SignalViewpoints



R.J. MARX/SEASIDE SIG

The Gearhart firehouse, at 22 feet above sea level, is unable to withstand the impact of most Cascadia Subduction Zone earthquake and tsunami scenarios.

On the path to higher ground

It was almost a year ago when the Gearhart firehouse committee presented an option for a new firehouse on parkland at Pacific Way and North Marion. Reaction was swift and generally unfavorable from longtime residents and newcomers alike who spoke of the need to protect open space and the park's historic location.

"The fire station is the one thing here we need to work on most of all," Chad Sweet, a Gearhart firefighter and the city's administrator, said at an April 7 emergency management town hall. Only 22 feet above sea level and constructed of hollow-core, nonreinforced cinderblock, a "little-bitty shake" could bring the building to the ground. "Hopefully we can dig the trucks out. We'll see."

With fewer than 1,000 full-time residents and limited land out of the inundation zone, the city's geography and demography

has focused on preparedness as the first line of defense.

Members of the firehouse committee hope to identify one



of three sites for relocation of the 60-year-old building and to present a bond to voters in 2019. Now they're stalled, according to firehouse committee chairman Jay Speakman. "We've come to a place where we've kicked it into neutral," he told Gearhart's City Council on April 4. "We're not racing ahead."

Remaining in the existing site at 670 Pacific Way is not an option, Speakman said. "This building should be condemned," Speakman said.

'Costs, traditions, aesthetics'

The Gearhart Fire Department faces complex issues of geography and historical perspective: a low-elevation location at the current site and a city park that comes with a glorious heritage, open parkland preserved at a cost of political and social equity of generations of Gearhart residents.

Alternatives are limited to inflexible criteria: need for a centrally-located site, enough elevation to survive most Cascadia Subduction Zone disaster scenarios and a budget determined by voters. The state's Department of Geology and Mineral Industries told fire committee members that if another site existed, they would not recommend replacing the station in its present location.

Gearhart Park and a privately-owned property on North Marion Avenue referred to as "High Point" remain the only serious options after the committee reviewed locations throughout the community, east and west of U.S. Highway 101.

Despite a less than enthusiastic reception from the public, the park is clearly the favorite. While its elevation is 48 feet to High Point's 63 feet, the North Marion site comes with a hefty price tag, starting at \$4 million for purchase.

"We're up against costs, traditions and aesthetics," Speakman said.

Plans include extending the west side of the park, regrading, replanting and create an open space that's as big as the existing space, Speakman said. The city would be required to work with the county to lift deed restrictions allowing rezoning.

The committee plans to increase the park's area with fill. "We would do everything we can to replace park space that would be lost by the addition of the fire station," Sweet said

Size matters

The Gearhart fire station at 670 Pacific Way was built to standards of the late-1950s, years before anyone understood the extent or potential consequences of a Cascadia Subduction Zone event.

Subsequent scientific studies provided evidence that Gearhart and other coastal communities were at ground zero for a Cascadia event.

In 2015, the City Council reopened discussions about renovating or replacing the station, with city councilors, making it one of the city's top priorities.

Any earthquake that is going to happen in Gearhart is going to "shake us up pretty good," Sweet said.

When the school bond went to voters in 2016, superintendent Doug Dougherty and bond supporters presented worst-case scenarios — a wave of up to 120 feet — when advocating a new campus in Seaside's Southeast Hills.

Gearhart doesn't have the luxury of that kind of height

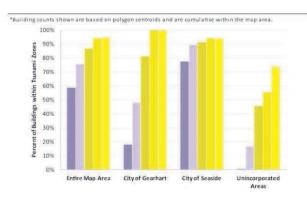
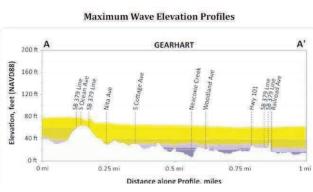


figure 4: The table and chart show the number of buildings inundated for each "tsunami T-shirt scenario" for cities and

DEPARTMENT OF GEOLOGY AND MINERAL INDUSTRIES

According to the state, Gearhart's buildings will not survive the largest tsunami inundation scenarios.



DEPARTMENT OF GEOLOGY AND MINERAL INDUSTRIES

Projected wave heights after a Cascadia Subduction Zone event in streets throughout Gearhart in different scenarios.

outside of the inundation zone. According to state geologic maps, while none of Gearhart's 1,729 buildings would survive an extra-large tsunami, almost half of those would survive a medium-sized event.

"There are going to be some homes that come down," Sweet acknowledged.

That doesn't mean residents shouldn't prepare. Chances of the Big One hitting — with waves reaching more than 75 feet — are only 3 percent. "There's no guarantee the tsunami that comes in is going to be the big one, the 'XXL' that will cover Gearhart," he said.

"Gearhart will fare very well in 90-some percent of all scenarios," Sweet said.

A well-equipped firehouse on higher ground could prove a matter of life and death after waves recede. "The more resilient we are, the faster we're going to recover."

Wait until next year?

With two new county bonds on the November ballot and voters still feeling the pinch from passage of the \$99.7 Seaside School District bond to move schools out of the tsunami zone, the firehouse committee elected to roll back the bond timetable to November 2019.

"If you work backward for approvals, plans and council readings, that's probably the soonest this could happen," Speakman said.

By delaying the bond vote to 2019, the committee and proponents have another 18 months to make their case.

Speakman said he hopes a town hall meeting this fall will educate the public and "help people get their mind around this is something that really should be done."

He anticipates resistance from second homeowners who objected to taking the park out of public use. "We really don't know what to expect. It's anybody's guess."

Estimated costs for a firehouse project, not including land purchase, reach about \$5 million, of which \$3.4 million would go to a 12,800-square-foot public safety building. Costs to voters could run an estimate 78 cents per thousand dollars of assessed home value if a station is built at the park site. Costs would be "just about double that" for the High Point location after land purchase.

Along with replacing the fire station, the bond issue would also fund a new fire truck, with a potential price tag of \$500,000. For taxpayers owning a \$300,000 home, the bond cost would be about \$234 per year. For a \$500,000 home, taxes would increase about \$390 per year.

"It's an expensive proposition," Speakman said. "But we're kind of in a box. We can't put it to the voters this November. These things can take a long time, but in the end if we prevail it will be worth it."

Long live the iceberg wedge

rowing up in the Garden State, which is what they used to call New Jersey, my family ate a lot of produce. On our table was a seemingly endless stream of corn, peaches, cucumbers, eggplant, cranberries, spinach, asparagus, bell peppers, squash, and tomatoes. But when I was a kid, just about the only lettuce you could buy was iceberg, the public not yet having developed a taste for romaine, Boston, or bibb. This was decades before artisanal lettuces like mesclun, arugula,

radicchio, and endive took over, forever changing Americans' ideas about greens. Iceberg lettuce

derived its name

VIEW FROM THE PORCH EVE MARX



in the late 1920s when California lettuce growers got the idea to ship what they grew across the country covered in heaps of ice. (Originally the lettuce was called "crisphead.") When the produce trains pulled into the station, people shouted, "The icebergs are coming!" and the name stuck.

Foodies complain iceberg has little nutrition and even less taste, although the late gastronome James Beard, who grew up in Gearhart, once said of it, "Many people damn it, but it adds good flavor and a wonderfully crisp texture to salad."

I love me a great salad. In one of my past lives, I must have been a deer or a rabbit. For years my favorite thing has been a composed salad. I admit for a very long time, I assiduously avoided iceberg lettuce which I associated with my mother's lousy cooking. Salad for her was a quarter head of iceberg lettuce drowned in Russian dressing. My reaction as soon as I was old enough to have my own kitchen was to create lovely dinner salads for myself and my pals — Caesar salad, Cobb salad, Greek salad, caprese salad, salade niçoise.

It seems a dish of the 1960s, the iceberg wedge, has made a comeback. You know the recipe. Cut one small head of iceberg lettuce into four wedges, plate, and spoon bleu cheese dressing over it. Top with crumbled bacon, a small amount of thinly cut red onion, and garnish with a sprinkling of crumbled bleu cheese and chopped chives. I first noticed this salad appearing on trendy restaurant menus around 2015. I steadfastly ignored it, along with other retro foods like fondue, sloppy Joes, and beef bourguignon. (I've never lost my enthusiasm for deviled eggs.)

Last week my spouse and I dined at the Twisted Fish Steakhouse on Broadway in Seaside. It was an unplanned outing, which lent it a festive air. After a round of cocktails, and they do have a full bar, my husband ordered steak; as is my wont, I had two appetizers. I started with the grilled ahi tuna (very good) and took a chance on their iceberg wedge. It was more or less the classic version, arriving on a dinner plate with extra garnishes including sliced apple and sections of mandarin orange. As someone always happy to have salad as my entrée, I was very satisfied.



EVE MARX/FOR SEASIDE SIGNAL

Iceberg wedge with mandarin oranges at the Twisted Fish in Seaside.

LETTERS

Vote for Tim Josi

When I decided to finish my 32 years of public service I felt compelled to have some input into my successor. I wanted to see a local citizen who knew the district and its people well win this seat. The job of state representative is not easy. It has many factions and it requires many sacrifices including being away from family during the legislative sessions and poverty wages. Whoever wins the seat must understand how things work in Salem. One cannot simply say they will solve problems alone ...that is not possible. They must be able to set aside partisan actions and act on behalf of all their constituents and the entire state. I am also saddened by the unkind statements made by people, who I had considered friends, toward some of the candidates. I am afraid they have learned this from the national stage and are being enabled by social media. For the first time I have seen long-term friendships torn apart just because the people disagree and for whatever reason there is an "I'm right and you're wrong" belief without an attempt to understand the other's side.

Some of the statements I am reading in the letters to the editor and in the voters' pamphlet are often vague, uninformed (the state already is doing it) or not possible. For example, to say one is going to not allow off-shore oil drilling in federal waters is not possible. Oregon already has a law that prohibits it within our three-mile territorial sea waters. That area is the only open ocean area in which we can act. The federal waters are not within the state's authority. Nor can they say that they will make the state 'pick up the slack' in the case of the federal government not funding programs or services. There will be another severe

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The Seaside Signal welcomes letters to the editor. The deadline is noon Monday prior to publication. Letters must be 400 words or less and must be signed by the author and include a phone number for verification. We also request that submissions be limited one letter per month. Send to 1555 N. Roosevelt Drive, Seaside, OR 97138, drop them off at 1555 N. Roosevelt Drive or fax to 503-738-9285, or email rmarx@seasidesignal.com

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