

Police probe mysterious bunny deaths

By Brenna Visser
Cannon Beach Gazette

Police are investigating what is causing what appears to be a recent string of bunny deaths in Tolovana.

Maggie Kitson, a Tolovana resident, noticed a bunny carcass near her front porch on Saturday, Nov. 3. After living in the area for more than 14 years, she had seen her fair share of deceased rabbits, but usually they are tucked away in the bushes or carried off with the predator that hunted it, she said.

Rarely did she see a dead bunny without any claw or teeth marks laying out in the open.

"I thought, 'that was odd,'" Kitson said.

Over the next few days, Kitson found two more carcasses within the same block of her house. She began to fear

that they were being poisoned, knowing that many people do not like the rabbits and could be using pesticides as a bunny deterrent, she said. She posted a photo on Facebook to warn people in the area to keep pets indoors just in case.

After finding two more the next day, Kitson decided to call the police.

"For me, it's not about the bunnies. It's about the poison, getting into our water, harming our environment," she said.

Tensions about the ballooning Cannon Beach rabbit population are running high. Over the past few weeks, some Tolovana neighbors have asked the city to do more to control the animals, which they say are covering their lawns in pellets and destroying their gardens.

The pro-bunny faction is growing in its own right, with more than 4,900 people around the country signing a

petition on Change.org asking the City Council to "not kill the Cannon Beach Bunnies." The council has researched options to handle the population, but thus far has chosen not to get in the business of pest control.

"The hatred I just don't get. If they are coming on your property and causing a problem ... Well, there are things you can do to prevent that," Kitson said. "And so what? They are a joy to have around."

As of Thursday, Nov. 8, what is killing the bunnies is unclear, Police Chief Jason Schermerhorn said. Officers collected the carcasses and brought them to Seaside Pet Clinic, where an initial autopsy was unable to determine a cause of death. There was no blunt trauma or obvious hemorrhaging that would indicate poisoning.

Disease or natural causes could also be the cause, he said.

"One other thing that is a possibility is that these deceased bunnies were found in the morning before the coldest night of the year," Schermerhorn said. "Disease — if that is the case — spreads faster during colder (temperatures)."

Aside from discharging a firearm within city limits, property owners generally have the right to trap or otherwise dispose of bunnies in their own yards. But putting out poison that can be accessible and harmful to other animals or pets could be potentially classified as animal abuse under the city's municipal code, Schermerhorn said.

"Bunnies aren't protected, so our main concern is finding out if anything could harm people's pets or children," Schermerhorn said.

New policy aims to keep fire chief in district

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voted for the policy.

While in support of the policy's objective, board member Sharon Clyde didn't feel the rules did enough to ensure the fire chief would lead the fire district during its busiest time.

"In my opinion, you have to look at it as a worst-case scenario," Clyde said. "This whole thing started because of how much time he was gone last year. Now, this policy has him gone half the summer potentially."

Benedict, however, strongly disagrees with the policy, viewing it as board overreach that will make running the fire district efficiently a challenge.

"I feel the board is attempting to micromanage the fire chief position," Benedict said.

Benedict argues there are already measures in place to ensure the region is properly covered. Before anyone gets



COLIN MURPHEY/THE DAILY ASTORIAN

The Cannon Beach fire district wants to restrict how often firefighters are deployed elsewhere during the summer.

sent outside of the area for a fire, it is protocol for a fire chief to weigh factors like weather conditions, whether there are enough volunteers in town and other special circumstances before deciding

to commit resources. He also has championed conflagration calls as invaluable training opportunities for volunteers.

With an entirely volunteer fire department, it's possible everyone could be unavail-

able any time of year, not just during the summer, and implementing restrictions won't change that reality, he said.

Mutual aid agreements with other fire departments help cover any gaps in coverage.

Board member Mark Mekenas agreed with Benedict and voted against the changes.

"We hired the man to do the job. We trust this guy," Mekenas said. "He's only going to go if he knows things are good and taken care of."

Benedict said it is currently unclear whether the 15-day rule applies to volunteers or just the fire chief, and hopes to engage with the board to clarify the intent of how the policy affects the fire chief and volunteers.

"What the expectation of the fire chief and volunteers is, when we do get asked to go by the state of Oregon, needs a little more clarification before we can proceed," he said.

Three potential sites for City Hall face scrutiny

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about the current building in a tsunami or earthquake. The building would be vulnerable to a minor seismic event or a medium-to-large sized tsunami.

The decision could mean the difference of millions of dollars on the project's price tag or the chance to usher in the first stages of development on a property meant to keep critical services above water.

Preliminary findings from SRG, the Portland-based architecture firm evaluating the benefits, downsides and costs of each location, are raising questions about soil quality and landslide risks of each location.

"We knew there was going to be geotech issues," St. Denis said. "It's a part of the process."

The new City Hall is proposed to be about 6,000 square feet larger than the current building at 10,000 square feet to accommodate department growth and a larger police department.

Rebuilding City Hall in the exact footprint where it stands now is not an option, St. Denis said, as the building current sits a few feet onto some-

one else's property line.

Instead, the city is looking at building it in the lot currently behind City Hall or in the parking lot below it bordering Hemlock Street. Despite being larger in size, the reconfiguration would end up produce about five to 20 more parking spots, SRG consultant Lisa Patterson said.

Soil contamination may be an issue that could drive up costs, however. Before becoming a parking lot, the property used to be a gas station, St. Denis said, raising the likelihood of hydrocarbons being in the soil. At the property east of the current City Hall, engineers would likely recommend soil upgrades out of fears of liquefaction to the current soil in an earthquake.

This means the city would have to fill in either plot with new soil, which could significantly increase the cost of the foundation by up to one to two times, Patterson said.

If the property were to be built to the east it would have to be two stories to account for proper setbacks, which also has the potential to drive up costs. The benefit, St. Denis said, would be the second floor would be above a medium-size tsunami inundation

line, unlike the site off Hemlock Street, which is fully in the medium-sized inundation zone.

St. Denis said there are ways to build city hall to be tsunami resistant in these zones.

"We are more likely to have more smaller tsunamis more frequently," he said.

The third site at South Wind is the most securely out of the inundation zone, but could carry larger landslide risks, which would again drive foundation costs higher. While a geotechni-

cal study was completed in 2013, engineers are seeking to do more borings to analyze the landslide risk, which will cost about \$20,000 to \$30,000 more over the original study price tag.

"We knew there'd be soil issues," St. Denis said. "We'd rather spend the money up front to find out rather than go out for a bond and find out the project is 40 to 50 percent more expensive after the fact."

A final report with cost estimates will be published in December.

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