

In Gearhart, please do not feed the elk

Officials seek to curb elk-human interactions

By R.J. Marx
Seaside Signal

Anyone seeking to give an elk a handout in Gearhart will have to think twice, if a city ordinance is adopted.

The City Council met at a work session to consider a draft ordinance on feeding wildlife, the first step, members say, in helping the city tackle an increased elk presence within city boundaries.

After a Gearhart resident proposed a “don’t feed the elk” policy in July, members of the City Council consulted with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife.

The department asked Gearhart to consider prohibit a no-feeding ordinance, Mayor Matt Brown said. “According to the ODFW, there have been reports of folks in town feeding, so they strongly suggested that would help with safety mitigation of the herd.”

According to the Gearhart draft, “attracting or feeding”



Elk in Gearhart, shortly before a City Council workshop on a “no-feeding” ordinance.

of wildlife within the city limits could be declared a public nuisance prohibited at all times.

Along with elk, City Administrator Chad Sweet said, wildlife would be defined as bear, cougar, coyote, wolves

and other animals. Feeding “anything that would be considered wild” would be considered a possible violation.

The ordinance also addresses the feeding of smaller animals such as skunks, raccoons and geese, Brown said, which has led to not only some potential health issues, but safety issues as well.

Like a similar no-feeding ordinance in Warrenton, the feeding of songbirds or squirrels would not be regulated.

Violation of the Gearhart ordinance could bring a penalty of up to \$500, but officials hope they’ll find compliance with the public before issuing fines.

“We’re going to work with people for a period of time before we start issuing tickets,” Sweet said. “If we take care of large wild animals and have this ordinance, and keep it simple, it will probably take care of 90 percent of the problem. If we find unintended consequences, we can always make an adjustment.”

Brown and councilors asked city staff to begin crafting the no-feeding ordinance, to be presented at a future meeting.

Gearhart City Council issues Palmberg zoning denial

City Council rejects property owner’s request

By R.J. Marx
Seaside Signal

City councilors were unconvinced by property owners Palmberg Paving Co. that a zoning change was needed to promote higher-density housing on a 27-acre property in Gearhart.

The owners had hoped to rezone 498 McCormick Gardens Road in advance of a sale.

After receiving flood maps, soil analysis and housing data, among other documents, the Planning Commission held two meetings this fall and received input before recommending denial, said City Planner Carole Connell.

Low elevation, drainage issues, questions about soils and the property’s former industrial use led to concerns from commissioners. The change, from rural agricultural to medium-density residential, could have delivered 10 parcels on 7.5 buildable acres, about 20 percent of the site.

At the Nov. 7 City Council public hearing, the owners asked the council to reconsid-

er the Planning Commission’s recommendation.

Heidi Palmberg Snidow and consultant Li Alligood, of Otak, sought to alleviate contamination, traffic and quality of life concerns.

Snidow stressed the family’s decades of supporting the community. “We really do want to see the best for Gearhart in years to come,” she said.

Snidow said the family seeks to sell the property to a developer “who can create a residential community consistent with the growth that is and has been happening.”

The hearing was for a zone change only, she added, and any development would be subject to city review.

But neighbors and city councilors echoed the Planning Commission’s earlier concerns.

Roads are too narrow for the additional traffic, said McCormick Gardens Road resident Gloria Edler. “It’s nice for a rural area — but gosh, to add 50, 100 cars, I can’t even imagine such a thing.”

McCormick Gardens Road homeowner Mary Chandler said “the traffic on that road is enough as it is. It could just be

a nightmare.”

City Councilor Paulina Cockrum said she was “uncomfortable moving forward at this time with this plan. We’ve being asked to approve something with many issues that are still unknown. That makes me uncomfortable.”

A motion to deny rezoning was unanimously carried by Cockrum, Reita Fackerell, Kerry Smith and Mayor Matt Brown. Councilor Dan Jesse, as a neighbor to the property, did not vote.

City officials, however, left a path forward for future development on the property.



Pacific Way near Railroad Avenue in Gearhart, near the southern border of the Palmberg property. Neighbors said they feared the impact of a high-density development on local roadways.

The rural agricultural zone does allow a “cluster development” option, Connell said, with each buildable acre offering a 10,000-square-foot lot.

“If they didn’t change the zone, they could have 20 single-family lots on the property in a cluster manner through the Planning Commission without a zone change,” Connell said. “They could do that now.”

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