

Pearl of Seaside owner pulls the plug

Sale prompts exit of Seaside hotel plan

By R.J. Marx
Seaside Signal

Some neighbors may rest a little easier as plans for a luxury hotel on the Prom were scrapped in July.

After a year of Planning Commission and City Council review — and a challenge to the state's Land Use Board of Appeals — an application for a variance for the proposed 45-room Pearl of Seaside at 341 S. Prom was withdrawn because of the pending sale of the property.

City councilors took action Monday, July 24, to suspend any further action on the appeal, according to City Planner Kevin Cupples.

Owner Antoine Simmons indicated the purchaser was not planning to pursue the proposed development project, so the request for an 8-foot property variance "has effectively been withdrawn from consideration at this point," Cupples said.

Two other Simmons properties, Seaside's Gilbert Inn and the Inn at the Prom, are included in the sale.

"The offer came out of



The Gilbert Inn in Seaside will see new ownership in September as part of the deal ending a new hotel on the Prom.

left field and was too good to pass up," Simmons said. "I couldn't say 'no.'"

Neighbors object

Simmons and his wife, Rocio, own and operate four boutique hotels in Seaside and Cannon Beach.

Plans for the Pearl of Seaside called for three stories, a penthouse floor and tower roof.

A two-level parking garage on Beach Drive with 41 inside spaces would have been supplemented with an additional 10 outdoor spaces on Avenue A.

But stall lengths, back-out and lane widths required a variance from the Planning Commission. Simmons also requested a height variance of 7 feet because of grade differ-

ences on various parts of the property.

After several months of testimony, the Planning Commission granted both variances.

During the 2016 planning process, neighbors — including Dan and Susan Calef — said the proposed building would eliminate natural light, reduce parking spaces and could "disrupt property values."

After a fall appeal was upheld by City Council, Simmons and architect David Vonada returned to the Planning Commission in January with revised plans, leaving only the 8-foot grade difference needed to allow the increase to 60 feet for the roof height at the west building wing, an addition of 15 feet above the 45 feet allowed by city zoning. Without a height variance, the building would have lost two floors and been limited to 30 rooms, Simmons said.

The Planning Commission's granting of the variance was again challenged by neighbors.

The proposed resort, the Calefs wrote, "will dwarf our house, invade our privacy by placing hotel balconies feet from our upstairs bedroom and generally diminish the value of our property."

This time, the City Council upheld the Planning Commission's granting of the height variance.

The Calefs challenged the decision with the state's Land Use Board of Appeals.

September sale date

After the city received notice of the sale, City Attorney Dan Van Thiel filed a withdrawal from the state proceeding in order to suspend

any further action on the appeal, sending the matter back to the city.

On July 24 the council approved the Calef appeal "based on a finding of no further contest."

Councilors Seth Morrissy, Tita Montero, Randy Frank and Dana Phillips, along with Mayor Jay Barber, voted in favor of the revised final order. Councilors Tom Horning and Steve Wright recused themselves.

"We felt that the proposed hotel was simply too big and we are pleased that the plan has been withdrawn," Calef said in an email after the meeting. "We wish Mr. Simmons good luck with his future endeavors and appreciate the civility he has shown through a process that easily could have been very acrimonious."

The identity of the purchaser was not available at press time.

The sale of the properties will be completed by September, Simmons said.

His properties in Cannon Beach, including the Blue Gull Inn and the Inn at Haystack Rock, are unaffected by the sale.

"I am now working on building a 37-unit apartment complex in Warrenton," Simmons added.



KATHERINE LACAZE/FOR SEASIDE SIGNAL

Children experiment with paper plates and small round game pieces to get a sense of how far away the moon is from the sun in order for a solar eclipse to occur.

Games, activities teach about eclipse

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performances and events for families; Teen Tuesday events; and six Thursday afternoon events for elementary-aged children. The most recent, and final, was themed "Solar Eclipse: Moon and Sun Experiments," and about 60 people attended.

During the event, students decorated cookies with frosting and sprinkles to resemble suns, watched informational videos, and explored how far away the moon is from the sun to cast an umbral shadow, considering the significant size difference.

During a question-and-answer period led by youth services librarian Marian Rose, one young attendee accurately noted how a solar eclipse involves the moon's shadow passing over the planet. Rose further informed listeners the North Coast does not fall in the path of totality — in which the sun will be completely obscured by the moon — but rather the path of a partial eclipse. The National Aeronautics and Space Administration estimates viewers in Seaside will experience the sun being covered about 96 to 98 percent, according to an online map.

"We will see the moon pass over the sun," Rose told the students. "It'll be pretty cool."

Observers within the path of totality, she said, will be able to see the sun's corona, the outermost part of the sun's atmosphere that normally is hidden by the bright light of the sun's surface. In all phases of the eclipse besides totality, however, viewers need to wear special eclipse glasses when looking directly at the sun.

"Only when the moon has completely blocked the sun is it safe to look," Rose said.

The last time a total solar eclipse passed across the continental U.S. from coast to coast was June 1918. After the 2017 solar eclipse, the next total eclipse visible over the continental U.S. will be April 8, 2024, according to NASA.

As the library's event drew to conclusion, each attendee was given a pair of eclipse glasses and led outdoors to experiment looking through them at the sun, much to the delight of the young observers.

This year's Summer Reading program, based on the theme "Build a Better World," wraps up Aug. 31. More than 300 children and teenagers in Clatsop County signed up to participate. Through donations made by local businesses and organizations, participants will receive rewards for meeting certain milestones throughout the summer program.

"We have a really amazing community that recognizes the importance of summer reading," Rose said. The other events hosted in conjunction with the program — including the eclipse activity, a scavenger hunt in mid-July, a puppet show in June and more — further engage students, along with their whole families. Showing the connections that can be made through reading "helps pull them into literacy," Rose said, adding the library is the ideal spot for providing these various opportunities.

"This is a place we can get things to families that are helpful to them," she said. "Keeping kids engaged with literacy in any form is important."

New Sweet Shop a blend of sweet and savory

Sweet Shop from Page 1A

salon in the 1950s, later an antique shop and finally a boarded up office space across from Pops.

The closed space still had remnants of the beauty salon — tall mirrors, workstations and ornate columns. Williams left the mirrors for the ambiance and was able to utilize the stations to display products, and the columns separate the larger room from a lounge area.

The extended side of the building has become a gathering place with its inviting sofa of warm-colored leather and oversized coffee table stacked with books and games. She has added Wi-Fi, a workspace and a big screen TV. Williams refers to it as "an extension of my home," adding, "I want it to be open and homey, a place to bring the grandkids."

Realizing Pops was known for its coffee, homemade waffle cones and breakfast scones, Williams wanted to maintain that sentiment, yet, lay a foundation of her own. In a few short months, she created a new look, new menu and brought in new products. She emphasizes highlighting local, organic and homemade items. She also supports products made by women and by people through her advocacy work.

In addition to selling coffee, ice cream and scones, her homemade soups, tuna salad and wraps have become word-of-mouth famous. She's added a sizable wine selection with wine accessories. There's also growler jugs and covers; picnic baskets; condiments, sauces and jams; teas; candy and baked goods. She sells books, games and beach toys for kids. Williams noted it's one of the last stops before the beach where shoppers can buy almost anything they need for a beach outing.

Williams admits she is no chef and her homemade soups, salads, wraps and baked goods are as organic as she can make them. She changes up the recipes to keep the offerings fresh and trendy, simple to decadent. Her experience comes from cooking for a large family, children with allergies, and her travels where she experienced all kinds of foods, calling herself and daughters "foodies." During those travels, she took a baking class in France and a cooking class in Italy.

Williams has begun to establish herself into the community. The Sweet Shop has become part of the Gearhart ArtWalk, supporting local artists. She supports local organizations and wants to offer employment to people



REBECCA HERREN/SEASIDE SIGNAL

The Sweet Shop in Gearhart.



Evan Urutt helps customers make a selection from a variety of ice cream flavors at the Sweet Shop.



Love Heals from Thistle Farms is one of several product lines Traci Williams supports at the Sweet Shop in Gearhart.

who are working on rebuilding their lives. At some point, she would also like to work with the culinary students at Seaside High School, and future plans include having a farmers market in the garden area west of the building. "It's about paying it forward," said Williams.

Her purpose for the Sweet Shop is to build the business for success and to support her family. At the same time, she's all about supporting local businesses and being neighborly.

As part of her support and being neighborly campaign, Williams would like to form a merchants group for Gearhart businesses. "Seven business-



Original columns are revealed during the remodel and separates the lounge area for a gathering place.

es have expressed interest in a business round table along with the mayor and a council member," said Williams, "there are many possibilities to support each business here."

Though Williams does not believe the Sweet Shop is the last chapter in her life, she does see it as a gathering place and an anchor to the town. She loves living on the coast and sees it as a magical place where people can connect with the earth. She also views Gearhart as a bit quirky and stays neutral when it comes to its politics. "I always say I'm Switzerland."

With a background in public relations, marketing and

sales, Williams is well on her way to becoming a contributing member of the community. The new Sweet Shop is a blend of sweet and savory, world travels and the love of family, gatherings and food; offering something for everyone from the price conscious to the free-spirited spender, the simple to the decadent and everything in between.

She offers a stress free environment for both customers and employees. "We give free water and our prices are really reasonable and honest. If people leave happy, they come back. Besides, we offer ice cream, wine and coffee — there shouldn't be any stress," she added with a smile.