

SignalViewpoints

Mapping the BIG ONE in Gearhart

SEEN FROM SEASIDE
R.J. MARX



Gearhart isn't underwater, but new maps swathed in shades of blue delineate degrees of submersion. Residents are faced with daunting existential choices to determine what level of risk they want to prepare for. It could impact not only high profile issues like where to place the firehouse or emergency buildings, but where businesses operate and homes are built.

After receiving a state grant from the Department of Land Conservation and Development to prepare for big events, the city is working on ways to improve resiliency in the aftermath of a Cascadia Subduction Zone event.

Mapping the future

At their February meeting, the Planning Commission considered model language provided by the state's Department of Geology and Mineral Industries to update the comprehensive plan and land use regulations. Revised maps provide guidance on what to expect — if not the date the tsunami will hit — historical trends suggest within the next 15 years.

Goals are to improve readiness and make Gearhart more resilient after a tsunami by establishing standards to be applied in the review and authorization of land use in areas subject to tsunami hazards, City Planner Carole Connell said at the commission meeting.

The numbers are discouraging, if not numbing: 95 percent of Gearhart will be vulnerable to inundation from a "L" magnitude

local tsunami event.

Worse, the entire city would be impacted by an "XXL" event.

That leaves residents and planners alike faced with some huge asterisks when it comes to making decisions, especially with key locations — the Gearhart Elementary School building, firehouse, city park — under discussion for critical safety needs and emergency infrastructure.

Region faces threat

In the Seaside School District, voters had limited choices where to construct a campus outside the tsunami zone, but with the donation of land in the Southeast Hills and an approval from voters, students can expect firm footing in fall 2020.

Cannon Beach, which is also facing the unsettling projection of its own demise, is holding similar discussions as it looks for a new location — or locations — outside of the tsunami zone for a new City Hall and police station.

Cannon Beach has sites that Gearhart might consider a luxury: out of the tsunami zone at South Wind and near the RV Park, both offering greater protection and potential for future relocation.

Gearhart doesn't have similar options — but that's not a reason to give up on safer, more versatile public safety buildings.

A coastal effort

Gearhart received \$14,000 from the state to help them address tsunami evacuation routes and needs, and to identify evacuation improvement projects, the Department of Land Conservation and Development's Coastal Shores Specialist Meg Reed said in late February.

Along with Gearhart, the state is collaborating with 10 other coastal jurisdictions through two federal

grants provided by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration on this project, the closest communities being Rockaway Beach, Tillamook County and Newport, with participation as far south as North Bend and Port Orford.

These communities expressed interest in addressing their individual tsunami risk, Reed said.

Department of Land Conservation and Development staff provide technical and financial support to the city to prioritize long-term planning related to the Cascadia Subduction Zone earthquake and tsunami event.

By identifying projects now and prioritizing them in a plan, communities will be able to take advantage of grant funds when they arise more readily, such as FEMA hazard mitigation assistance funds.

There are no consequences from the state for not adopting a tsunami hazard overlay zone.

Exception

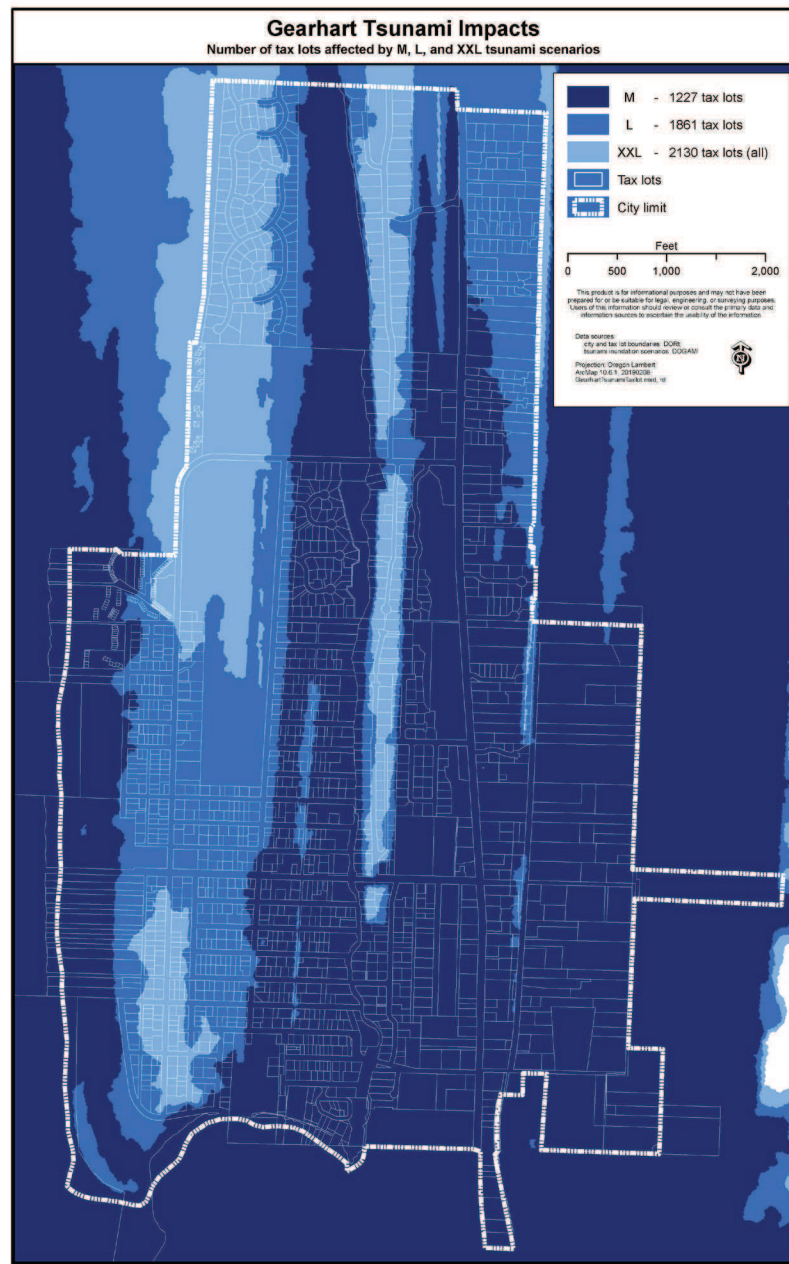
Proposed code language includes three main points, Reed said.

New rules could limit certain types of critical and essential facilities — police stations, hospitals, schools — from being built in the tsunami inundation zone, she said.

That zone is up for the city to decide. DOGAMI has five mapped tsunami zones: small, medium, large, extra-large, and extra-extra large based on the variability of the size of the next earthquake. The community can make a decision based on their acceptable level of risk.

The goal is to provide options to provide incentives for development within the tsunami inundation zone that results in lower risk exposure.

These provisions would not



City of Gearhart

All of Gearhart could be feel the impact of the most severe tsunami events.

THE NUMBERS ARE DISCOURAGING, IF NOT NUMBING: 95 PERCENT OF GEARHART WILL BE VULNERABLE TO INUNDATION FROM A 'L' MAGNITUDE LOCAL TSUNAMI EVENT.

apply to single-family dwellings, existing developments or uses. All of Gearhart's proposed firehouse sites are compromised and vulnerable to varying degrees.

That doesn't mean residents shouldn't pick the best-case scenario. According to draft language, sites can win approval if "there are no reasonable lower-risk alternative sites available for the proposed use."

"The city is well aware of this as far as the fire station goes,"

Reed said. "The city needs an exception because there is no other place."

While the standards have yet to be adopted, planning commissioners expect that they will be passed by the city prior to the construction of a proposed fire station.

A hearing will present rewritten code language to the public March 14.

"If we stay on schedule for the grant, it will be adopted by June 30," Connell said.

Whale Spirit drum circle has its first meet

VIEW FROM THE PORCH
EVE MARX



Bebe Michel of Gearhart and Russ Mead of Seaside have been interested in drumming for awhile.

"Ever since I experienced a Grateful Dead drum solo in concert as a teenager, I recognized drumming as primal and thrilling," Michel said. Michel plays the piano and alto recorder, but said until fairly recently, she never owned a drum. Fast forward to 2016 when she became a political activist.

"I started out with a homemade bucket drum," Michel said. "I still didn't know about real drums and was unsure how to begin." She said on the night of the lunar eclipse January 20, 2019, she and a group of friends went out on the beach to build a bonfire and drum. That's when she met Russ Mead.

"He knows about drums," Michel said.

The two got to talking, and soon after Michel purchased a djembe drum. One thing led to another and a drum circle in Seaside was born.

The first circle will take place Saturday at 7 p.m. at the Bob Chisholm Community Center in Seaside. The plan is to meet the first Saturday of every month. The drum circle is open to the public and everyone is welcome.

The Whale Spirit Drum Circle is a family friendly event. It's meant to be a monthly celebration of drumming, Mead and Michel said.

"We have no agenda other than bringing together locals and visitors



Russ Mead and Bebe Michel are planning a percussive experience in Seaside.

who want to sit in circle and drum," Mead said. "We expect to see Native American style frame drums, African djembes, Irishbodhrans, as well brightly colored festival drums produced specifically for modern drum circles. We expect to welcome serious drummers as well as first time drummers."

Mead said a good community drum circle has a loose structure. "Everyone knows when and where to gather," he said. "A facilitator opens the circle with a few remarks. Then the facilitator lays down a steady beat. The rest of the circle either joins in or adds slight embellishments; the rhythm ebbs and flows with its own spirit."

Mead has created a website that details drum circle etiquette and what

to bring. A small suggested donation is requested to offset the room rental for the Bob Chisholm Community Center.

Michel said her vision for the circle is that it become like the community of drummers who meet regularly in Asheville, North Carolina. "They started out with 10 people to become a downtown cultural event and major tourist draw."

"We're hoping we'll have people of all experience levels come to be part of a drumming conversation and have fun," Michel said. "And when the weather is nice, we're hoping to do outdoor drumming at the Seaside Turnaround at the end of Broadway. Hopefully it will make people happy as they stroll along the Prom."

For more information, log on to WhaleSpirit.com.

An investment in journalism

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Last summer and fall, we surveyed readers and convened a group of Seaside and Gearhart residents as a quasi-advisory group to talk to us about how to improve our publication and delivery of news to South County residents. One of the things that came from the survey and discussion was that South County residents value local news and information produced by professional journalists — and are willing to pay for it.

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But newsprint and ink is expensive, and we pay to have copies delivered to the local racks and businesses. Journalists who are trained and experienced in sourcing and verifying news are paid for their work because it's a valuable service. We believe that credible, local information that is gathered and verified, then delivered in print to locations in Seaside is worth paying for.

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