

Fireworks light the sky over Seaside in 2017.

AN EXPLOSIVE TOPIC AT CITY HALL

It's not too early to prepared for Independence Day 2019 — a celebration of our nation's 243rd birthday.

With July 4 falling on a Thursday, Seaside will brace for a four-day weekend blast that could have some unintended consequences.

After the 2018 celebration, Seaside resident Cindy Daly described the "outlandish use of illegal fireworks in the Cove, in the dunes and on the beach. Cove resident Bill Basiliko called Seaside a "war zone."

"You couldn't even tell when the official fireworks started," he told city councilors in July.

Almost a century ago sailors and townspeople "engaged in a mix-up" on Broadway, when the Signal reported on July 5, 1923, "a citizen strenuously objected to a sailor's shooting off torpedoes under his feet." Today, residents and officials say, the problem is worse than ever.

In Gearhart, two young people were hospitalized after illegal fireworks exploded.

In Seaside, a visitor threw lit mortar fireworks into random fire pits before police were notified and the man arrested and charged.

But enforcement remains at least as complex as it did in 1999, when the Signal reported "the problem of illegal fireworks is an ongoing concern for authorities."

Fewer shows

The annual show — a tradition launched decades ago and one of the largest in the Pacific Northwest — draws thousands to Seaside and presents one of the most remarkable displays anywhere.

Engineered by Larry Kriegshauser, the show benefits businesses and restaurants throughout the community and caps off a day of festivities, from the downtown parade to the Seaside Museum's Ice Cream Social.

SEEN FROM SEASIDE

R.J. MARX



One problem for Seaside is the lack of fireworks shows on the coast and throughout the region. Cannon Beach gave up its fireworks show years ago. Vancouver and Tigard have opted out.

Fire bans on the South Coast limit events. Pacific City, Neskowin and Manzanita, each in Tillamook County, each abandoned their fireworks shows this year.

As a result, Seaside draws an ever-larger crowd.

And, according to longtime Seaside Chamber of Commerce volunteer Doug Barker, the crowd "has changed dramatically. We have these few who are really causing problems."

Parks patrol

Beach enforcement falls under the aegis of Oregon State Parks, but patrols are limited, State Parks District Manager Teri Wing said at a Sept. 11 Seaside City Council workshop on illegal fireworks.

"We're more than willing to help, but there's a limit to the enforcement rules," she said.

State Parks is responsible for management of the ocean shore from low tide up to what's referred to as the statutory vegetation line.

According to Park Ranger Justin Parker of the Fort Stevens Management Unit, parks employees emphasize prevention related to camping, litter and fireworks.

"We know around the holiday, the popularity of the beach and use of fireworks creates problems," Parker said.

Two beach rangers with training in special event management, permit compliance and ocean shore rule en-



R.J. MARX

Officials at a meeting of a workshop on illegal fireworks. From left, seated with pad, Seth Morrissey, Jason Elkins, Teri Wing, Jay Barber, Dave Ham and Joey Daniels.

forcement work out of Fort Stevens and Nehalem Bay, along with about 30 staff members who either directly patrol the beach or provide support along the North Coast.

State Parks has a contract with the Clatsop County Sheriff's office and recently the Oregon State Police to provide funding for additional services, including overtime and reserve coverage, in place to provide additional resources through the peak tourist season, not just the Fourth of July.

"A lot of people think the state has huge pockets, but we don't," Wing said. "We do what we can in that respect."

A matter of personnel

Seaside ordinances prohibit all fireworks on the beach, Seaside Police Chief Dave Ham said, in line with the state prohibition which does not allow any fireworks on the ocean shores without permit.

Any possession or use of any firework — even legally purchased year-round in Oregon — is prohibited.

About half of the city's 19 police officers are not on duty at night

because they've been on duty during the day or on an extra assignment.

"That takes them out of the equation at 7, 8 p.m.," Ham said. "It becomes a safety issue when people are working long hours without breaks and they're working seven days in a row."

All fireworks are illegal on the beach, including sparklers, he said, as well as bottle rockets, Roman candles and mortars. Some explosive devices confiscated police are bigger than the commercial devices used for Kriegshauser's professional show.

Most violators simply run off at the first sign of police. "They watch, drive by and they go out again," Ham said. "It gets worse at night."

To win a successful prosecution, complainants must be willing to sign file a report and follow through with an investigation. Evidence is needed to prove "who threw that particular projectile," Ham said.

Like Seaside Police and State Parks, firefighters are equally short-staffed. The city only has four professional firefighters; the rest are volunteers, according to Fire Chief Joey Daniels.

Their day starts on the Fourth

at 7 a.m. and continues to the early hours of July 5, Daniels said. This year, one firefighter logged 22 hours straight.

Throughout the evening, firefighters confiscated what he described as "a U-Haul size load of fireworks."

Light it up?

The Sept. 11 workshop presented an abundance of ideas from officials and residents alike.

Putting notices in hotels and short-term rentals "would make a lot of difference," Daly said.

Russ Vandenberg, general manager of the Seaside Civic and Convention Center, proposed lighting up the Prom after the city's official fireworks show's conclusion.

"What about bright light fixtures during the Prom and light the beach up after the main fireworks is over?" Vandenberg asked. "Light it like it's daylight out there and people might be less able to find enjoyment with these fireworks."

Seaside's Matthew Stolberg urged a greater education component for visitors, an idea seconded by Councilor Steve Wright.

Ham urged residents to follow through when they make a complaint. "If you're one of those people who call in, tell me where it's happening, identify the person and be willing to sign a complaint," he said.

City Councilor Tita Montero suggested a texting hotline to identify violators. "Take a picture of a person and text it to the hotline," she said. "Then we know who that person is."

Mayor Jay Barber suggested forming a task force to sort through available options.

"We need to put together a strategic plan with incremental steps that we can actually pull off in a way that helps to progressively deal with the issue that doesn't put a damper on the celebration but helps to deal with illegal fireworks," Barber said. "This will take citizen involvement."

Busy, happy kids and clean locker rooms on a facility visit

A few weeks ago I paid a visit to the pool. I made an appointment with Skyler Archibald, the Sunset Empire Park and Recreation District executive director. Nobody told me in advance how tall he is, but then again, I am pretty short. Skyler generously gave me an hour of his time to answer some questions and show me around.

And show me around he did. I saw the lap pool, the warm pool, and the spa. I saw the men's shower and locker room; I saw the women's. I saw two preschool classrooms filled with busy, happy kids. I saw a commercial-grade kitchen where meals are prepared. I saw a modest weight and exercise room. One of the highlights of my tour was the operations room which contains the huge double-tank filtration system used to

VIEW FROM THE PORCH

EVE MARX



filter the various waters of the pool.

I met Levi Conner, the maintenance manager. It was actually towards Levi I directed my most pointed questions. My purpose was to address the complaints of a couple of letters written to this newspaper regarding the pool area and locker room cleanliness.

On my tour, I was apprised of the temperatures of each pool and how they differ, and what accommodations must be made for each pool as to chlorine and other chemical disinfectants. Obviously, the warmer

the water, the greater the need. I also learned a physiological fact which is that the warmer the water, the more likelihood of sphincter and bladder accidents. I learned what happens during a "Code Brown" event. I learned disinfecting is a genuine science.

The pool has a state of the art filtration system installed in 2017. Although there is an alarm system in place to alert personnel of any surprises, the pool waters and the filtration system are comprehensively checked every two hours. We talked about the men's locker room floor and how mistakes made during its installation last year are scheduled for correction starting Oct. 24.

The lap pool itself is 41 years old. The warm pool and the spa were built in the early 2000s. Some things

aren't working properly, including the slide, which is out of commission and needs funds for replacement. We talked about the waiting list for the preschool. We talked about how the fitness room could easily be doubled in size and how nice it would be if there could be a room for yoga or Zumba.

I left the building feeling energized. I walk an hour every day it's not raining, but I could use more exercise. I thought about the beautiful natural light in the pool area. I thought about buying a new swimsuit. Despite the complaints about the facility, it all seemed pretty nice to me.

The vote on the Sunset Empire Park and Recreation District Building Expansion Project is coming up. On Tuesday, Oct. 9 and Monday,

Oct. 29, there will be public forums to discuss the project. Both forums start at 5 p.m. at the Bob Chisholm Community Center located at 1225 Avenue A. Highlights of the project include an indoor walking track; a community gymnasium; a new fitness room; expanded classrooms for early childhood education; community meeting room space.

The project's estimated cost is \$20 million dollars to be paid for by a 20 year bond that will cost taxpayers about 70 cents per \$1,000 of assessed home value. For families trying to make ends meet and seniors on fixed incomes, the price, at first glance, may seem steep.

Before you make up your mind, attend a community forum.

You may be surprised what you learn.

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PUBLISHER
Kari Borgen

EDITOR
R.J. Marx

CIRCULATION
MANAGER
Jeremy Feldman

ADVERTISING
SALES
April Olsen

CLASSIFIED
SALES
Danielle Fisher

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John D. Bruijn

SYSTEMS
MANAGER
Carl Earl

STAFF WRITER
Brenna Visser

CONTRIBUTING
WRITERS
Skyler Archibald
Rebecca Herren
Katherine Lacaze
Eve Marx
Esther Moberg
Jon Rahl

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