

Gearhart hunts for the perfect firehouse location

Public sour on park site

By R.J. Marx
Seaside Signal

The city is looking for alternatives to a new firehouse on public parkland, a proposal that met with strong pushback at a public forum in May.

With some willing property owners, conversations about potential sites are underway.

The current firehouse consists of a cinder-block building at 670 Pacific Way, built in 1958, and is considered outdated and vulnerable to earthquake and tsunami. While built “fairly stoutly,” according to geologist Tom Horning, who has served as a consultant for the city and is a Seaside city councilor, the property is likely to flood even in a moderate tsunami, prompting discussion of a new location.

Gearhart has two and possibly three potential sites for acquisition, Mayor Matt Brown said Tuesday, June 27, and talks with property owners have begun.

Brown said he hopes to present the new locations, along with cost breakdowns, to the public this fall.

“The park can be an option, but I believe we need to present three options to the general public in a town hall meeting later this year,” Brown said.

Limited options

After a two-year study of nine locations, the firehouse committee narrowed the choices down to three: Gearhart Park at the corner of South Marion and Pacific Way; the current firehouse on Pacific Way; and Trail’s End, directly across from the fire station on the south side of Pacific Way.

“Unfortunately the current location of the fire station would not be approved by



R.J. MARX/SEASIDE SIGNAL

Of the sites considered by the city for a new firehouse, Gearhart Park remains the only one still under consideration.

DOGAMI (Oregon Department of Geology and Mineral Industries) to build there, and the current condition of the building there is not good,” Brown said.

The Trail’s End site was eliminated because of low elevation, poor soil quality and public opposition. Locations to the east are vulnerable to flooding from the Neacoxie.

Now, the city is left with only the park site. But at a May public forum, many residents expressed their discontent with the park even being considered as an option. Despite the park’s 48-foot elevation — the fire station property stands at an elevation of 27 feet — the proposal met stiff resistance. Many of those who spoke said they considered the park a part of the “character of the town.”

Is park best choice?

Some city councilors and fire committee members still consider the park location the most optimal for a new firehouse.

City Councilor Sue Lorain, a member of the firehouse committee, said misconceptions arose over the park site in terms of its size, location and elevation. The park is

higher than the current fire station, she said at a City Council discussion in early June, and the location is far more secure in an earthquake or tsunami.

“I would recommend we go ahead with the park, and get rid of misconceptions, and have another town hall meeting at the end of September,” Lorain said. “If nothing comes up, I think we go with the park.”

Lorain asked councilors to extend the search process until September, and eliminate the current firehouse as a potential location.

“I feel it’s important to keep this ball rolling,” City Councilor Dan Jesse said at that meeting. “At some point a large earthquake is going to happen. I don’t know when that’s going to be. But we should keep propelling this forward. At some point we will have to decide, ‘This site is the best we’re going to get,’ and be willing to move forward, even if we lose.”

What’s ahead

At the City Council’s June meeting, councilors agreed to continue the location search.

One privately owned site under consideration reaches an elevation of 75 feet,

Mylar balloons remain outage threat

Firefighters see greater risk in fireworks, illegal parking



SUBMITTED PHOTO

By R.J. Marx
Seaside Signal

The city’s 2015 July Fourth celebration saw plenty of fireworks, but one piece of pyrotechnics went awry. Then Pacific Power spokeswoman Sheila Holden called it “Mylargate.” When a metal-coated balloon made contact with a Pacific Power substation, sparks flew and the South County went dark for hours, disrupting celebrations, picnics and parades.

More than 8,000 customers were affected by a metallic-skinned helium balloon that got away, according to Pacific Power. Crews found “unmistakable red, white and blue Mylar shreds” when doing repairs, Pacific Power reported at the time.

The balloon from a nearby celebration caused a main substation transformer to short circuit near Seaside Factory Outlet Center. Other equipment was also damaged on nearby poles.

Seaside, Gearhart and parts of Warrenton were without power from about 4:40 to 10:20 p.m. as Pacific Power crews replaced the damaged equipment.

Pacific Power wants Independence Day events this year to be Mylar-free. So far in 2017, Pacific Power has recorded 13 instances where balloons have caused outages somewhere in the three states — Oregon, Washington and California — the company serves. In 2016, there were 26 such outages.

“Mylar is particularly bad as it is a conductive material,” Regional Business Manager Alisa Dunlap said Friday. “However, all items that can get tangled in our lines can cause problems.”

Mylar balloons can pose a threat to transformers.

The 2015 Seaside Fourth of July outage was an “unavoidable fluke,” Dunlap said. Nevertheless, precautions must be taken.

“We always try to communicate with the community at large that balloons, kites and drones don’t mix well with power lines,” she added. “We have done our best to education.”

In issuing a list of safety tips, the power company advises residents to keep the balloons indoors where they can’t rise into overhead power lines or drift into contact with transformers or substations. Make sure the string for each balloon is securely attached and short enough to control its direction, power company officials recommend attaching a weight to the balloon’s string. Never intentionally release metallic balloons, they warn.

In 2015, as soon as the power went out, the Seaside Fire Department called the substation to respond to the incident. While there was smoke coming from the failed transformer, there were no flames.

While Seaside Fire Chief Joey Daniels has not completely discounted the possibility of another Mylar incident, he and department members are focused on other safety measures. “That’s the first time any of us had ever heard of something like that,” Daniels said Friday. “It’s such a fluke. We have more issues with people letting off illegal fireworks and illegal parking.”

Gilligan graduates from Coast Guard Academy

Carrie Gilligan accepts congratulations from President Donald Trump at her graduation from the U.S. Coast Guard Academy in May.



On May 17, Carrie Gilligan graduated from the U.S. Coast Guard Academy, sixth in her class with high honors. Gilligan graduated valedictorian from Seaside High School in 2011.

RV accident on Highway 26

EO Media Group

An accident Wednesday involving a rolled over motor home complicated traffic on U.S. Highway 26 south of Saddle Mountain.

Reports of an accident in the area trick-

led in to Astoria 911 just after 10:15 a.m. Initially, several vehicles were thought to be involved.

Drivers, many of whom are traveling after the Fourth of July holiday, were warned to expect delays.

Horning, Stacey leave Sunset Empire board

Long-time board Sunset Empire Park and Recreation District members Tom Horning and George Stacey passed the torch to incoming board members Jeremy Mills and Veronica Russell during the district’s

regular board meeting this past Tuesday night. Mills and Russell won the seats during a special election this past May.

Horning, a board member since July of 2009 was voted in as a Seaside City Council

member during the general election last fall. Stacey, who has been serving since he was appointed to fill a board vacancy in July of 2010, was also an original SEPRD board member during its early formation.

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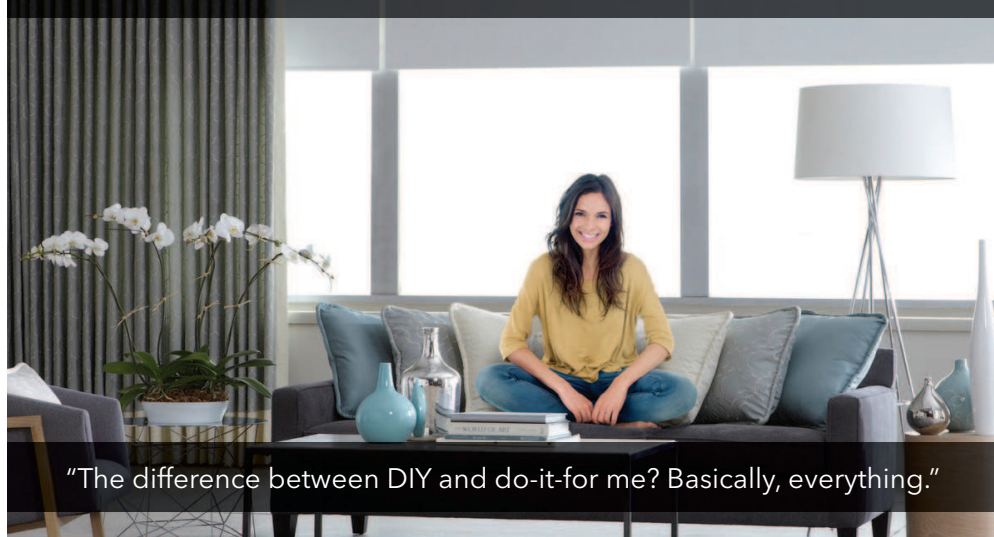


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