

Bike lanes in the tsunami zone



Jim Mendenhall, owner of Triangle Towing, upends a 2006 Ford Escape that came to rest on its roof after nosediving in the Dairy Queen parking lot in 2014. The intersection by Dairy Queen could see changes under proposals from the city.

A Gearhart Transportation System Plan makes a lot of sense. But in a place due within the next 15 years to experience a 9.0 earthquake and tsunami plan, there are some special considerations.

City Planner Carole Connell and city staff were able to win the \$100,000 grant about two years ago, Connell said at an October presentation at City Hall.

Gearhart’s grant proposal had the usual requests for sidewalks and bike paths, but “the one that got their attention was the tsunami evacuation plan,” Connell said.

After the grant was awarded, the process of hiring a consultant followed. The city contacted the Portland-based consulting firm DKS.

“We’re telling a story,” Kevin Chewuk of DKS said at the Gearhart presentation. “Each part is a basic part of the story.”

Consultants present an “aspirational project list” to address all of the city’s transportation needs, whether the city can pay to fund them or not. Analysis is geared to the next 20 years, to 2040.

They considered state, county and local rules and identified areas of “transportation enhancement” and “transportation improvement.”

Elements of the enhancement project consider traffic-calming devices on city streets, tsunami route identification, bike parking, “way-finding” signage for bicyclists and pedestrians and Ridge Path enhancements.

Chewuk is right: the plans will tell a story: how the city perceives its audience and its users.

There are those needing bus transport to Warrenton and Astoria. Hikers and walkers who want to trek through the city’s magnificent sheltered trails. Parents who want to drive the babysitter home without making two dangerous left-hand turns to go one block, from Salminen to Hillila and home again.

Even with a signal at Highway 101 and Pacific Way, “You’re standing in that little space waiting for the light,” Connell said. “So far, the east side people are frustrated by those constraints. We know that’s where the problems are.”

Fifty-two improvement projects are listed in the consultant’s Sept. 29 document. They connect walking and biking facilities and address the need to cross the highway. “A lot of the projects we identified are trail projects that could facilitate tsunami evacuation, but also act as recreational facilities through the year,” Chewuk said.

About 10 people a day use Sunset Empire Transportation District buses in Gearhart, according to the memo. Improvements to bus stops near Wild Rose or Cottonwood lanes could make the prospect more appealing, featuring “new sheltered stops” to keep riders out of the rain while they wait.

Another proposal suggests a traffic signal is considered at Highway 101 and Gearhart Loop Road, what the state identifies as a high-collision location.

“Biking and walking on the highway are dangerous,” Connell said in October. “Crossings don’t exist.”

The highway — innocuously called “Park Avenue” on maps — gets the bulk of consideration as the city seeks to make it easier for bikes and walkers to cross the 80-foot roadway. Options include narrowing portions to three lanes, buffered bike lanes and widening for sidewalks.

The most costly approach would widen the highway to five lanes with a sidewalk and bike lanes.

The least expensive alternative? Do nothing.

The memorandum now goes before the Planning Commission, where they’ll be presented with the first draft, consider options and narrow down the list. Their findings will be refined to maximize funds, minimize impacts to environment, and “balance investments across all modes of travel,” according to Chewuk.

“They’re going to finish the plan and hopefully get it adopted,” Connell said.

Once adopted, Gearhart is eligible for additional state



Gearhart Planner Carole Connell and consultant Kevin Chewuk discuss the city’s proposed Transportation System Plan.

SEEN FROM SEASIDE

R.J. MARX



funding. If grant funds are acquired, the city can start prioritizing them by importance.

While analyzing options, city and residents should consider not only the memo at hand, but future what-ifs.

Will the Gearhart fire hall be replaced, and if so, where? When Gearhart Elementary School relocates, what will replace it?

Where will residents find the greatest access to cache sites in case of a long-term need for emergency supplies?

Could new construction east of the highway call for additional, previously unconsidered roads and crossings?

Most towns don’t need it, but for Gearhart, which lies almost entirely within the tsunami zone, the emergency component should be an opportunity to meet multiple goals — emergency evacuation, pedestrian safety and improved roads for bicyclists and drivers.

City Administrator Chad Sweet said last month the state responded to the city’s ideas about planning for tsunami and quake hazards, “which was part of the reason we were selected for the grant.”

The other reason, he added, was that the city didn’t have a transportation systems plan.

We think, as the state did awarding the grant, the first reason — the threat of hazard in the Cascadia Subduction Zone — is the most compelling. The tsunami safety aspect of the program drew the state to funding this grant. A bike lane is terrific, but in a tsunami, drivers may swerve.

Here’s my plan: Put money into scooters and motorbikes for emergency getaways. Install large, readable maps. Test loudspeakers to make sure they are clear and can be heard throughout the city. Give each residence an individualized evacuation plan. Establish an emergency database accessible by registered users. Construct pedestrian bridges over every waterway. Inform every resident about tsunamis, landslides and quakes.

And while we’re at it, put a covered shelter on that bus stop.

‘A lot of the projects we identified are trail projects that could facilitate tsunami evacuation, but also act as recreational facilities through the year.’

Kevin Chewuk
consultant for DKS



Bob Cook takes the plunge.

Crossing one off the bucket list

After examining my bucket list, I decided it was time to check something off or kick it and nobody wants to kick the bucket. Since elder Bush did it at the age of 85, why couldn’t I at the young age of 82!

I thought of a lot of reasons why I couldn’t or shouldn’t, but there was nobody to tell me how dumb it was, so I called the club at the Molino Airport and made arrangements to go sky diving on my 82nd birthday. The first thing I was told was that it should be tandem (student tied to the instructor) and the main reason is that an older person’s memory and reflexes are not as good as they used to be, of which I can attest to. After a lot of instructions and reminders of safety, we started the long walk. During this time I was reminded that just because I’d paid my way didn’t mean I had to go.

Upon close examination of the airplane I noticed there was neither seat for me or a parachute. I was immediately reminded of the briefing I had just received. During our take off, I sat on the floor and halfway to 14,000 feet the instructor got behind me and secured us together to the point that all of my movements were controlled by him.

When the moment of truth arrived the exit door was opened and loded in position. I was moved to the door and positioned so that I had no choice. It was a long way down and so i thought it best to just don’t look. At this moment I thought this is a young man’s game and that is why “God made young men.” I was thankful that he did as I had no intention of jumping again. Once we left the airplane there was no stopping us. But we did slow down when the chute was deployed. A few maneuvers caused us to spin and to go to our right or left, which caused a bit of vertigo. Fortunately I had no control so consequently we landed in a sitting down position within 50 feet of our designated point.

I was apprehensive at first but since my will was already made out, meant there was only one thing left to do. I wrote my obituary and left it on my counter top. When I returned home I tore it up.

GUEST COLUMN
BOB COOK

Bob Cook
Seaside

EDITOR’S NOTE:
Claire Lovell’s column “Scene and Heard” will be back in the Nov. 25 Signal.

SCENE & HEARD
CLAIRE LOVELL



LETTERS

Don’t shut off Avenue U

I am writing in response to a letter that was printed in the Sept. 16 edition of the Seaside Signal. In the letter, the writer expressed his thoughts about the upcoming local election and outlined some ideas that he thinks would be good to help reinforce and protect the city and it’s residents against a possible tsunami and other natural disasters and problems.

Some interesting ideas were presented in the letter, however, there is one point on which I disagree and that is the comment that the Avenue U bridge has absolutely no value in the event of a tsunami evacuation and that money that has been set aside to strengthen and retrofit the Avenue U bridge should be used for something else.

I disagree with this idea because there are many homes and residents who live in this area and several businesses who use this bridge on a daily basis. The Avenue U bridge aids with the improved flow of traffic in the Seaside area and offers many people an effective way to get out of the area and into the town and other surrounding areas without having to drive through the crowded downtown area.

I agree that it would be good to begin retrofitting the bridges and securing the schools, they are both important areas but it is important to take care of the Avenue U bridge too. It would not be good to cut off one end of the city by not fixing the only bridge that serves that area.

Thank you for publishing my letter and giving me a chance to respond and express myself.

Carrie Paldanius
Salem

Lost rentals

I told you so. The rental housing market in Seaside was totally destroyed by the conversion of long-term rentals into vacation rentals in the early 1990s. At the time the City Council and Planning Commission had members who

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