



R.J. MARX/THE DAILY ASTORIAN

Councillors Sue Lorain and Dan Jesse at the Gearhart City Council meeting.

Gearhart plans new short-term rental rules

Poll is scrapped as city schedules work session

By R.J. Marx
Seaside Signal

Gearhart councillors reversed course Wednesday, Dec. 2, and scrapped plans for a short-term rental survey among residents. The survey, which would have been inserted in water bills, was to determine the public's inclination to regulate short-term housing rentals.

Of the city's 1,200 homes with water connections, more than 80 are used for short-term rentals, City Manager Chad Sweet said in a November analysis. Thirty-five of those allow for occupancy of 10 or more.

"I don't think the poll will do any good at this point," Mayor Dianne Widdop said.

"It's not going to accomplish anything. People who have vacation rentals in their neighborhood will possibly respond to it.

People who don't have vacation rentals in their neighborhood — I see totally apathy."

Widdop said the poll would likely be interpreted in different ways without providing real guidance for the council.

"Right now it's more important we go home and start working on regulations, some things we want to do going forward, so we can have things set up for the summer rental season," Widdop said.

North Marion Avenue homeowner Laurie Whittemore asked councillors to adopt educational tools rather than regulation.

"I urge the City Council to adopt a collaborative approach with the short-term rental homeowners," Whittemore said. "Rather than pitting one side against the other, please forgo restrictions in favor of an educational approach."

Council Sue Lorain said education is "always a good thing."

"But I believe, also with education, we need some fundamental things that give consistency to all the rentals," she said.

Lorain asked councillors to choose language carefully and avoid words like "restrictions" or "bans," which have negative connotations.

"I don't think it has ever come up that we have ever said we want to ban or prohibit these homes, but what we want is a regulation for uniformity," Lorain said. "I don't think we need a survey. I think we need some minimum regulation from the start to

level the playing for everybody."

Mixed input

Over recent weeks, councillors had solicited letters and comments from homeowners and renters alike.

"We are not Seaside or Cannon Beach and I suggest that we not copy their ways," Whittemore said in opposing regulation. "Let's keep the 'heart' in Gearhart."

Vacation guests Michel and Marian Boileau urged the council not to restrict short-term rentals in Gearhart. Without a short-term vacation home available, "we would not have come to Gearhart for our vacation," they wrote.

Planning Commission Vice-President Richard Owsley supported regulation. "By consensus, the Planning Commission recommends and supports short-term rental regulations, and we are ready to begin work immediately," Owsley told the council.

"Successful regulation I've seen along the coast includes prudent limitations to the amount of guests a home can have, as well as the amount of vehicles," wrote Dean McElveen, director of operations for Oregon Beach Vacations.

"I am looking for regulation that permits rentals while protecting the feel of our residential, non-touristy community," said Jeremy Davis, who was officially appointed to the city's Planning Commission Wednesday.

South Marion Avenue resident Paula Madden urged adoption of measures like those in Cannon Beach. These could limit the number of short-term rentals and establish a minimum number of days per stay to between five and seven days in the high summer season.

"Gearhart should learn from the Cannon Beach example and follow this lead without delay," Madden wrote.

Joint work session planned
Widdop, Lorain and Councillors Dan Jesse and Paulina Cockrum voted to forgo the poll, while Councillor Kerry Smith voted on its behalf.

Councillors plan a joint City Council and Planning Commission work session, likely the first council meeting of the new year.

In preparation, Sweet was instructed to gather information on licensing, regulations, safety and health measures, rules and taxation.

"I think it would be nice, Chad, for you to get some of the rules of people who have successful rentals, so we can get a wider range of what's working," Lorain said.

"So we don't need to reinvent the wheel," Widdop added.

Cannon Beach prepares to go its own way on floodplain mapping

Residents may see big insurance savings

By Dani Palmer
EO Media Group

CANNON BEACH — New maps could offer flood insurance savings to Cannon Beach residents. But because of problems with North County mapping, it looked like South County's savings would be delayed.

Cannon Beach was ready to make a request to the Federal Emergency Management Agency to adopt the maps, encouraged by business owners and residents who said changes would lower costs. City Planner Mark Barnes had begun writing a draft.

FEMA acted first.

During a City Council work session last month, Barnes said FEMA decided to accelerate its adoption of Cannon Beach and Seaside maps, removing the need to send a letter. In an email exchange shared with Barnes, Stephen Lucker, mapping specialist with the Oregon Department of Land Conservation and Development, asked FEMA engineer David Ratte if the agency was "preparing to separate out the Warrenton and Columbia Estuary work and move forward with the rest of the county." Ratte answered yes.

'Tremendous' cost savings
Accuracy concerns in flood-prone areas affected by the Columbia River near Warrenton and Astoria had stalled adoption of all mapping work throughout Clatsop County, when FEMA originally planned to approve the southern and northern portions of the county together.

North County agencies are now working together to complete an in-depth analysis and technical review of the draft flood maps.

