair users can check out beach wheelchairs while safely storing their own, Rice said. Until money is raised for the sheds, however, users will be able to check out wheelchairs starting in October from the Cannon Beach Police Department.

"Our aging population affects a lot of us. People haven't been as vocal as we need to be for those who are mobility impaired," Rice said.

List is narrowed in city's search for a manager

Finalists to be announced at Oct. 17 meeting

By Brenna Visser
Cannon Beach Gazette

Cannon Beach is one step closer to finding a new city manager.

The hiring process began after former city manager Brant Kucera left in June to take another city manager position in Sisters. Since then, city councilors and the recruitment firm, Jensen Strategies, have narrowed down the search to eight semi-finalists.

The semi-finalists were funneled down from a pool of 29 applications, city attorney Tammy Herdener said.

At this point, not much can be said about these candidates for confidentiality purposes, other than the fact candidates applied from all over the country. City councilors will be interviewing each candidate via video chat next week during two executive sessions. From there, the plan is to narrow the pool to three to five finalists, whose names will be publicly announced at the Oct. 17 special meeting, Erik Jensen from Jensen Strategies said.

So far, the process is running on schedule, but will be nudging up against the city's deadline to hire someone by the first week of November. The city must select a preferred candidate by this time to avoid violating the city charter, which mandates an interim city manager can only serve for four months until the position is filled.

The new city manager will be expected to facilitate policy priorities like

keeping community character by limiting expansion, developing the South Wind property, affordable housing and addressing emergency management and aging infrastructure needs.

Once finalists are chosen, city staff and Jensen Strategies will work on forming community and local government administrator panels to evaluate finalists. City staff will choose representatives from the Cannon Beach Chamber of Commerce, the hospitality industry, arts community, environmental groups and other locals to offer input, interim City Manager Jason Schermerhorn said.

"We want to include people who have key relationships with the city from a variety of perspectives," Schermerhorn said. "We want a variety of different points of view and interests. People in this town are so involved I think it will be easy to form a panel, and their voices will be helpful in finding a good city manager."

The other panel will be made up of three other city managers and one special district manager, Jensen said, though who exactly this will be has yet to be determined.

Those interested in meeting the finalists are invited to a community forum Nov. 6 at 7 p.m. at city hall. Citizens will be able to ask questions and mingle with the finalists, and whatever discourse happens in this forum will be considered when choosing a candidate.

"It would be interesting to see how our candidates interact with the public. I think that's important to see," City Councilor Nancy McCarthy said.

Arch Cape residents come out in force in opposition to RV plan

RV Park from Page 1A

Waggoner said people should expect a small RV park with about 35 spaces. The preliminary plan is to add walking trails around the site and to preserve as many of the large trees as possible to add to the overall ambiance.

Before almost any detail can be decided, Waggoner said a variety of geohazard, transportation and ecological studies will need to be conducted to complete a development permit.

But some argued it doesn't take a study to recognize how the narrowness of the highway will impact pedestrian safety for people who will want to leave the RV park to visit Arcadia Beach. Many echoed concerns how deceleration and acceleration lanes, which would likely be required by the Oregon Department of Transportation, will not solve traffic buildup and blind spot

issues from drivers trying to turn left into the park.

Waggoner said once the development application is filed, ODOT would provide any necessary mitigation requirements for pedestrian safety. But residents like John Mersereau is not sure whatever is recommended would be enough.

"Widening the highway is not going to help the danger," Mersereau said. "I don't see how ODOT can make this safe for pedestrians."

The environment

Others were concerned with environmental issues, such as the fact the project would be squarely in Arch Cape's watershed. Sharon Stern said residents would be vulnerable to any septic tank failures or other waste contaminating the groundwater.

Residents like Bob Turk, who has secondary water rights to a creek that runs

through both his property and Smejkal's, also worry about what effect numerous campers could have on the neighborhood.

"I worry people will be walking through that stream, dumping things into that stream," Turk said. "It's not just me. This affects everybody."

Arch Cape resident and environmental advocate Nadia Gardner, along with many others at the fire hall, was also concerned how the project would affect the marbled murrelet, a seabird that can only live in increasingly rare, old-growth coastal forests. The state Department of Forestry identified the property as adjacent to a marbled murrelet management area in 2009.

Waggoner said many of these drainage and environmental concerns can be ad-

ressed once more engineering surveys are completed.

Problems with procedure

Questions about whether the developer has followed county planning rules were also raised.

The county issued a cease-and-desist order in July after the Department of Forestry reported Smejkal was planning a logging operation on parcels without county approval, Caplinger said.

Waggoner and Smejkal argue they were cutting underbrush to allow surveyors to assess the land adequately to fulfill county requirements.

"All we're trying to do is try to look at the property," Waggoner said. "We're not going in to pillage the land."

Oregon Coast Alliance president Mike Manzulli said between the lack of regard

for the planning process and questionable applications for tree removal, there is reason to question whether the developer can be trusted to build the project responsibly.

"Why would we trust you?" Manzulli said.

Caplinger said part of what has made the property so complicated is its zoning. In most cases, private landowners would not need a permit to clear underbrush to conduct land surveys. But because the land is former park land and zoned recreational management, the number of acceptable uses is minimal and vague.

"Going from preservation to development always raises concerns," Caplinger said. "The code is not clear

on brushing on recreational management land. While it is feasible, it would be difficult to fulfill our development requirements without a full survey. The question is if you need to do that much clearing to conduct these tests. At this point we don't know."

Waggoner and Smejkal still need to complete a variety of surveys before submitting a development permit application. After that, a public hearing will be scheduled for community input.

Waggoner said he was not surprised by the public reaction, and that they intend to move forward with the project as permitting allows. However, Smejkal reiterated that he was open to selling the land, but had yet to see an offer.

Carrier to leave Nov. 20

Carrier from Page 1A

In his time as executive director, Carrier helped establish a contract with the city to invest lodging tax revenue for tourism-related marketing support. He also played a large role in organizing celebrations for the 50th anniversary of the Oregon Beach Bill.

Ryan Snyder, the Travel Oregon chairman and CEO of Martin North, met Carrier in 1997 when his wife was in one of Carrier's hospitality classes at Mt. Hood Community College. Through that personal connection grew a professional one when he heard Carrier was chosen for the director position in 2014.

"I was elated when he found out he was going to be executive director, so the emotional pendulum really swung when he told me he was stepping down," Snyder

said. "He's a tremendous asset to the industry, and his knowledge in tourism has been invaluable to the small town of Cannon Beach — more than people realize."

City Councilor George Vetter worked with Carrier when he served as a chamber board member, and said that Carrier's high energy will be "hard to replace."

"Court has been a great asset to the chamber and to the community. It's through his energy and leadership that we are competing with other destinations throughout the country and the state," Vetter said.

In Snyder's view, what cemented Carrier's legacy was his ability to get people to work toward a common mission.

"We shared a spirit of love for people and love for sharing experiences," Snyder said. "He will truly be missed."

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