

Wanted: \$35M to save lives in Seaside

Geologist Tom Horning delivered a 90-minute presentation to councilors on the topic in 2007. At the end of his talk, a councilor summed up: “Now let’s get on to more important things.”

“That made me so mad,” Horning says today.

He intends to remedy that. “Ultimately, I want to identify the nature of the hazard, its proximity — how soon it will strike — and I’m going to try to justify using room taxes to build bridges.”

New, resilient bridges, he hopes, will help residents and visitors survive the wave from an even medium-sized tsunami, a Cascadia Subduction Zone event in which thousands may perish.

The threat

The city’s history of tsunamis is carved in the land. Stretches of sand have been washed over by rock thrown by waves, and trees pulled from the ground like toothpicks clogged waterways. All this formed moats, meadows and other features we take for granted. Former marshes are filled with sediment from the Necanicum River and now serve as land for homes. Springs near Avenue N drain and flood houses in a nearby depression. Shoals of round rock or cobbles were carried, swept and deposited in a northeasterly surge corridor.

“The town gets overtopped easily,” Horning said in a tsunami history tour in late July. “What’s done in the past is likely to occur in the future.”

There is no “gentle” Cascadia Subduction Zone earthquake and tsunami, Horning said.

While a tsunami originating near Alaska or Japan might cause tidal activity here, it’s nothing like the big one.

“We’re out at the very leading edge of a seriously massive block of tectonic plate that extends all the way to the Atlantic Ridge.”

More than four-fifths of the buildings in Seaside are expected to be inundated by a medium-sized tsunami wave.

“We can’t afford to be wrong and we don’t have much time,” he said.

But the city’s bridges haven’t kept up with the threat. Substandard bridges will collapse during the first earthquake, making them useless in the 20 to 30 minutes we have to get to high ground before the tsunami hits. Bridges at Avenues S, U and G, all of which were originally built to the standards of the early 1960s.

The extra minutes to find another bridge — there are none considered able to withstand the impacts of a

SEEN FROM SEASIDE
R.J. MARX



predicted 9.0 Cascadia earthquake south of Broadway — could be a matter of life and death.

“If we fix the bridges, we reduce the fatality rate from a high number to a low number,” Horning said. “That’s the bottom line.”

According to the city’s 2011 Transportation System Plan, the bridge over the Neawanna Creek between the two intersections lies inside the 100-year floodplain, requires a seismic retrofit and has “deficient facilities” for pedestrians and bicycles.

Other bridges, built decades ago, are equally vulnerable. The city had applications out for grants and Oregon Department of Transportation funding to rebuild its most vulnerable bridges.

But Seaside “often falls through the cracks” when applying for grant money, City Manager Winstanley told the Signal’s Brenna Visser in a July interview.

The city is either too small to compete for projects or has too healthy of a budget to qualify for need-based grants intended for smaller, rural communities.

Applications, reports and projections from researchers, the city, state and federal government remain on a back shelf of the library or city offices, or more likely, in a forgotten PDF file on a computer hard drive.

Who will pay?

When I rented a car this summer on my vacation in New Mexico, I got hit with a vehicle license fee and an energy recovery fee and a shocking 11.25 percent “customer facility” charge.

It shows you that there is always one more surcharge that can be added to unsuspecting tourists who have little to no leverage.

Seaside doesn’t event the highest lodging tax in the state or even the county — Bend’s stands at 10.4 percent; Astoria collects 11 percent. Portland’s city and county room taxes reach 11.5 percent.

In 2012, Horning, asked hotels and motels to establish a voluntary user fee of \$1 or \$2 giving guests an opportunity to help cover the cost of emergency preparations. The money raised would fund replacement of bridges in Seaside designed as escape routes.

Horning believes that between



TOM HORNING

Repairs on the 12th Avenue bridge undertaken in the late 1990s. The bridge is only one of a few in Seaside considered able to withstand a Cascadia Subduction Zone event.

\$18 million and \$35 million today could make a big difference in improving the city’s most at-risk bridges.

Horning has modified his “\$1 a head” plan from 2012, but still targets visitors as the best way to go about it. With a room tax increase, lodging owners aren’t bearing the costs — tourists are.

Councilors agree it needs to be done; the days of disputing tsunami science are over.

But at the city’s July workshop, they showed little appetite to passing the costs along to visitors.

While the council has authority to raise room tax on its own, if they decide not to, voters could initiate a room tax hike without council backing, City Manager Mark Winstanley said early this month. “But it would certainly be unusual,” he said.

And while it’s tempting to spend other people’s money, I agree with Terry Bichsel — owner of Best Western Plus Ocean View Resort and Rivertides Suites — this should be a shared responsibility.

Raising the lodging tax is “always easy,” Bichsel said at the workshop. “Something like this should be shared, because it does affect our community, not just the businesses and the tourists.”

A more likely and less controversial source of funding could come from urban renewal funds intended



REBECCA HERREN

Tom Horning holds a sprig of edible Salicornia (pickleweed) on a tour of Neawanna Point marsh in Gearhart. The area was formed by past tsunamis.

to improve the Avenue S corridor between the Highway and Wahanna, Winstanley added.

Approved in 2017, funds of up to \$62.4 million — more if matched by state funds or grants — could help build bridges, add traffic enhancements and provide infrastructure needs for Seaside School District’s new campus.

“I would think that would be an area the urban renewal agency would be very interested in doing work,” Winstanley said this month. “That’s

right in the middle of the urban renewal district.”

Another pathway could come through a road levy, initiated by residents or members of the City Council, he added.

For concerned residents and visitors, is there a Plan B?

If necessary, Horning is ready to “wait a while and try again,” he said. “There are fees you can generate, road levies — but then you have to go through the political process of convincing people to support it.”

Dining al fresco at the Seaside Farmer’s Market

The season for dining al fresco is brief on the north Oregon Coast; one should take advantage of every opportunity. I know, I know, real Oregonians (and you’re right, I can’t ever be a real Oregonian since I came here from New York) know it’s possible, even desirable to eat outdoors in every weather, including heavy wind, drenching rain, fierce fog. Being made of less stern stuff (OK, you can call me a wimp), I prefer outdoor dining when it’s not raining. Or drizzle. Which happens not that much.

While there are multiple opportunities in Cannon Beach and Seaside to dine on restaurant patios — Pelican Brew, Angelina’s Pizza, the Wayfarer, the Driftwood, the U Street Pub — my current favorite al fresco dining happens to be at the various farmer’s markets. I’m loving the Seaside market right now, which happens every Wednesday.

The Seaside Farmer’s Market is growing all the time. There are over 25 vendors selling fresh produce, nut butters, fudge, roasted nuts, berries fresh and dried, fresh eggs, vodka, and wine. Coast Community Radio has a presence, as does the Seaside Museum and Historical Society, the North Coast Land Conservancy, and the Clatsop Casa Program. SNAP, the supplemental nutrition assistance program has representatives on hand. There’s live music and it’s good. The big draw for me, however, is the opportunity to enjoy a simple but



EVE MARX PHOTOS

Outdoor dining options at the farmers market.

VIEW FROM
THE PORCH
EVE MARX



excellent al fresco dinner because let’s face it, after decades of cooking dinner, I’m kind of over it.

I really appreciate excellent prepared food and the Seaside Farmer’s Market does not disappoint. Right now my favorite thing is the fish tacos made with fresh albacore tuna at the food cart called Roll and Bowl. The culinary team of Bryan Tiller,

Jonathan Hoffman, and Brae Bartlett is a winner. Other folks seem equally excited by their pork belly ramen, their poke bowl, and even their grass-fed beef burger. The fish tacos, which are sublime, are a lot of fish garnished with a spicy Asian-style slaw. They come three to an order, which is ideal for one fairly hungry person who doesn’t care to share. I like to wash this down with a glass of their probiotic lemonade, which has a tart, tangy edge.

When I’m not scarfing down fish tacos, I like a cup of smoked salmon chowder made by the Smoked Salmon Chowder Co. out of Astoria. The



chowder is dense and packed with fish; it’s especially good with a slab of garlic toast, (\$1) on the side. The chowder folks, Dan and Tina Delay, are a husband wife team, who make their chowder from a family recipe, fresh batch by fresh batch. They use their beef cattle market earnings to feed their beef cattle through the winter.

If we’re still feeling peckish, there are some good choices for dessert. You can have a sweet scone or muffin from Dough Dough Bakery, or gelato or a bag of Pilgrim’s Roasted Nutz, or naturally sweetened Cran-nies. I have a personal weakness for the chocolate covered toffee made



ABOVE Albacore tuna tacos from Roll and Bowl at the farmers market.

LEFT The garlic toast is great, but even better with the salmon chowder from Smoked Salmon Chowder Co. at the farmers market.

by the Columbia Candies Company. Naked Winery, Buddha Kat Winery, Gresser Vineyards, and Nehalem Bay Winery are also represented. You’re a teetotaler? No worries. Pacific Roots Coffee is also here.

The Seaside Farmer’s Market is open Wednesdays until Sept. 29 from 3 til 7 p.m. From Sept. 5 through Sept. 19, the hours of operation are Wednesdays, 4 to 7 p.m. The market is located at 1120 Broadway in Seaside. Parking’s easy. The market is sponsored by the Sunset Empire Park and Recreation District. They do a good job and it’s a great place once a week to duck out of cooking dinner.