

Gearhart firehouse survey favors High Point site

By R.J. MARX
Seaside Signal

The City Park will remain a park in Gearhart.

A proposal that had launched an emotionally charged debate and divided community members is off the table as Mayor Matt Brown formally took the site off the list of potential firehouse locations, in a process designed to increase resiliency and safety in a Cascadia Subduction Zone earthquake and tsunami. The current firehouse building, constructed in 1958, is considered too limited to meet the needs of modern firefighters and at risk in the case of an earthquake or tsunami.

Of all 947 surveys received, about 50% supported the High Point Station at 1376 North Marion as their No. 1 choice, followed by 38.4% who selected the current location at 670 Pacific Way in second place.

Only 11.5% of respondents chose the Gearhart Park Station as their first choice.

“In trying to follow the public’s guidance in what they choose and don’t choose, I’d like to make a motion to take the park off the table,” Brown said, a motion unanimously approved by councilors Paulina Cockrum, Reita Fackerehl and Kerry Smith. Dan Jesse was absent from the meeting.



R.J. Marx

Gearhart Park, no longer a proposed site for a new firehouse in Gearhart.

Three-year history
After considering nine locations, City Administrator Chad Sweet said in a staff report delivered at Wednesday’s City Council meeting, the fire station committee recommended three concepts and locations to the public to help guide the decision-making process. In narrowing down sites, members of the committee relied on state geologic data and scientific trends to prepare for an L-1 or large tsunami, which encompasses 95% of the possible flood scenarios, consultant Tom Horning of Horning Geosciences said in an April 22 letter. A small scenario, the M-1 or medium scenario, would encompass only 79% of the modeled wave scenarios, Horning said. Lives at risk are proportional to the number of buildings flooded for each scenario. After a town hall in January, residents heard merits and drawbacks of each site. Audience members at the time showed little stomach to convert the park — donated by Lesley Miller as dedicated parkland in 1947 — into use for a public safety building. Following the town hall, Gearhart voters and residents were invited to fill out a survey ranking each location. Respondents ranked their preferred locations and provided feedback on their choices. Along with their preferred site, they were asked if they were supportive of a bond to fund the project, and if they favored private donations to help cover costs. Those results were delivered Wednesday night. Of the 947 total survey responses, 78% supported a new station, and 75.5% supported a bond to pay for construction. Of respondents, 61.6% supported private donations.

Costs for a firehouse at the park had been estimated at \$7 million. Negotiations on the possible land acquisition of the High Point site could be concluded by Aug. 17, the date necessary to place a measure on the ballot in November, Sweet said. “The committee’s been at this for three years,” fire station committee member Tom Thies added. “We’ve got some real momentum going. It would be really nice if we could get it to the next step. We’re moving right now.”

Public safety, personnel, capital outlays drive Gearhart budget toward \$2M

By R.J. MARX
Seaside Signal

The city of Gearhart presented and approved a first reading of its proposed 2019-20 budget on Wednesday, May 1. Ordinance 919 allows the city to impose taxes for the upcoming fiscal year, and is necessary to receive tax revenues.

At \$1.98 million, the budget is about \$22,000 more than last year’s budget of \$1.958 million, an increase of less than 1 percent. Of general fund expenses,



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the police and fire departments are the largest portion, at about \$503,000 for

each department. Administrative personnel services, materials and capital outlays

slightly exceed \$400,000. The city has about \$250,000 in cash on hand. Of resources, the city anticipates receiving \$375,000 in transit room tax, a number matching last year’s figure. Building permit revenue is anticipated to be slightly down, from \$212,000 to \$200,000. Building inspector fees are budgeted at \$128,000, a reduction from last year’s budgeted \$155,000. Marijuana tax revenue is anticipated at \$25,000. The number is based on what the city’s one retail dispensary

been paying monthly, City Administrator Chad Sweet said. Total personnel services exceed \$1 million, up from \$945,000 in 2018-19. The city’s tax rate is \$1.0053 per \$1,000 of assessed value for property owners within Gearhart. The council also approved an ordinance to receive state revenue sharing, necessary to receive tax revenues, amounting to \$25,000. An ordinance imposing taxes for the road district was provided in the

approved budget. Road district taxes total \$33,000. The city also approved cost of living increases and incremental raises for several Gearhart employees. “They’ve all done an amazing job, and they should have everything else they get,” audience member Wilson Mark said during public comment. Each ordinance will receive a second reading at the council’s special May 29 meeting, in order to meet state deadlines requiring budgets to be approved by July 1.

Rental: Commission puts rental home on probation

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“It’s going to happen. It’s not going to stop,” Woodman said. “I need help, and I need you to back it up. If I have to I will get the list of 320 VRDs and I will go door-to-door and I will get a petition and get other people to back me up when it comes to VRD rules.”

The property in north Seaside was originally approved as a vacation rental dwelling in 2007, with a maximum occupancy of nine people over age three in the existing four-bedroom dwelling.

In a thick binder of complaints, Woodman described noxious vegetation, an unmowed lawn, noise, loud music, barking dogs, “hot tub shenanigans,” and “verbal abuse” from vacation rental guests.

Woodman, who has sent her concerns to the Signal, Gov. Kate Brown, State Sen. Betty Johnson and Seaside City Council members, said when she asked visitors to the vacation rental home to be quiet, they ignored her, used profanity and “even mooned me.”

“I live next to there,” Woodman said. “It’s a nightmare. It’s zoned for nine occupants. I count 10, 11, 12. Let these people be responsible for what they’re doing.”

In a letter to the Planning Commission, neighbor Kristi Coulter said she had experienced “loud, drunk, hostile renters,” and a problem of outdoor parties in the hot tub over many years.

“Quiet and peaceful enjoyment of our home is no longer possible,” she wrote. But the Norlings, attorney



Seaside Signal

Home at 441 16th Avenue.

Christian Zupancic and property manager Erin Barker said owners have responded to all complaints in a timely manner.

Jon Norling said 95 percent of the complaints were parking complaints, all of them rectified within “a couple of hours” after notification.

“It’s easy to make allegations; it’s hard to substantiate them,” Kelly Norling said. “I would like to remedy this. I’m interested in keeping the house as a rental, and for use of our family.”

Norling said she is proactive in sharing the home’s rental rules, especially parking limits, on listing sites, via email to renters and with posted notices on the premises.

“I remind them, this is a big deal,” she said. “You may not park on the street. I barrage them with warnings.”

“I’ve done my level best to try to communicate with

the neighbors, let them know what my phone number is, let them know I’m responsive,” Barker added. “I let them know if there’s an issue I will deal with it.”

Norling said she and her husband had received only one complaint until 2015, when Woodman moved next door. All the complaints have been since then, she said, “primarily or solely from her,” and are driven by a “personal vendetta.”

Barker suggested Woodman has “a different level of sensitivity to things.”

“She’s a hypersensitive person, and I can appreciate it,” Barker said. “I respect that. Everybody has a different level of sensitivity.”

In coming to a decision to institute a permit probation period, Planning Commission Chairman Chris Hoth asked commissioners to consider the “letter of the law” and the “spirit of the law.”

Rules are created to solve these problems, he said,

“not to be draconian or to punish.”

Hoth asked for a solution “that’s fair for both parties.”

Commission members supported Planning Director Kevin Cupples’ recommendation of a probationary period.

During that time, city staff will track and log all complaints received with a written response. The owners will be required to provide a rental log that indicates the days the vacation rental dwelling is rented, and the number of occupants staying in the home during each rental period.

Conditions must be met so commissioners can monitor the situation and “see what’s going around there,” Hoth said.

If violations are documented, the owners could be subject to a reduced occupancy rate or revocation of their vacation dwelling permit.

“We will of course continue discussing the issue of vacation rentals and rules and their impact on the city,” Hoth said.

A joint City Council and Planning Commission work session will be scheduled after budget season, Cupples added.

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