

Candidates Smith, Zimmerman on the issues

Candidates from Page 1A

Zimmerman, a former oil and gas executive, moved to Gearhart after traveling and visiting for over 28 years.

"I wish to serve to protect Gearhart from unnecessary taxation and concentrate all my efforts on improving our city's existing assets before taking on new service obligations which can cause the city to lose its primary focus on our current residents," he said. "I desperately want to frame this election in the overriding concept of creating beauty and goodness for our special oasis by the sea."

In interviews last week, they discussed key issues — the location of the proposed firehouse, the growing elk herd, the budget process and growth.

Fire station

Smith called a new fire station the city's most important concern.

The existing station, built in 1958 and liable to collapse and flood during a Cascadia Subduction Zone earthquake and tsunami, is the topic of years of conversation.

Smith anticipated using feedback from the community to help determine a new site, he said. A town hall meeting is planned for November.

"With the town hall meeting, they'll find the pros and cons as the committee sees it for each location," he said.

Zimmerman opposed locating the fire station at one of the three proposed locations — the city park at Pacific Way and North Marion Avenue, he said.



"The park was deeded to the city by the county as a park, and it should be continued as a park," he said.

The cost of new infrastructure at that site could be prohibitive, he added.

Zimmerman suggested a new building at the fire station's current site, which already has infrastructure.

A new building could be constructed to "withstand various scenarios."

Smith countered that building the firehouse at its current site could prove even more expensive, with a temporary structure needed during construction and work needed to backfill unstable ground.

"The park doesn't have that problem and neither does 'High Ground,'" Smith said, referring to a third site on North Marion under consideration.

"There are issues with both of them," Smith continued. "Nobody wants to lose a park and it's going to be more expensive — but those two sit on stable dunes."

Growth

Both candidates said they share a love for the city and a passion for its protection.

Smith said the city must comply



PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY COLIN MURPHEY

Jack Zimmerman, left, and Kerry Smith are campaigning for the Gearhart City Council Position 1 seat.

with state regulations that require Gearhart to maintain a 20-year inventory of buildable lots. "The state has notified the city that we need to comply with this requirement," he said.

New development could provide workforce housing, which could prove a boon for the city and region, he added.

As a "no-growth" candidate, Zimmerman said an expansion of the city's urban growth boundary would create higher density, require more services, employees and costs.

"How much do you want to put on the back of the taxpayers?" he asked. "Gearhart doesn't necessarily want to change — I don't think anybody's made the case that Gearhart has to be dragged into the 21st century, or that Gearhart has to provide high-density apartments. Look at Portland."

Spending

Zimmerman's concern about growth spilled into his views for the city's future. The most important issue for the city, he said, is spending priorities and the impact they have on the community.

"That's especially true in terms of how much spending are you going to ultimately levy on the property taxpayer," he said.

Building fees, a septic fee or taxes on cigarettes might also "throw off excess revenues" for the city's parks and other needs, Zimmerman said.

Smith said he would seek to limit future expenses in "small ways that add up," with housekeeping cuts and tightening up of expenditures.

Money saved could be moved to the city's Community Emergency Response Team and resiliency planning, he said.

If elected, Zimmerman said the first thing he would change in Gearhart would be to open the budget process to greater scrutiny. Right now, he said, it's limited in scope.

"I'd like to see that process come into the light of day and provide an opportunity in a town hall meeting and get up and describe what they want to spend money on, why they want to spend, where they're limited," Zimmerman said. "The taxpayer who has to pay that bill should have the ability to either agree, disagree or say 'great job.'"

Smith said the process offers residents an opportunity to study the budget for 30 days before it is accepted by the council and presented for a public hearing where they can let their input be known.

Elk

With a growing elk herd and increasing encounters between elk and people, the city's wildlife population has become a heated campaign issue.

Residents and businesses complain about the loss of plantings, damage to lawns, and hazardous meetings between the herd and visitors.

Smith is in favor of an ordinance under consideration that would prohibit feeding wildlife. "No feeding is the first step we can take to stop the habituation of elk-human interaction," he said.

Culling the herd should be a last measure, he said, with sharpshooters or bow hunters tracking the animals outside of city limits.

Zimmerman said the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife has underestimated the herd's numbers and condition.

"They've mismanaged that thing so bad that the herd's grown to a population where they have hoof rot, one of the most debilitating diseases an animal can get. What has happened to the elk herd is a travesty and borders on negligence in terms of state supervision," he said.

The herd should be transported out of the city when possible and culled if necessary, Zimmerman said.

Smith said if the elk are moved from the area, "they'll just set up shop in someone else's town."

The city, which provides an online blog to chronicle elk-human encounters, is building the paper trail with comments to the Department of Fish and Wildlife, and is likely to pass the ordinance to stop the feeding of wildlife except for songbirds.

"The elk are state property and that's about all we can do until ODFW comes to us," Smith said. "As it is now, our hands are tied. I'd cull the herd, but not within the city limits at all."

After planning role in Seaside, Wallace takes to Astoria trolley

Trolley from Page 1A

He joined the board for Camp Kiwanilong, which proved to be a perfect outlet for filling in what he missed, using his skills in forming, funding and managing projects.

If that wasn't enough to keep Wallace busy, his wife asked if he knew they were looking for trolley men, saying she felt he would be good at it. He wasn't so keen on the idea, but "it kept spinning around in my head and I thought, 'yeah it might be fun.'"

He submitted his application and quickly found himself in the training program. "After I drove the train the first time, I was pretty well hooked."

Wallace has joined an elite group of about 45 certified

volunteers, mostly retirees. He goes about once a week, and says there are always two volunteers on the trolley who split the shift, alternating between driving and conducting. There is no set schedule and no commitment.

"That works for me because if I don't have anything going on, I can sign up for a shift if it's available. I like that."

The trolley has become part of Astoria's scenic fabric. It runs along the waterfront daily from noon to 6 p.m., from spring to October. For a dollar, passengers can take the hour ride from the Trolley Barn off Industry to the 39th Street Pier and back.

The route is linear, and when the train stops to prepare for the trip back, passengers are

instructed to stand and move a lever which flips the seat-back over so passengers are always facing forward. "Some people get shanghaied in Astoria, some people get turned around in Astoria," he joked.

Wallace enjoys learning about the early history of Astoria and its colorful past. "It's fascinating, especially when you realize how quickly things happened. Part of that makes me realize how big a focus there was on the northwest and how many foreign countries were interested in this area."

He learned about the War of 1812 and why Astoria was renamed Fort George. He's fascinated by the different nationalities and looks forward to learning more about the river pilots and bar pilots.

"You take people's money, greet them, give them a bit of history and some stand up," he said. "I enjoy doing that. I like telling stories and I like learning stories. After spending 25 years in Seaside and learning all about it, it's nice learning something different, and Astoria has a lot of history."

Though some of the locals are quick to correct Wallace on historical facts, he says "that doesn't happen a whole lot."

"Most people don't know Astoria that much and they enjoy hearing the history. Where else can you look at the most gorgeous scenery for an hour? Where are you going to get that for a buck? It's a unique experience both from my end and the passengers' end," he said.

"It's really gotten under my skin."



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Neal Wallace works the controls of the trolley.

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