

Gearhart dune management plan misses window

City to seek more information

By R.J. Marx
Seaside Signal

Earlier this year, the city developed a plan to cut noxious weeds on Gearhart's foredunes, with the goal of maintaining public safety, protecting firefighters and beach habitat.

But after concerns from residents that a proposed amendment to the city's beach and dunes overlay zone was over-reaching, information incomplete and ill-timed, city councilors agreed to postpone the Wednesday, May 3, public hearing.

"The city finds the opportunity to address the fire hazard and noxious weed growth in the subject area has passed until later this year," City Planner Carole Connell wrote in a report delivered to councilors.



R.J. MARX/SEASIDE SIGNAL

The invasive plant Scotch broom proliferates in the Gearhart foredunes.

Safety, habitat at issue

In January, residents filled the Gearhart Fire Station for an education forum and town hall meeting on an amendment permitting the removal of noxious weeds.

The panel of city officials,

state parks representatives and other experts was organized by Margaret Marino, a resident who had expressed concerns about the vegetation at city meetings and reached out to state departments and ecologists for assistance.

The amendment would have permitted the "removal,

destruction or uprooting" of vegetation in areas of Gearhart's foredunes. The amendment would have required re-vegetation of native plants or grasses after removal. Letters on behalf of the amendment stressed the risk of fire from overgrown vegetation.

"As a child in the 1980s,

I witnessed the power and speed of a large dune fire that started close to the northern end of Ocean Avenue and spread down the dune to nearly in front of our home," Gearhart property owner Joe Gregoire wrote. "Had there been the high fuel-load currently in place in the dunes with the added height ... I believe the outcome would have been much worse."

"I am in support of clearing and cleaning the safety lane for fire and police access to Little Beach," Gearhart's Ted Amato wrote in late-April.

Fire Chief Bill Eddy provided testimony that a wildland fire in the area would be left to burn itself out because of the amount of flammable fuel load.

"As the dune area now exists, there is a real public safety concern, with the limited access for emergency vehicles," Police Chief Jeff Bowman wrote in March. "We have re-

sponded to incidents such as unattended campfires, unlawful lodging, illegal fireworks, minors in possession, parties and other minor disturbances."

Threatened species

Future council decisions will also be driven by not only public safety but on impacts to threatened or endangered wildlife.

Any proposed land use action may negatively impact bird habitat in the area, Connell said in her staff report.

Five bird species — murrelets, northern spotted owl, short-tailed albatross, streaked horned lark and western snowy plover are threatened or endangered species nesting in critical Gearhart foredune habitat, according to correspondence from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Leatherback, olive ridley and loggerhead sea turtles may also be found in the Gearhart dunes.

Students seek to spread joy, happiness

Sprinklers from Page 1A

"It's always easy to be quiet and not say a word," he said. "You're just passing by or you're busy."

Yet, he added, while at first it may seem difficult to approach those people, talk to them and ask what's going on, doing so can make a significant difference.

"Just asking someone if they're okay can save a life," agreed fellow student Kodie Stark.

Hence, Breaking the Silence was deemed a fitting description and title for what the students hope to accomplish by uniting with one another. Bullying has affected each of the members in one way or another. Some are the victims of bullying, some former perpetrators, and others were witnesses. A few had taken each role at one point or another. They have seen the negative ramifications of bullying, including self-harm and suicide, and want to make a difference.

"In order for a change to happen, everyone has to do something about it," group member Autumn Benthien said. "That's kind of what we're doing. We're trying to make that change and get everyone to not only see what they're doing, but also help people with their struggles."

When a tragedy occurs as a result of bullying, people often are shaken up and willing to change, but "that's not how it should be," Kiser said, adding people should be kind to one another "every single day without something like that happening."

"It should never have to come to that," he said.

Fellow student Lola Paser-Johnson echoed that sentiment.

"It's sad to think that someone has to take their life in order for people to see that it's a big thing, that someone has to kill themselves in order for people

to realize, 'Wow, bullying is a big deal,'" she said.

Planting seeds of change

While the students were unable to get the group established as an official club at the high school this school year, they hope to do so during the 2017-18 school year. Members, however, were unwilling to wait for a club designation to get to work.

They are each focusing on ways they can personally promote awareness, compassion and kindness at school and home.

"Not a lot of people know of all the different forms of bullying and how impactful it is to people in general," student Gage Cain said. "You have to start somewhere, and by simply letting someone that it's happening, it's a start to changing."

Desiring to create an even greater impact, Breaking the Silence also put together the Happiness Sprinkling and have made it into a school-wide event, encouraging all students to take part. The objective is "focusing on the kindness part, focusing on the positive, rather than the negative," by disseminating uplifting, motivational messages throughout Seaside, Kerr said.

On May 2, the students left the school and marched downtown. At the memorial for fallen Seaside police Sgt. Jason Gooding, which sits outside the Pig 'N Pancake on Broadway, the marchers lingered and conducted a moment of silence. Then, they moved on to the Turn-around and headed back to the high school. The Silence Breakers are inviting community members and students from other schools to participate in the Happiness Sprinkling and march with them. They request that all participants wear yellow.

For more information, contact Yates at 503-738-5586.

Gearhart fire station proposal causes clash

Gearhart from Page 1A

two-year process that evaluated the merits and downfalls of nine different locations to replace the deteriorating station on Pacific Way.

After a series of geologic and economic evaluations, the fire station committee narrowed down the choices to either rebuilding at the current location or in the east half of the oceanfront park between Pacific Way and First Street.

Building a new fire station in the park means the station would be much less vulnerable to a tsunami, but residents are concerned about losing a community landmark.

The current fire station was built to the standards of the late-1950s, many years before anyone understood the extent or potential consequences of a Cascadia Subduction Zone event. In the event of a tsunami the station, already riddled with stress fractures, could be

inundated by 10 feet of water, according to the geologic report commissioned last year.

Local geologist Tom Horning said that an earthquake and tsunami are due sometime in the next five to 50 years, and according to modeling done by the state, waves could rise from 40 to 60 feet.

But this wasn't a part of the equation back in 2006, when the city failed to pass a \$3.75 million bond to build a new fire station. In 2015, the City Council reopened discussions about renovating or replacing the station, making it one of the city's top priorities.

With the park sitting at 48 feet above sea level compared with the 27 feet the fire station currently stands, City Administrator Chad Sweet said the park was the only centrally located space that wouldn't be inundated by water that the city could afford.

Other locations that met the first two criteria are either owned privately or prohibitively expensive.

Locations to the east were vulnerable to flooding from the Neacoxie. And if the fire station were on the hills all those services would be cut off from the town below without some form of bridge, Sweet said.

Sweet said if the plan were accepted it would cost the city between \$5 million to \$7 million, which would cover the cost of a new building, replacing a fire engine and renovations at City Hall to retrofit what would be the former offices of the fire and police chiefs.

The lot including the building and parking would be about 54,500 square feet. Park enhancements could be part of the plan, Sweet said.

"We know there's some taking, but there would be giving back, too," he said.

Alternatives

Many residents expressed their discontent with the park even being considered as an option.

The land has a deed restriction that allows it only to be a park, and the city would have to ask Clatsop County's permission to lift the restriction before starting any projects.

But for some neighbors, it wasn't about just losing some land — it was about losing part of the character of the town.

City Councilor Dan Jesse warned that almost any other site would require the community to raise a considerable amount of money.

"I'm not convinced that if we put out a larger bond measure the community would support it," Jesse said.

Sweet said the public forum on Thursday was just one of many forums the city intends to hold about the issue.

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