

Rec district faces tough challenge in Cannon Beach, Gearhart

Gearhart is out of the district; Surf Pines is in, as is Cullaby Lake and anything north of the Highlands in the Seaside School District. Boundaries include residents near U.S. Highway 26 and U.S. Highway 101 junction and extend past the Oregon Route 53 junction near Saddle Mountain Road. Cannon Beach is out. Hamlet is in. Users come from as far as Astoria and Nehalem, which are out of the district.

The logic of the Sunset Empire Park and Recreation District is a little mystifying, even to those in the know. The independent taxing district provides fitness and community events in their Seaside locations, but not all residents enjoy their benefits. With a relatively small population and few public recreation facilities, it might make sense to bring the community together.

The district, formed in 1969, will celebrate its 50th anniversary next year, Executive Director Skyler Archibald told the Gearhart City Council in March. The goal, he said, was to provide swim and aquatic education to those living on the coast and along the county’s many waterways.

The Sunset Pool opened to fanfare in 1978. Since that time, programming has expanded to a fitness center, community center, senior lunch program, preschool and playing fields, for starters. The district employs seven full-time staff, with an annual budget of \$2.8 million.

Gearhart residents may use the pool and facilities, but must pay out-of-district rates.

Annexation rejected

Since the pool’s inception, efforts at bringing Gearhart and Cannon Beach into the rec district have been beset by politics, disinterest or a little bit of both.

Not that residents don’t use the district; they do. Almost 40 percent of Gearhart residents are members or previous members, Archibald said. About 650 Gearhart residents have signed up for district programs since 2013, he said.

“When we do analyze our program participants, particularly for programs like swim lessons, preschool, after school programming, we find that typically around one-third of the participants are Gearhart residents,” Archibald said this week.

In 2009, Mary Blake, the district’s executive director at the time, brought an annexation proposal to the city of Gearhart.

“I think this particular council seems to recognizes the dynamics of Gearhart and there are a lot of young families here, and people who could benefit,” she said at the time.

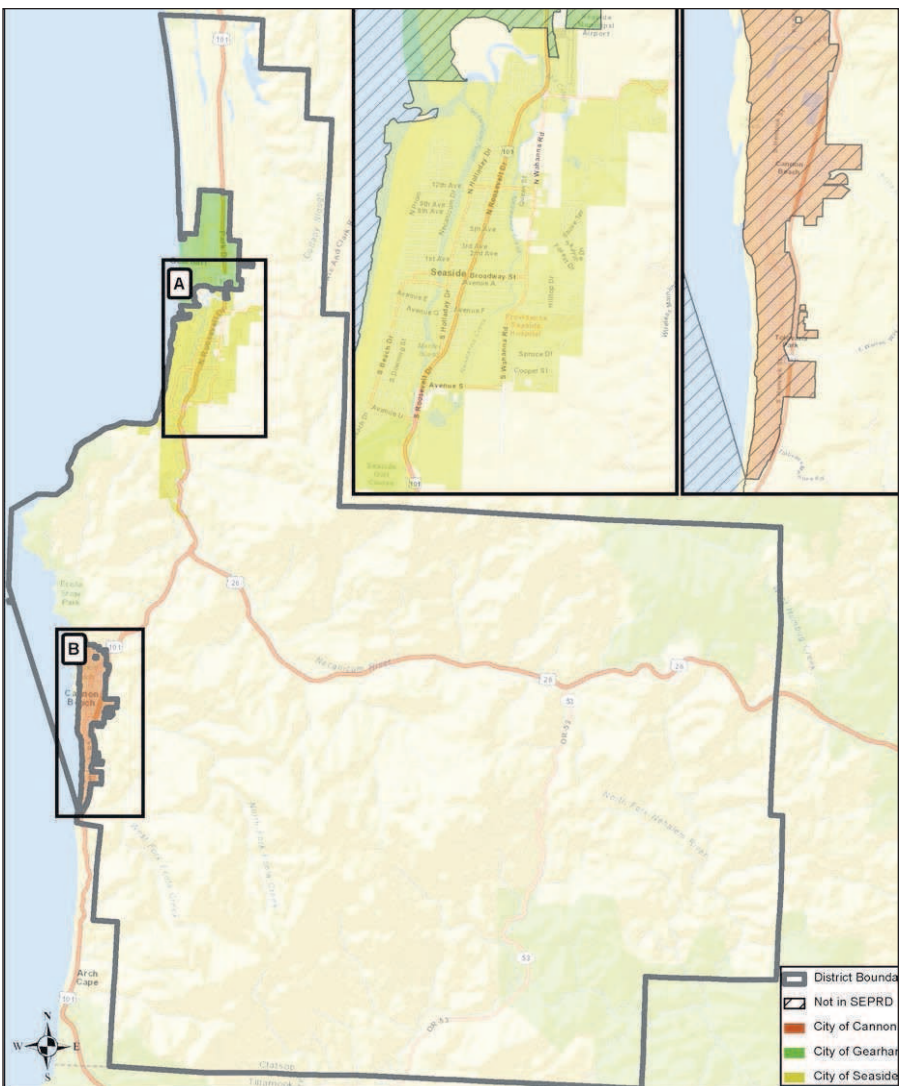
Blake suggested Gearhart put the question on the fall ballot. But after nearly an hour of discussion, members decided the time wasn’t right.

In 2011, Blake went to Cannon Beach with a partnership proposal. Her goal was to bring new services to Cannon Beach: trails in the Ecola Creek Forest Reserve, a community garden, outdoor education and summer camps.

The effort stalled and the measure never made it to the ballot recalled Nancy McCarthy, the former editor of the Signal and Gazette and now a member of the Cannon Beach City Council recalled.

City officials were “pretty noncommittal” at the time, McCarthy said this month, although the district did provide some funding for Cannon Beach park programs.

The Cannon Beach City Council re-



Boundary map of the Sunset Empire Park and Recreation District.

SEEN FROM SEASIDE
R.J. MARX



The Sunset Empire Park and Recreation District is holding a board workshop on the expansion project, Monday, April 2, at 4 p.m. at the Bob Chisholm Community Center, 1225 Avenue A, in Seaside.

ceived a letter from Archibald in 2017 asking the council to consider a partnership with the SEPRD, McCarthy added, but the matter has yet to be discussed.

With board members and Archibald considering building expansion, this might seem a likely time to revisit the notion of growing the rec district’s boundaries, to expand user base, expand recreation options and cut costs for individuals and families.

“For 40 years the district has provided an amazing facility with the Sunset Pool, but we’re under-serving our need,” Archibald said. He walked Gearhart councilors through expansion plans, including a second floor to the athletic facility, with a gym and possible remodeling to Broadway School for fitness programs.

Cost for the base plan is estimated at \$15 million to \$18 million. Bringing the middle school into the mix could include a 4,000-square-foot community room, kitchen, three preschool rooms, teen room and outdoor courtyard, at an additional cost of between \$7 million and \$9 million.

Taxpayer burnout?

Archibald left Gearhart City Hall early this month without a decision, but the city could decide to take up the matter again.

“There would have to be a request from SEPRD or some of the councilors to begin having conversations about what that would like,” Gearhart City Administrator Chad Sweet said after the March meeting.

“I think it’s a wonderful organization, but we’ve got a lot of big projects too,” Sweet said.

In the meantime, Gearhart voters are readying to finance a new firehouse, which could run into the millions and will most likely be borne by taxpayer dollars.

In Cannon Beach, the fire district opted to forgo a vote on adding two professional firefighters. Residents are still feeling the pinch of the 2015 school bond and an increase in water rates.

Even in Seaside, funding for a rec center addition faces a tough path: lodging taxes rose 2 percent to pay for upgrades to the Seaside Civic and Convention Center and taxpayers are looking ahead to three years of school construction. The county wants a new jail and upgrades at the airport. The Clatsop County Health District announced a \$3 million tax levy this week, intended for service and facility upgrades.

When she stepped down as executive director, Blake said in 2012, the hardest thing about her job was dealing with two cities and communities that are “putting their taxes first and not understanding that those taxes can go to the quality of life. ... Unfortunately, the people that live in those out-of-district areas will continue to find they have to pay more for our services.”

Meanwhile, Archibald is holding out hope. “I really want to see if I can help expand the district in a positive way and bring our services to those communities who don’t have them.”

Wedding draws guests, ghosts

Of course my son and his fiancée would get married on Ghost Conference Weekend, I said casually to a friend. I was feeling a little sad I wasn’t going to the conference, which took place at the Seaside Civic and Convention Center this past weekend. The conference is in its seventh year; in the past I’d written preview pieces about the conference and made a point of attending for at least a few hours. In case you missed it, the Oregon Ghost Conference features mediums, past-life regression practitioners, spirit experts, animal communicators, psychics and vendors specializing in paranormal-related wares. The Oregon Ghost Conference is the largest paranormal convention in the Northwest, attracting thousands of visitors.

In preparation for the wedding ceremony, which took place in Seaside on a semi-secret beach, I went through boxes of old photographs — real photographs, not the digital variety. Around the house I scattered pictures of our combined families’ deceased; my mother, my father, my favorite stepdad; my husband’s mother; a couple of much loved pets, and deceased close family friends who had known our son since he was just a lad. I imagined their pictures would serve as an invitation to their presence at the wedding, just in case if in their ghostly capacities they cared to attend.

My son and his fiancée were oblivious to the Oregon Ghost Conference as they planned their nuptials at the beach. To be honest, I’ve never heard either one of them indicate in any way whatsoever they are believers in ghosts and spirits. They were officially married at a rather rocky and imposing location not far from the Cove. We warned them there could be gawkers, but it was raining (what else?) and save for two passersby who stepped away when they divined a wedding was about to happen, we had tranquility and peace.

Back at the house as my husband cracked open a couple of bottle of champagne, I found myself glancing a few times at those old photographs. I thought what it would be like if our old dear friend, the Montreal-based singer Tony Roman, could have been there; or Bill, whose life was taken from him in a homicide by an unknown assailant when he was only in his early 40s. The really crazy thing is Bill’s case has been a cold case for 28 years. A few months ago Bill’s case was reopened by a New York Police Department detective who specializes in cold cases. Was it a coincidence that just hours before the wedding, the detective called me with a bit of news? What he said was less important to me than the simple fact of the timing of his call, which I read to be a message from Bill, letting me know he was with us in spirit for the nuptials. Bill loved a party.

The bride wore a diamond that had belonged to my mom. It was the diamond my father gave her when they became engaged. I felt my mother’s approval of the beautiful new setting for that diamond my son’s bride commissioned. My son never met my mother; she died a few months before he was born, but since she was so attached to the ring, I felt her spirit hovering approvingly nearby during the vows. My mother-in-law was famous for scowling in almost every photo, but as I was going through those old photos, I found one where she’s smiling. In it she is beaming at our son when he was newborn. Our family is by any standard very small, but if you count the ghosts with us at the wedding ceremony, I think we had quite the crowd.

OUR FAMILY IS BY ANY STANDARD VERY SMALL, BUT IF YOU COUNT THE GHOSTS WITH US AT THE WEDDING CEREMONY, I THINK WE HAD QUITE THE CROWD.

LETTERS

Need to enforce Seaside leash law

I moved to Seaside July 2017. I am a manager at a local motel. We are pet friendly plus I have two small dogs. My issue is this... I run three days a week along the promenade. Every time I run my three miles, I encounter a dog off leash and it’s usually the same people with the same dogs.

I know there is a leash law in Seaside, but I guess they think the law does not apply to them. I say, “leash law” as I run past them every time. They still do not leash their dogs. I never see anyone patrolling, policing or enforcing the leash law.

I am stating my case because I took my dogs out for a walk, both on leashes. I was in a neighborhood in a residential area, and suddenly, a dog came out of nowhere and grabbed one of my dogs with its teeth and would not let go. Had I not had my dog leashed, I would not have been able to pull it away

from the attacking dog. You never know which dogs are friendly and which ones are not, and unfortunately, there are some people who don’t care to follow rules and ruin it for the rest of us.

I’m asking that Seaside post signs along the promenade reminding everyone of the law to leash their dogs. I would also like to see someone policing the promenade regularly.

Sandra Garvin Seaside

Jail bonds are a risky investment

Why would anyone want to buy the county’s jail bonds?

Yes, Clatsop County needs better jail facilities. The county plans to seek voter approval to issue bonds for new jail facilities that will be repaid by future property tax revenues. It all sounds pretty normal, right?

Nestled behind their podium up in Astoria, our county’s elected leaders and paid staff are hoping that this time jail improvements will be successful. They really don’t want to acknowledge that the investment community rates bonds for buyers by the risk that they will not be repaid.

Property taxes are based on property valuation and Clatsop County has just over \$6 billion dollars of property that is taxed. The narrow Pacific coastal strip of the county from Arch Cape to the mouth of the Columbia River contains 70 percent of this property valuation. Using state-issued tsunami inundation maps, about 80 percent of the value of these properties will be destroyed by a mid-size Cascadia event. Event Astoria with about 13 percent of the county’s assessed valuation will be hard hit by the earthquake portion of a Cascadia event because of the age of its downtown structures. The state puts the probability of such a

Cascadia event as 1 in 3 over the next 50 years.

As an investor would you want to fund your children’s education and your retirement on a “junk bond” like this? But wait, didn’t Seaside School District just successfully issue \$100 million in school bonds? Yes, but under duress from Sen. Betsy Johnson, the state treasurer guaranteed these bonds. There is no one to guarantee these jail bonds nor many of these other proposed non-school bond issues presently being proposed by local agencies.

John Dunzer Seaside

John Orr, our best choice

As a former Republican, I would like to share why I believe candidate John Orr should be our next State House Representative for District 32.

Even though he is running for political office for the first time, he is certainly no “newcomer” to politics. Orr’s progressive views on finance reform, housing and the environment as well as his 25 years representing his community and helping others, have always been distinct and have never wavered.

His approach has always been to fight hard, balanced with a pragmatic sensibility born out of experience with our justice system.

In a time of political turmoil, John Orr maintains a perspective of calm, but resolute leadership that Oregonians need in their lawmakers. Someone who cannot only represent their concerns, but has the mind and heart and experience to actually accomplish these goals.

I encourage everyone to vote, but I especially encourage you to vote for those who truly care about the future of Oregon — John Orr is for Oregon.

Phil Hall Warrenton