

Jesse asks Gearhart mayor to bow out

Councilor says controversy has 'split the community apart'

By Nancy McCarthy
Seaside Signal

In an impassioned speech during a recent Gearhart City Council meeting, City Councilor Dan Jesse told Mayor Dianne Widdop, "I don't think you're the best choice for the community" and asked her to resign.

The controversy surrounding some of the mayor's recent actions has created an atmosphere that has "split the community apart," Jesse said.

"I don't think it is fair that the rest of us have to endure that," he added.

Widdop, however, repeated her intention of staying in office unless a recall forces her out.

"I have gotten a tremendous amount of support from the community," Widdop replied. "I have not attacked anyone; I have defended myself. If someone attacks you, how would you handle that?"

Following the discussion, the council asked city attorney Peter Watts to request letters from the Oregon Secretary of State's Office and the state Ethics Commission that describe where they are in their investigations.

Although Kevin Willett, an unsuccessful City Council candidate in the November general election, had contacted the agencies, he eventually withdrew the complaints against Widdop. However, Widdop filed her own complaint with the Secretary of State's Office, claiming that allegations contained in a recall petition against her are untruthful.

The conversation Jan. 7 repeated several recent City Council discussions about accusations that Widdop unduly used her influence as mayor. She has fielded complaints from a local business owner who said Widdop sug-

gested that Willett's campaign sign be removed from the business and that she accused Willett of having a temper and being unsuitable for the City Council. Former City Councilor Joy Sigler has also accused Widdop of secretly recording a private conversation between the two of them and City Administrator Chad Sweet and trying to distribute the recording to other councilors. Sweet later said he was the one who recorded the conversation after Sigler asked if she could use her recorder.

I wish this would come to an end. It won't happen unless you choose to resign."

Jesse said he didn't think a recall election was the best way to deal with the controversy.

"You owe an apology to all of the citizens," said Jesse, adding that Widdop's apology to business owner Linda Goldfarb wasn't believable.

Jesse, who was elected in 2012, said he had considered resigning, but his wife reminded him that he was "elected to a four-year term and I owe it to the citizens

permit is pending.

"Allegations that were made against me; I have an answer to everyone," Widdop said. "What more can I do?"

"I didn't tell her to remove the sign. I did nothing to Kevin Willett. He has a temper. It's my constitutional right to say what I want. I have done nothing wrong.

"I apologized to Linda Goldfarb. What else do you want from me? I did nothing illegal. I've done nothing wrong. I am not going to resign."

Jesse said he had never accused Widdop of doing anything illegal.

"Just because it may not be illegal doesn't mean it's right," Jesse said.

He noted that the City Council wrote a code of ethics to follow.

"We agreed to respect each other and treat each other right," he said.

Kerry Smith, a new councilor who took office last month, said he didn't agree with Widdop's actions concerning the sign but felt the other accusations were "nit-picking."

"I talked to the (Oregon) Ethics Commission," Smith said. "It was not smart, but it shouldn't have been blown up like this. I have a bitter taste about it.

"It has soured my feeling about this job. I'm going to fight even harder to have this be a council that gets the job done," Smith said.

Widdop agreed that her actions were "stupid."

"It was stupid. I'm the first to admit it," she said.

Councilor John Duncan, who also took office for the first time in December, said as an engineer and land surveyor in the region he has worked in several small communities, and he has seen worse controversies.

"What you're seeing here is small," he said. "You may be thinking it's just Gearhart, but it happens all over Oregon and Washington."



GAIL COMO PHOTO

Gail Como, Gearhart city treasurer and administrative assistant, shot this photo of the elk herd as it marched down Pacific Way in front of City Hall.

Show to feature local elk herd

Elk from Page 1A

"I have crawled along the pumice plain inside Mount St. Helens to try to get covered with elk urine so that I'm not smelling like a human in order to get close to elk," she said. "They're very skittish. They're very aware. They have great senses of smell, and they know when a human is around."

The Gearhart herd was different.

"These elk, I guess, are habituated enough to being in the midst of human activity that they really didn't scare at all," said Gilfillian. "And that was so unusual, according to my experience."

Along with a cameraman, Gilfillian followed the herd closely for two days last August.

"They were in the dunes area, then they made their way into a neighborhood and then made themselves at home on a golf course," said Gilfillian. "We just got amazing footage."

"We met one poor woman who was chas-

ing them out of her yard," Gilfillian added. The incident presented the issue in a nutshell.

"There are legitimate safety concerns, I just feel that way personally," said Gilfillian. "I think I wanted to honor all the opinions that I did hear, because I want to represent the community's opinion authentically. So we found people with lots of different views."

"I don't think we take a stand," she added.

"But we explore the issue of how the community is going to grapple with it. I have a feeling this is not an uncommon experience in communities all over, particularly in the American west, and likely to become more so, because wildlife is more protected in some areas and that has allowed them to reproduce more, and we are also building in habitat."

After the initial airing Thursday, the episode will be repeated at 1:30 a.m. and at 6:30 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 8, on OPB.



DAN JESSE



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