

Letters to the Editor

We need honest, kind leaders

To the editor,
Democracy is an ongoing responsibility. Whether you are voting in a general election or being asked to sign a recall petition, it is a voter's democratic responsibility to gather and evaluate as much information as possible and take action according to your values and morals.

We believe, based on observation and experiencing retaliation first hand, that this recall is necessary so our local government will, in fact, represent the collective standards and values of Gearhart residents. On the west and east sides of the highway reside residents that believe Gearhart government should be transparent, fair, compassionate, honest and supportive of economic development and racial diversity.

We deeply appreciate that communities to the north and south of Gearhart are privileged to have intelligent and professional representation that serve their voting populace with humility and honesty. We can have the same if we ask for it and settle for nothing less than excellence in the governance of our community.

We believe that this recall has the potential to bring our community together and to collectively agree that we need leaders that truly have a passion to serve all residents of Gearhart to the best of their ability with honesty and kindness.

Many residents were afraid to sign the petition for fear of retaliation. Based on our own experience that is a legitimate fear. However, there is power in numbers and our community government can be different if we desire it.

Democracy requires facts and courage. The freedoms established in the U.S. Constitution must be nurtured and preserved.

The goal of Oregon's newly appointed governor and the majority of Gearhart residents is the same: Restore trust.

**Brian Sigler
Joy Sigler**

Know the facts

To the editor,
I am writing this letter to eliminate confusion and highlight the truth regarding the effort to remove Gearhart's mayor, Dianne Widdop, from office. The goal of this letter to the editor is to be as factual as possible, and I will state when facts can be checked and where to fact-check them.

As some of you may know, a petition was circulated, mostly door to door, by approximately eight people in Gearhart, asking for signatures to recall our mayor.

The gist of the reasoning to remove Dianne Widdop was that she violated a Gearhart business owner's right to freedom of speech. Note: 108 people signed the petition. If you want to know everything the petition stated, it is public record at the office of the Gearhart city manager.

Dianne Widdop has served Gearhart for almost 20 years as a city councilor and mayor. She has worked very hard all these years to keep Gearhart a great place for all of us to live...she does this without pay. She, at the very least for all she has accomplished, deserves a basic level of respect and due process by the voters. She is being accused of violating a business owner's freedom of speech, which is a terrible thing to do.

But did she really do that? It is our responsibility as voters to ferret out the truth before casting our ballots and not allow ourselves to be swayed by a small group of people that I feel strongly, in this case, are aggressively tainting the truth to further their needs, whatever those needs may be.

Gearhart business owners in the past have not put out campaign signs. The sentiment has been that business owners do not want to politicize their business. A new business owner, however, did put up a sign for a candidate named Kevin Willett. Kevin Willett is not the issue here.

Dianne Widdop used to work in the store location which the new business owner now occupies. Dianne reached out to the business owner with advice as she was opening her new store earlier in the spring of 2014. Dianne thought of her as a friend. On Oct. 17, Dianne talked to this business owner friend about the campaign sign in front of her

store. Dianne, per transcripts on record with the city, has stated that she told the business owner "...it's a bad idea to put out campaign signs at shops in Gearhart and that none of the merchants put out signs as it is a no-win situation."

The business owner said that Craig Weston, her landlord, had said the same thing, but that she could put up a sign if she wanted to. Dianne stated (per transcripts) she never told the business owner she had to take down the sign. The business owner did leave up the sign for Kevin Willett. On Nov. 5, at a City Council meeting, the new business owner confirmed that Dianne never told her to take the sign down. This can be fact-checked by Gearhart City Council meeting minutes.

So what is the issue? Do you Gearhart voters think that Dianne Widdop violated the business owner's freedom of speech? If not, then why is she being accused of doing so?

At some point after Dianne talked to the new business owner about the Kevin Willett sign, the new business owner apparently talked to a few Gearhart residents and business owners about her conversation with Dianne. These people included Joy Sigler, a past city councilor and the owner of a shop in Gearhart. It is Joy and about seven other people who went after Dianne Widdop by misstating what she said. Note that Joy has been the most vocal.

It is these eight people who asked for the recall petition using their emotionally charged freedom of speech violation claim to get signatures. They seem to be angry people who see Dianne Widdop and anyone who does not agree with them as their enemy. They have been very aggressive and inappreciative and bullish at City Council meetings. It is unclear why they are angry, but some part of their angst is tied to Gearhart's historic barn.

The transcripts of all Gearhart City Council meetings are public record.

The historic barn on Pacific Way is home to an issue that has been going on for several years, starting when the barn was bought as a venue for weddings and large parties. The barn was not in compliance regarding safety issues as determined by the fire department, city inspector and county electrical inspector's office. The owner, to date, has not accomplished what the city has asked her to do. The Gearhart city manager and Gearhart building official are responsible for making sure these compliance issues are taken care of.

Several of the eight people who are going after Dianne Widdop would benefit from the barn having a wedding business. They have fought back saying the compliance requirements are not fair, and all eight of these people have been very hostile towards Dianne, the mayor and the city manager. Keep in mind that all businesses have to be in compliance on safety issues...it is one of the costs of doing business. Note also that the barn owner has sued the city and that we as taxpayers are paying thousands of dollars for the city to defend itself...we will also spend around \$7,000 for this recall election.

Everything regarding the historic barn's compliance issues and the lawsuit against the city is public record.

This is what has happened and why we are where we are now. The struggle to defame and remove the mayor has cost us all money, time and energy. This has been going on for five months, a period of time where the people that we all elected could have been getting other things done besides talking about making the historic barn safe and what Dianne Widdop said about a sign.

Eight people in our town have an aggressive agenda to go after and depose anyone in the Gearhart City Council that does not agree with their agenda. That's just toxic, it is not right, it's a waste of time and it is not what Gearhart is all about. And now we need to take the time to deal with their claim of a freedom of speech violation by a mayor who has worked hard for us for almost 20 years.

Suggesting that someone take down a sign as a matter of business protocol, but not saying they had to, does not mean legally or logically that a person's freedom of speech was taken away. But in this case, unless we all understand and react to the truth, it could unfairly affect all the

good that Dianne Widdop's long public legacy has been about and send the message that the voters of Gearhart can easily be deceived and bullied.

**Wilson Mark
Gearhart**

It's about trust

To the editor,
Gearhart Mayor Dianne Widdop, in her informal interview for a Feb. 20, 2015, *Daily Astorian* article called me out by alluding that she is "facing the same situation" as I when a recall was attempted to remove me from the Clatsop County Commission. That recall failed, and I was not removed from my elected position.

The motivation behind that recall was one issue, LNG, and not, as in our mayor's case, a continuous pattern of questionable behavior, leadership and judgment.

The recall of Gearhart Mayor or Dianne Widdop is about the loss of trust in her judgment and ability to govern by the community. It is a grassroots movement of citizens and involves many, who, in their experience during the two years Dianne Widdop has been Gearhart's mayor, have been singled out, cited, fined, regulated or unreasonably denied use of their property. It is not about Mayor Widdop's stated "good intentions" to uphold the comprehensive plan as given in her ballot statement as justification to not be recalled.

Read her ballot statement explaining why she should not be recalled. She does not refute the stated reasons for her recall but construes a list of accomplishments as reflective of her positive contributions during her almost 20 years in public office.

Fact: She twice walked into a Gearhart business and requested the removal of a legally posted political sign from in front of the business. The second time she brought her husband. Is this appropriate behavior?

In yet another instance, she sent her husband to knock on the door of a homeowner's residence to request he come to City Hall to talk to the mayor about his RV parked at his home. Wouldn't a letter from the city requesting a meeting have been a more appropriate approach?

The list goes on and on because the fact is Dianne prides herself in this hard, direct confrontational style without thought to the impact of her word, actions and style on others. Each time the mayor inserts herself directly into a situation, she riles some, intimidates others, but each time she establishes an antagonistic interaction from the start.

The second and even more troubling revelation reveals a darker side to how this mayor conducts city business when out of the public eye.

Fact: In October of 2014, another resident forwarded a string of personal emails to the mayor and city manager. The subject of the emails was a private discussion among homeowners who had attended a city meeting about short-term rentals. These emails were not addressed to the city, nor had they been sent by the authors to the city, yet Mayor Widdop chose to forward them to selected City Council members and one City Council candidate. Nothing could be more divisive. By communicating with only some members of the City Council and only one of the three candidates running for the City Council, a hierarchy of "favored" group of those "in the know" verses those who are excluded was created.

This divides, not unifies, not only the council but also the community into camps of "us against them." Mayor Widdop's forwarding effectively allowed her to communicate information to those she wished while not disclosing it to the public. Worse, the next time these property owners appear before the City Council, a majority of the council members will already have formed an opinion thanks to the forwarded emails by Mayor Widdop.

Worst of all, these private conversations became innuendos, oblique references, gossipy topics and cliques... a private language. The mayor set the tone, and I believe, helped create an environment in which someone could think it acceptable to send an anonymous Christmas card to one of the homeowners who spoke at the city meeting on short-term rentals and was

among those whose email was forwarded by the mayor. The greeting in this card included a passage "incessant bleating ramblings" and ended in the threatening tone of "changes are a coming." Was the forwarding of those emails by the mayor the catalyst for the card sender? This is not the Gearhart I know or want.

I have lost confidence in Mayor Widdop's judgment, leadership and ability to be impartial and fair. Please join me in voting yes for her recall.

**Patricia Roberts
Gearhart**

Campaign suffers credibility

To the editor,
While not diminishing citizens' rights to recall elected officials, I believe that the campaign to remove Gearhart's Mayor Dianne Widdop suffers serious credibility.

The reasons for my low regard include: 1) petitioners' apparent disinterest in conciliating their dispute prior to launching a divisive crusade; 2) their focus on highly disputable accusations at the expense of relevant confirmed facts; 3) their senseless derogations of character and warnings of political intimidation; and 4) their disinclination to give the mayor even a modicum of credit for her 20-year record of selfless work to preserve, enhance and protect our little city by the sea.

**John Dudley
Gearhart**

Support Gearhart mayor

To the editor,
My reasoning for this letter to the editor is to add unknown information regarding the complaints against Mayor Widdop by those who petitioned her recall.

These complaints did not stop with the mayor, but went beyond to include myself as the city's building official. One of the players attempted my replacement with a seven-page complaint letter to the Oregon State Building Codes Agency requesting that I be replaced immediately. They stated that I was being unprofessional, along with other misleading statements because I wouldn't compromise the health and welfare of the general public. But because I did what was right by following the rules the complaint was to no avail!

Another player made a statement that there was a certain amount of fear of Mayor Widdop and those within City Hall. In my 40 years in this profession, 30 in Clatsop County, I can say this for the city of Gearhart: The entire city staff, Mayor Widdop included, have made this one of the most people-friendly cities I have ever worked for. Myself, along with Mayor Widdop, are for what's right. I promise you those who follow the rules for the best of this community should never fear retaliation from this city.

**Jim Brien
Seaside**

Center capacity

To the editor,
Several questions have been asked of the Seaside Civic and Convention Center since the release of a financial feasibility study for the possible expansion of the center. In response to a couple of items that appeared in story on Feb. 16 in *The Daily Astorian* and Feb. 20 in the *Seaside Signal* ("Seaside businesses object to proposed sales tax"), we felt it was important to clarify accordingly.

Although the article stated that the center "can handle only 200 people," this is not 100 percent accurate, and there are actually many scenarios that impact total volumes much larger than that. A theater style use of the Pacific and Necanicum Rooms (main level rooms at the center) could hold up to 1,200 people. Those same rooms, set with 80 "rounds of 10" tables could hold 800 for a plated dinner.

What's typical of one event may be unrealistic for another. Does a group require breakout sessions (where a large group splits into several smaller groups)? Perhaps a group will not be using the center for meals, choosing, instead, to only host its meetings and tradeshow functions inside the facility. A group of 500 could meet together in the large Pacific room and then split into breakout sessions, in the small-

er Necanicum, Seamist, Seaside, Riverview, Seahorse and Haystack rooms.

However, a group of 500 would not be able to assemble as one large body in multiple rooms (and thereby allow for an immediate transition from, say, a meeting space to a meal space).

The bottom line is that there are numerous scenarios and caveats that affect the size capacities of a specific group. A complete list of room capacities and sizes can be found at seasideconvention.com.

**Russ Vandenberg, CFE
General Manager
Seaside Civic and Convention Center/Seaside Visitors Bureau**

Use other spaces

To the editor,
As a local Seaside homeowner, I have seen and witnessed a lot, and around town, the initial knee-jerk reaction was to oppose the expansion of the convention center. It uses the classic "field of dreams" logic: "If you build it they will come." We should be prepared by reinvesting not only in the downtown core but utilizing existing spaces.

The facility is ready — maybe even due — for an expansion, but it should stop and rethink its marketing and sales strategy to the community and public at large. Websites matter, and our local sites reek of fragmentation and cumbersome event calendars.

A sales tax is likely beyond just a poor idea, and frankly un-Oregonian. Local small businesses already struggle enough, especially in the rainy season, just to find staff, let alone another barrier to a sale. Tax increment financing is a possibility, but, realistically, lodging and parking fees are more practical.

We also need to raise prices on the services our patrons use the most. The corporation of Worldmark should pay way more in taxes. Every timeshare bought and sold in our town should be taxed. The conventions and events themselves need to pay more.

We need to raise the cover charge the city of Seaside charges to finish here; Hood To Coast needs to settle and pay up its huge bar tab. H2C is a self-contained party at the beach. H2C literally uses, abuses and pukes upon our community. Yes, it fills up the hotels, but at what cost? It fills the town with unresponsive and intoxicated guests who have violated minimum stays and occupancy requirements.

Their self-contained party supports its corporate sponsors, not the local community. It leaves a whole town with a hangover, leaving a bad taste in everyone's mouth from locals to those who drank too much. Tax the events and tourists more and not the local community. A county-wide lodging tax increase makes the most financial sense.

The convention center cannot stand on its own nor should the local small businesses. We need to galvanize Clatsop County, utilizing our small local spaces better from the Cannon Beach boardrooms and to the Seaside schools' gyms and churches, all the way north to the Astoria coffee shops and all the restaurants in between.

Our community goal should be to foster better, smaller micro-conventions that make use of our already existing localized spaces and even vacant spaces amongst the community. Lease out and pay to use underutilized spaces as mini-convention space downtown and literally spread out the community reach dollars and cars.

Until the numbers come back and the City Council votes, it's to be determined, but as citizens of the Seaside community, we should plan for a better town and be willing to be flexible to fund the growing future. So expansion of the convention center maybe, but only time will tell. Continue to cast the vision Seaside, we are the stakeholders.

**Sean William McKendry
Seaside**

A promise

To the editor,
To the mayor, City Council, and Chamber of Commerce: As if we aren't taxed enough as it is!

I will make this short and to the point. If the city of Seaside goes ahead with a city sales tax, I PROMISE I will never spend another PENNY in your community!

**Bruce A. Forster
Warrenton**