

Guest Column DIANNE WIDDOP

Take some time to ask questions

Statements made by petitioners, mayor

The following statements were filed with the Clatsop County Elections Office



The reason given for demanding the recall of Diane Widdop, as filed in the recall petition:

Mayor Dianne Widdop's separate response to the recall petition:

Oct. 17, 2014 Mayor Widdop asked a Gearhart business owner to remove a lawfully posted campaign sign, abusing her position as an elected official and misrepresenting Gearhart ordinances. Further, she abused her office by acting as an ordinance enforcement officer, violating the rights of free speech and by encumbering a candidate's right to campaign for public office.

Oct. 29, 2014 a conversation between Mayor Widdop and a citizen was recorded on a hidden device during "Coffee with the Mayor" without the citizen's knowledge or authorization. Mayor Widdop then attempted to distribute this recording, contrary to Fourth Amendment privacy rights, contrary to City Council rules and against Oregon Law. Mayor Widdop has consistently misrepresented her opinion as that of the City Council using the term "WE" without the knowledge or approval of the City Council.

Nov. 5, 2014 Mayor Widdop publicly denounced a candidate's ability to serve in public office citing his "alleged" temper. March 15, 2013 (Daily Astorian) Widdop admitted to her own "temper" thus disqualifying herself as fit to serve in public office.

Because of her abuse of leadership, lack of transparency and strong personal bias, vote YES to recall Mayor Widdop. Restore honesty and trust to Gearhart's government.

In almost 20 years as a city councilor and mayor, I have consistently made decisions that reflect the values of the city's comprehensive plan. My goal has always been to preserve and enhance the livability of our community.

As mayor, my focus has been to increase the transparency and accessibility of the city government. The city's website has been improved to provide more information. Residents now can access the same information packet provided to city councilors. The city blog allows citizens to receive notices and information automatically.

I'm at City Hall every Wednesday, giving anyone the opportunity to ask questions, express concerns, or just chat. I attend Gearhart Homeowners Association meetings to answer questions on city affairs for their membership. I have worked to increase Gearhart's presence beyond purely city affairs, working with Senator Merkley and Representative Bonamici to hold well attended town hall meetings in Gearhart, inviting representatives of the Port of Astoria and the Community College to speak at council meetings, attending League of Oregon Cities and Mayors Association meetings, and maintaining working relationships with other area mayors, state representatives. I do this as a volunteer unpaid elected official.

I ask you for your vote of support.

Ballots will be mailed to Gearhart voters on March 6 regarding the question of whether I should be recalled from office.

The ballot will contain a statement from the petitioners, and one from me.

The petitioner's statement makes some ominous sounding allegations including one that states "October 29, 2014, a conversation between Mayor Widdop and a citizen was recorded on a hidden device during 'Coffee with the Mayor' without the citizen's knowledge or authorization. Mayor Widdop then attempted to distribute this recording, contrary to Fourth Amendment privacy rights, contrary to City Council rules and against Oregon law."

Joy Sigler elaborated on this charge at the Dec. 5 council meeting, saying "Our community does not need any interpretation for an act of an elected official to secretly record a citizen during coffee with the mayor. Nor do we need any further investigation when we learn that an elected official attempted to then distribute the recording that was secretly obtained. This community values transparency. Illegal or not we know that any secret recording is not consistent with any code of conduct elected or otherwise ... A complete report of this incident was reported to the Clatsop County District Attorney's office."

Before deciding on the significance of this charge, a few additional facts may be helpful. The "citizen" in question was then City Councilor Joy Sigler. She asked to record the conversation and I did not object. I did not record the conversation nor cause it to be recorded. Roughly a minute into her rant, the city administrator, who was also present, turned on his cellphone in the belief that it was in the city's interest to have its own record.

While I was given a copy of the city's recording and told the remaining council members of its existence, I did not attempt to distribute the recording to anyone. I was informed later that both the city attorney and the Clatsop County district attorney had determined that the city's recording was perfectly legal and could be distributed to anyone.

At the time I had won-



DIANNE WIDDOP

dered why a second recording seemed so threatening to Sigler, especially given the fact that all council proceedings are recorded. I believe I received the answer when she posted her recording on the Restore Trust Gearhart website. Her recording runs roughly five minutes. The city's recording runs almost 13 minutes.

I agree with Sigler completely on one point — our community values and deserves transparency in the conduct of the public business. To me, transparency involves several concepts. At a very basic level, it means that the public has access to accurate information in as simple a manner as possible.

Over the last two years, I have worked to increase the amount of information available on the city website, including the complete information packet council members receive for meetings. We have also set up a blog that allows anyone to receive announcements and information automatically by email. There is more to do in both areas, but we have started the process.

Transparency also involves access to public officials. I am at City Hall every Wednesday morning. Anyone can come in to ask a question, voice an opinion, or just chat about things in the city. Not everyone is satisfied with an answer, but they have had the opportunity to be heard.

At a higher level, transparency means that the public can see the process by which the council, planning commission, or city administration reaches a decision on individual cases and can have confidence that decisions are as consistent as possible with laws, ordinances or other established policies. There may be situations where it may be a good idea to change the law. If so, the

solution is to follow the process to change the law, but don't just ignore the law.

At the highest level, transparency involves the debate of public issues. It involves both the council or planning commission and the public giving their opinion. It involves making arguments that seek to increase clarity rather than confusion. It involves focusing on facts rather than personalities. It involves not only officials showing respect to the public, but also the public showing respect for elected officials, especially at the local level where all elected and appointed officials are unpaid volunteers.

The use of rumors, innuendos and vague unsubstantiated claims of "retribution" is a grave threat to transparency. The recall petitioners have made claims that I have turned Gearhart into a place where people need to be in fear of something or someone, but don't really say what to fear, other than that I have single-handedly undermined the Constitution in Gearhart.

As anyone who has attended City Council meetings over the past 10 months can attest, constitutionally guaranteed freedom of speech is thriving in Gearhart. The First Amendment says that people can say pretty much anything they want to say, and those attending have certainly exercised that right.

A recent commentary in *The Daily Astorian* described recent meetings as "nearly unbearable" ("The dark side of Gearhart," Jan. 23) As the main target of most of the speech, I can certainly agree. There is a difference, however, between the right to say something and whether listeners should take it seriously. This is the key to the recall issue that voters will decide. Do their accusations sound plausible? Do they have any relation to one's perception of life in Gearhart?

I hope you will take some time to ask questions if you have any, and then make an informed decision.

Dianne Widdop is the mayor of Gearhart and faces a recall election March 26.

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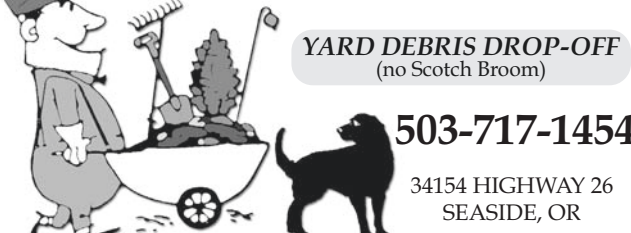
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