

Short-term rental owners get reprieve in Gearhart

Reading of ordinance will wait until August

By R.J. Marx
Seaside Signal

Two consecutive days of four-hour meetings, public comment and deliberation still left Gearhart without a short-term rental ordinance. But by 10 p.m. Wednesday, July 6, it was getting closer.

Councilors declined to conduct a first reading of the ordinance, designed to regulate properties rented for less than 30 days. But a revised draft of Gearhart’s zone code amendments for short-term rental properties from city councilors will be presented at Gearhart’s August council meeting.

Officials worked their way through the amendments, picking up where they left off Tuesday night in a public hearing at the firehouse. Most of the conditions presented by the Planning Commission were left intact, with significant changes to the number of permits offered to property owners, an extension to bring properties to code and a discounted fee for property owners who provide go-bags to their guests. Councilors raised the proposed permit fee from \$500 to \$600 per short-term rental



R.J. MARX/SEASIDE SIGNAL

Paulina Cockrum and Sue Lorain deliberate at the Gearhart City Council meeting.

property application, with a refund of \$100 for those who provide tsunami preparedness supplies to their guests.

The permit fee and lodging taxes are designed to cover the city’s costs, City Administrator Chad Sweet said. He estimated city income from short-term rentals could reach \$200,000, with more than \$140,000 from lodging taxes, paid quarterly, and \$50,000 from rental fees.

Other conditions for permit applicants include providing neighbor notice and a 24-hour representative able to physically respond to the vacation rental site within 30 minutes. Property owners would be required to display a notice of occupancy, parking and good neighbor policies in every rental, and occupancy limited to two people per bedroom. A pro-

vision requiring a maximum occupancy of more than 10 people was deleted if a property otherwise meets the ordinance requirements.

Tsunami ready

Councilors expressed concern for visitors unprepared for risks in the tsunami zone. “From a preparedness standpoint, I feel all these items should be mandatory,” Councilor Dan Jesse said. “We owe it to people coming to our community to have someone looking after them.”

A Planning Commission recommendation of go-bags and a NOAA weather radio was modified to offer a discount on the application for homeowners providing emergency supplies.

Councilors also considered what conditions would warrant a loss of permit, forming

a consensus that three citations to separate rental parties would be required to trigger revocation, rather than multiple citations from a single incident.

A “bad group” should not be enough to revoke an owner’s permit, Councilor Sue Lorain said.

“I don’t think it’s fair to kick somebody out because of a bad apple,” Jesse added.

The city will also provide language for a variance process, one which could impact several Gearhart properties, including the Lodge at Little Beach and Breakaway Lodge, both of which received approval from the city in 1994 to operate under hotel rules. “Both submitted evidence they’ve long been used as lodges,” Watts said.

They have each paid the 7 percent lodging tax since that time, Sweet said, and could be treated as nonconforming properties.

Planner Carole Connell advised putting a “placeholder” to the ordinance to consider variance procedure.

“The key is to have criteria that can be applied across the board,” Watts said.

With the close of deliberations, councilors unanimously approved a motion to direct staff to prepare a final document in ordinance form for its August meeting.



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Neacoxie Creek Barn in Gearhart.

Neacoxie barn faces foreclosure

Gearhart event center scheduled to be auctioned

By R.J. Marx
Seaside Signal

GEARHART — Martha Strickland, a co-owner of Neacoxie Barn in Gearhart, is facing foreclosure at the former livery stable on the banks of Neacoxie Creek.

“In October, the bank puts it up for auction, or it forecloses,” Gearhart City Administrator Chad Sweet said.

While Gearhart’s Shannon Smith is listed on the property deed, she is not listed as a party to the foreclosure proceeding, which appeared as a legal notice in The Daily Astorian. The notice of default comes after Strickland’s failure to repay \$297,741 and other advances and expenses. The property is scheduled to be sold at auction at Clatsop County Courthouse on Oct. 7.

The Neacoxie Creek Barn, at 774 Pacific Way in Gearhart, has been used for weddings, family reunions and other commercial events. Without a conditional use permit and a building occupancy permit, according to Gearhart officials, the owners have put the health and safety of guests and residents at risk.

“My property has been listed recently in legal notices, due in part, to personal impacts upon me and ... most of all through political ill-will,” Shannon Smith said at a July Gearhart City Council meeting.

“I am in conversation with prospective investors and co-partners who share my goal of preserving this unique historic resource for all of Gearhart to use and enjoy for many years to come.”

On Thursday, she said the loan is in modification consideration by the lender, which could end the sale proceeding. “Foreclosures are more common than people know,” she said. “They often get to this level and they get resolved. I’m extremely optimistic.”

Smith said she became an “underwater property owner” in 2007, within months of her purchase of the barn, when she was hard-hit by the economic downturn. “I have held on despite the land use and zoning approaches taken by the city’s officials in their interpretation of the allowed use of one’s property.”

A court order has suspended use of the barn until Smith meets conditions of city approval. In May, Smith said she plans to bring the building up to code. If Smith violates the court order, she would receive a \$500 fine for a zone code violation. This would be in addition to more than \$30,000 in administrative fines racked up by Smith, an amount reduced to \$15,000 by the Gearhart City Council in December.

Clatsop County Circuit Court Judge Philip Nelson extended an order keeping the former livery stable off-limits for parties and special events, at least until October.



Shannon Smith

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Shannon Smith

Peace Builders partners with Rotary to create a network of bully-free zones

Seaside Rotarians share ‘four-way test’

By Eve Marx
For Seaside Signal

Rotarians Alan Evans and Veronica Russell are working to extend the reach of the Seaside School District’s bullying prevention program by taking it to the streets.

Seaside Rotary hands out dictionaries to every fourth-grader inscribed with their names, Russell said. “We help host the all-night grad party for seniors each year, we offer scholarships and we have the Rotary youth exchange.”

Rotary shares the organization’s “four-way test” with fifth-graders, guiding ethical principles of service and goodwill, she added.

The school district’s own bullying prevention program is regularly discussed at monthly assemblies, reminding students what to say and do should they witness someone being bullied, or if they are victims of bullying.

The school’s partnership with Rotary began at a Peace Builders brainstorming session earlier in the school year. Gaps in the anti-bullying program became apparent.

“The kids at school had the oversight of staff to help prevent bullying, but what about those kids walking to and from school, riding a bike to an event, or to a friend’s house on a weekend?” Russell said. “There was nothing in place to provide protection away from school, so we decided to look to our business community.”

This resulted in the creation of bully-free zones around town where shop owners could be on the lookout and where bullying would not tolerated. Russell said dozens of businesses expressed interest in helping out, so the Peace Builders committee created a simple set of rules and a window sticker. They reached out to Seaside Police Chief Dave Ham for feedback.

“School-age kids are our most vulnerable citizens,” Russell said. “We hope these safe zones offer a haven for kids for those in-between times when they’re not at school or at home.”

Nearly two dozen Seaside businesses including Beach



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Rotary Peace Builders co-chairs Veronica Russell and Alan Evans with Chief Dave Ham; front row, students from Seaside School District: Kayla Sandoval, Samantha Evans.

FOR MORE INFORMATION about the Bully-Free zones, contact Russell at veronicarussell@gmail.com or Evans at a.evans@helping-handsreentry.org.

Books, Oceanside Vacation Rentals, the Seaside Chamber, the Sunset Pool and Park, Seaside Coffee House and Ace Hardware, expressed interest in being Bully-Free zones.

“Our goal is to create a network of safe zones, but also to make all of Seaside a bully-free community,” Evans said.

Russell and Evans share something in common giving them the inside track on what it’s like to be bullied. “We were both redheaded, freckle-faced kids growing up in the 1970s when there were no bullying prevention programs in place,” Russell said. “We were both bullied and know how that feels.”

Through their affiliation with Rotary, they knew they could do more. “We wanted to partner with the schools and find more concrete ways to work proactively on the problem,” Russell said. She said the school district stepped up their game, and at the beginning of the school year, Broad-



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Bully-free zone at Seaside Coffee Shop.

way Middle School began offering specialized training to staff, faculty, and community members through the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program.

They worked most closely with John McAndrews, principal at Broadway Middle School, where bullying was most prevalent and “where we could make the biggest impact,” Russell said. “Alan and I attended school assemblies at Broadway Middle School and spoke at a recent assembly about what we were doing as Peace Builders from Seaside Rotary.”

Local businesses who wish to participate in the program

can sign up through a form. “We’re currently signing up businesses and organizations and should soon have a list and a map of bully-free locations,” Russell said. “Typically they will be located in places where children go and the routes they take to and from school.”

She said the zones are meant to serve as places of temporary reprieve, where children can feel safe from being bullied. Through the Seaside Police Department’s tracking system, the department will be able to get a sense of who is being bullied, where it happens and who is doing the bullying.

You can help weed the Skipanon River by canoe

The wild, forested upper Skipanon River is lush with towering Sitka spruce, native sedges and invasive plants such as purple loosestrife, yellow flag iris, and ivy. North Coast Land Conservancy owns three properties totaling 106 acres along the Skipanon near Warrenton High School. The properties are impossible to access on foot, so staff and volunteers plan to ride the tide and weed the waterway by boat on Wednesday, July 27, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Stewardship day is a partnership with Skipanon Watershed Council.

The conservancy will provide canoes on a space-available basis. Wear clothing appropriate for boating and the weather, and bring lunch, drinking water, and gloves. There are no toilets or potable



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Invasive yellow flag iris seed pods.

water on site. The conservancy will provide any necessary tools. Volunteers may also participate with their own canoe or kayak. In either case, contact Stewardship Director Melissa Reich in advance at melissar@nclctrust.org or call 503-738-9126 for RSVP and location, and to reserve a spot in a canoe if needed.

Silent auction to benefit Alzheimer’s research

Avamere at Seaside will hold its second annual silent auction for Alzheimer’s from 4 to 6 p.m. Saturday, July 23. This year’s entertainment will feature jazz musician Shirley Yates and local wines and cheese will be provided in abundance for wine tasting. This event is open to the community. Area businesses and private individuals have generously donated items for the auction, which include dining certificates, gift cards,

rounds of golf, kitchen cabinets, lawn care and more. Avamere at Seaside has been a part of the Seaside community since 2001 and serve both the assisted living and memory care needs along the coast. Because of Avamere’s commitment to the care and development of residents with Alzheimer’s, Avamere at Seaside is located at 2500 S. Roosevelt Drive. For information, call 503-738-0900, or visit www.avamereatseaside.com.