

Website additions are great for visitors and locals alike

In February, I told you about a new website the Visitors Bureau had just launched. Our most visible asset — with more than 300,000 unique visitors every year — had received a complete facelift and we were just starting to show it off. The project, which came on the heels of our fall rebranding effort, was only a fraction of the way done though. Late last month phase two went live, and with it came the additions we'd been anxiously awaiting.

The initial launch comprised our most critical and popular content. Items like "things to do," our "tide tables," "virtual visitor guide," and "events calendar" were huge draws for us and we could not launch a new website without capturing our core strengths. Up to 50,000 people

SIDE RAIL

JOHN RAHL



a month will access our site during the peak season and we had to make sure we were placing the most critical content front and center.

Phase two ushered in all of our hotel listings, business listings and an entirely new feature for seasideOR.com: recreational trails for hiking, biking and kayaking.

This content was previously housed at seaside.naturally.com, a sister site of our core website, and migrating all of this took some time. It made the most sense for us to have

all of our content on one visually stunning and information-filled site. And so that's what we did.

Our biking section features 12 rides in and around Seaside. In addition to a thorough description of each trail, the details include total mileage, elevation gain, maximum elevation and a GPX file (a special file that users can load onto a GPS device — especially good in areas where cell phone coverage can be spotty or non-existent).

The hiking and kayaking sections, offering eight and four trails respectively, follow a similar outline. All three sections also feature a difficulty meter, telling users if the trail is easy, moderate or hard. Last but not least, we're also working to secure at least three photos for every single trail we have listed on our site. It's great

content and shows off some of the incredible recreational beauty we have throughout the Seaside area.

I made the analogy in my February column of our new website being similar to moving into a new house. Well, a similar thing happened with the phase two development. As we added bells and whistles, budgeted time and expenses for the work, we ultimately got to a point where we had to make a few concessions.

So our blog (which will feature general stories, historical posts and industry information) won't be unveiled until we complete phase three. We'll also introduce a birding section in this next phase.

I like to tell people a website is never really complete, and I don't believe it should be. There's always content

that can be improved or added. Our focus is making a site that not only entices visitors to come to the coast, but also acts as an informative and guiding light for when they are in town.

Just a few days after phase two went live, I attended the Oregon Governor's Conference on Tourism. During the opening dinner on April 24, we were presented with the Outstanding Oregon Tourism Website Award. So if you haven't checked out, please do so, and tell me what you think!

Have a thought or a question about tourism in Seaside, or maybe an idea for a future column? Drop me an email at jrahl@cityofseaside.us. Jon Rahl is the director of tourism for the Seaside Visitors Bureau and assistant general manager of the Seaside Civic & Convention Center.

Two major capital projects loom on the city's horizon

Budget from Page 1A

An improved economy has helped the city build up reserves, he said, and community development — building and planning departments — moved into the black a year ahead of schedule.

"Financially we're in much better shape," he said. "When the economy tanked in 2008, it caused significant problems not only for the private sector, but for the public sector also. We're back in a position where our reserves are pretty good and we don't have to worry if there's a downturn."

Public safety remains the city's No. 1 expense, Winstanley said.

The Seaside Police Department's proposed budget of \$3.4 million represents the largest portion of the \$4.4 million Public Safety total. Fire Department expenditures are about \$731,000, with lifeguard and courts costs completing the sum.

The preliminary budget sets aside about \$225,000 for the Bob Chisholm Community Center Main Hall refresh, Winstanley said, with another \$80,000

of the project cost coming from the partnering Sunset Empire Park and Recreation District.

Capital projects

Two major capital projects loom on the city's horizon — the Avenue U Bridge and a proposed Seaside Civic and Convention Center renovation — but the impact will not be felt in the new year's budget.

Representatives of the convention center went before the City Council in April with plans for a \$15 million upgrade to accommodate more guests and update facilities.

That renovation is not in the budget as councilors have yet to weigh in on the plan.

"They might say we're not prepared to do a renovate, in which case it doesn't require any budget adjustment," Winstanley said.

If the city does approve a project, costs could be paid "a number of ways," including a bond, he said.

The city is in the design phase to replace the Avenue U Bridge at an expected cost of about \$3.5 million, Winstan-

ley said, as Seaside awaits responses for federal or state funding. "My experience is that a lot of times when the federal government starts passing down money, ODOT (Oregon Department of Transportation) says, 'If you've got a project ready to go, we've got some funding.'"

But, he added, "I don't know if they're going to give us any at all."

Other factors

The city has budgeted \$27,000 from its general fund for donations and contributions. Where those funds are headed will be the subject of future Budget Committee meetings.

While cigarette taxes generate \$7,000 in revenue and the city receives \$1,800 in liquor license fees, taxes from the city's three cannabis dispensaries will not be budgeted next year.

"The state of Oregon has been fairly clear on this," Winstanley said. "They're going to keep it all until they decide that they're going to pass some of it down. I'm going to wait for them to pass it down before I start budgeting money for it."

Visitors Bureau awarded for website



Todd Davidson, Travel Oregon CEO; Jon Rahl, Seaside Visitors Bureau; Alana Hughson, Oregon Tourism Commission.

The City of Seaside Visitors Bureau was presented with the Outstanding Oregon Website Award at the 2016 Oregon Governor's on Tourism in Pendleton. The Visitors Bureau earned the award for seasideOR.com,

its new website that debuted after a fall 2015 rebranding effort. Jon Rahl, director of tourism marketing for the Visitors Bureau, was on hand at the April event to accept the award.

LETTERS

Rentals: Setting the record straight

Over the last year, I have attended every Gearhart City Council and Planning Committee meeting dealing with vacation home regulations. I think it is now time to correct conclusions presented by some residents and exaggerated scenarios presented by a member of the Planning Commission in public and in these pages.

Let's deal with reality. According to the 2010 census, Gearhart had 1,450 housing units but only 649 households. The remaining 801 housing units included 723 for vacation use. The balance was vacant as either for sale or rent. Only about one-third of the housing units in Gearhart are owner-occupied primary residences. 50 percent are seasonal and vacation homes. There is a large demand for seasonal and vacation housing in Gearhart which further demonstrates that this is the dominate land use in Gearhart.

At the March 15 Planning Commission meeting, Commissioner Graff posited that with 100 percent occupancy of all the vacation rental homes in Gearhart, the population would swell to over 53,000 with over 17,000 cars. In his March 31 Daily Astorian column he reduced that to number to 751 guests using 85 vacation homes. Inflammatory unfounded numbers are just that — made up, speculative and always changing.

Mr. Todd's recent letter in the Seaside Signal referenced "small investors, who realized they could buy single family homes and capitalize on their investments by renting them out regularly." He also referred to the "onslaught of commercial use in residential neighborhoods." This is total hyperbole and unfounded speculation.

We purchased our home in 2005. At the time it was a long term rental in an extreme state of disrepair. It took a substantial investment of time and money to return the home to a livable condition. I can proudly submit that the major landscape renovations beautified our area on North Marion as evidenced by the many favorable comments we received. This investment helped Gearhart, it did not hinder it.

There is a grave misconception that vacation home owners are rich Portlanders who have no regard for the city or their neighbors and only care about making money. Nothing could be farther from the truth. We knew our purchase would require a lifestyle change which we were willing to accept. We have never made a profit renting our home, quite the contrary. I would be happy to privately submit audited P&L statements showing losses in excess of \$15,000 per year (and some years more). Our intent was not to create a "commercial business." It was to buy a

home for our family to enjoy for a lifetime. Renting our home for only 95 days a year relieves a bit of the financial sting. It is a home, not a commercial commodity to be discarded but to be treated with care. And that is what we have done to the betterment of the city of Gearhart.

Jim Whittemore
Gearhart

Thanks to job fair volunteers

Last month, the second annual Clatsop County High Schools Career and Job Fair was held at the Clatsop County Fairgrounds.

The focus of the career and job fair was threefold: 1) Employers from throughout Clatsop County hiring for positions for immediate employment, and summer jobs. 2) Sharing vocational and career technical careers available that provide family wage jobs, including a pathway through Clatsop Community College and 3) Sharing with our students going away to four year colleges and universities that they can come home after graduation and find a fulfilling career in Clatsop County.

More than 700 students from Astoria, Jewell, Knappa, Seaside & Warrenton High Schools attended.

Sixty-eight businesses participated, more than last year. Many companies hired students on the spot!

Business evaluations were

very positive, and said the kids were very wellorganized this year. The student responses continually stated they were unaware of all the job and career options we have in Clatsop County, and were excited of the potential.

Clatsop Economic Development Resources (CEDR) partnered with the Oregon Employment Department (WorkSource Northwest Oregon and Pacific NW Works) to organize and facilitate this event, but we could have not done it without the over 20 community volunteers who came to twice monthly planning meetings for months, and of course the schools who invested their time with us to make this experience for our kids so memorable.

Everyone worked collaboratively to ensure success of this countywide event for our students, and inspired all involved!

Take a look at www.clatsopjobfair.com for more information. This is the new "go to" website, created by Jim Servino from the Astoria-Warrenton Chamber of Commerce.

We are already starting planning for next year, but I could not let the file close on this year without acknowledging our volunteers.

Kevin Leahy
Executive director, Clatsop Economic Development Resources (CEDR) and Clatsop Community College Small Business Development Center

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