

Seaside City Council listens to suggestion for watershed plan

Seaside officials get a 'gentle nudge' on plan

By Nancy McCarthy
Seaside Signal

In a gentle nudge, Katie Voelke, executive director of the North Coast Land Conservancy, suggested to the Seaside City Council that, before the city embarks on another timber harvesting project in the Necanicum watershed, it should have a management plan in place.



KATIE VOELKE

"There might be ways we could support each other and work collaboratively together," Voelke said, while presenting a PowerPoint program detailing the benefits of a watershed plan.

"This is not a presentation about complaints," she said at the council's March 9 meeting. "This is a discussion about the opportunity to work together in the future."

Voelke's remarks came in response to a decision made by city officials to clearcut 60 acres of timber from its property in the South Fork of the Necanicum watershed. The decision was made without providing an opportunity for comment from the land conservancy nor the Necanicum Watershed Council.

Neal Wallace, the city's public works director, said proceeds from the timber harvest would be used to purchase additional land in the watershed.

Both Voelke and Melissa Graeper, coordinator for the watershed council, had asked the city to temporarily halt timber harvesting until they could offer harvesting alternatives. The City Council, however, decided at its February meeting to continue the harvest. City staff members later discovered after searching the archives, that the city had a timber management plan that hadn't been updated since 1983.

The entire Necanicum watershed consists of 49,000 acres; of that, the South Fork portion amounts to 5,192 acres. The city of Seaside owns 1,100 acres in the South Fork; the rest is split nearly evenly by timber operators Campbell Global and Weyerhaeuser.

An updated management plan would enable the city to protect the city's drinking water resources, Voelke said. By having trees in the watershed to collect rainfall and moisture from fog and to act as a natural filtering system, the costs to treat the water are reduced dramatically, she added.

Protecting and enhancing natural water resources is more important than ever with the drought facing California, Voelke said.

"Winters like this show that you can't take water for granted," she said. "Californians are coming to Oregon, and we're going to have huge pressures on the state and huge pressures on our water system."

To manage the city's portion of the watershed, several funding sources are available, Voelke said. The state and local environmental organizations could be tapped.

"Certainly forest harvesting can be a part of the stewardship plan, but it can be part of a conservation



NANCY MCCARTHY PHOTO

Former Seaside City Councilor Stubby Lyons receives a plaque from Seaside Mayor Don Larson honoring Lyons' 14 years of service on the City Council and his extensive involvement in community activities. Lyons said later that it was the "best plaque" he had ever received. A former Seaside High School teacher and football coach, Lyons, who resigned from the council last year, was honored at the March 9 City Council meeting.

approach rather than revenue producing," she said.

Instead of clearcutting and replanting trees that eventually become uniform in size, the management plan would be more selective in the trees harvested, leaving room for smaller trees to grow and protect stream banks, she said.

Local residents might also support the city's efforts to manage the watershed, said Voelke, noting that Cannon Beach residents approved a bond measure to purchase land in the Ecola Creek watershed. She also cited Astoria's effort to protect its forest through the use of carbon credits, which could result in \$1 million in 10 years for the city.

"We are the people drinking the water," she said. "Often, the more people know about their water, where their water comes from, the more they care about it. If they know more about the

Fire station tops list of Gearhart's 2015 goals

Updated comprehensive plan also high on list

By Katherine Lacaze
Seaside Signal

Of a list of 50 potential city projects, replacing or renovating the fire station is the Gearhart City Council's top priority for 2015.

The council identified other projects in its recent goal-setting session, including: investigating system development charges, revamping the city website and updating the city's comprehensive plan.

The council's list was separated into categories such as asset management, transportation, parks and recreation and public safety. From those, they selected the projects they valued the most. The fire station emerged at the top.

"That's probably one of our No. 1 goals, to do something with that building," said City Administrator Chad Sweet.

Mayor Dianne Widdop agreed that the facility is "in desperate need" of repairs.

"If we have an earthquake of any kind, that building is down. I would be very worried about a very bad storm," she said. "To me, this is just one of those things where aren't we lucky nothing has happened yet."

When the community voted in 2006 on a \$3.75 million general obligation bond measure to address the problem, Widdop said, the proposal included plans for a high-end building to house the police department, City Hall and fire station. The bond measure didn't pass because people were concerned about cost, she said.

Widdop suggested developing a less expensive proposal to specifically fo-

cus on the fire department. Sweet said a solution likely would include another bond measure, but the council might want to determine if repairing the old station or building a new one would be more cost-effective. If the decision were made to build a new station, the city then could choose a location and develop a budget, he said.

Councilor Dan Jesse suggested that the council should revisit the city's comprehensive plan. Councilor Kerry Smith agreed it would be good to "bring it into the 21st century."

Jesse said the tone and wording of the plan give the idea that Gearhart is a closed community.

"If you read it before you moved into the community, you wouldn't want to move to the city," he said.

Updating the comprehensive plan would start with the Gearhart Planning Commission, which would make recommendations for the City Council to consider for adoption.

Other goals the council discussed at its work session included:

- Replacing the city's water main;
- Refinancing a 2005 general obligation bond;
- Obtaining grant funding to develop a parks and recreation master plan;
- Updating the emergency operations and hazard mitigation plans;
- Augmenting evacuation supplies and facilities;
- Finishing the city's short-term rental policy.

Sweet said he would update the goals list, which the council will revisit at a future meeting. The list will be posted on the city's website and blog. Sweet will make quarterly reports about the city's progress on the goals.

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