

# In Cannon Beach, a sign of the virus leaves a sting

Some business owners want softer message

By **KATIE FRANKOWICZ**  
The Astorian

CANNON BEACH — State and local restrictions over the coronavirus have hit many North Coast businesses hard. One business owner has pushed back against signs meant to discourage visitors.

“Due to COVID-19 Cannon Beach is closed to visitors,” state the signs set along U.S. Highway 101 ahead of entrances to the city.

The messages are targeted at tourists, but Erin Fenison, the owner of Cannon Beach Soap Co., said customers who live in Clatsop County think the admonition also applies to them.

“Like don’t even bother coming in,” she said.

Fenison is collecting signatures on a petition that asks the city to amend the signs. She supports the city’s

policies and doesn’t want to suggest what the signs should say — she trusts city councilors and believes they could come up with something better.

But she would like a softer message, one that makes it clear businesses are still open and North Coast residents can still shop.

So far, she has collected over 70 signatures from a mix of locals and people who live outside of the area.

Many Cannon Beach business owners make the bulk of their money during the spring and summer tourism season, but they rely on local traffic in the late fall and winter. Without a boost from spring break crowds this year and with summer still an unknown, they are more reliant than ever on local customers.

Last spring, Fenison moved her business into a new location nearly four times the size of the old one.

“That was kind of a big transition and an expensive year,” she said. “We really counted on this year to bring us out of it. There’s no cushion for us.”

Like other business owners, she is trying to adapt, finding new ways to reach customers and provide them with goods in a safe way. But the streets are deserted and rent is not cheap.

She isn’t sure if she’ll be able to bounce back.

“It’s impossible to say, honestly,” Fenison said. “All I know is it has significantly hurt our business and there’s a lot of businesses that wonder if they’re going to be



R.J. Marx

Some Cannon Beach residents would like to see a softer message from the city at its entrances.

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Deanna Hammond, the co-owner of Cannon Beach Bakery, supports Fenison’s efforts and plans to pen a letter of her own to the City Council making a similar request.

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Vineeta Lower

Suzanne Weber

George Kiepe

Debbie Boothe-Schmidt

## Favorites emerge for state House

Boothe-Schmidt, Weber have fundraising edge

By **EDWARD STRATTON**  
The Astorian

Even amid a campaign driven mostly online and over the phone by the coronavirus pandemic, favorites have emerged in the Democratic and Republican primaries to replace state Rep. Tiffany Mitchell.

The Astoria Democrat announced just before the filing deadline in March that she would not run for a second term, moving to Washington state because of her husband’s new job with Pacific Power.

Democrats outnumber Republicans in state House District 32 and have held the seat since 2002. But Republicans, buoyed by a rural backlash against proposed climate change legislation, are facing one of their best opportunities to take the seat.

Debbie Boothe-Schmidt, a trial assistant for Clatsop County and a board member with the Sunset Empire Transportation District, is running in the Democratic primary in May against George Kiepe, a former county commissioner.

In the Republican primary, Tillamook Mayor Suzanne Weber is facing off against Vineeta Lower, an online educator who lost a close election in 2018 to Mitchell.

Boothe-Schmidt and Weber have emerged as favorites, gathering almost all fundraising so far. Weber, a retired educator, amassed more than \$40,000 in donations as of Monday from the regional business community to Lower’s \$3,000. Boothe-Schmidt has raised more than \$24,000, while Kiepe has recorded no contributions.

### Republicans

Weber estimates she has reached around 120,000 people, mostly through Facebook videos. During a recent Zoom teleconference for candidates organized by Republicans, she said the North Coast needs better representation than Mitchell, who has taken heat over her support for cap and trade to help combat cli-

mate change and a corporate activity tax to provide more funding for public schools.

“It’s my hope to bring common sense back to the Legislature and back to Salem in the form of what we and the North Oregon Coast believe,” Weber said.

Weber said defeating cap-and-trade legislation is her top priority. She also took aim at the Student Success Act, which was financed by a corporate activity tax to support educational reforms she believes need to be voided.

Weber has gathered almost all major donations from the regional business community, including \$5,000 from a political action committee for Oregon real estate agents; \$3,000 from Hampton Lumber; and \$1,500 each from the #TimberUnity PAC, the North Coast First PAC and Koch Industries. Koch is the owner of the Georgia-Pacific Wauna Mill, which would have faced emissions regulation under the proposed cap-and-trade bill.

“Vineeta Lower is a lovely lady,” Weber said of her opponent by phone last week. “I think that I am more electable because I have more experience in public office.”

Lower said Mitchell has turned her back on North Coast constituents.

“I want to really work on addressing this ... tax exhaustion that we have recently seen implemented,” she said at the recent teleconference.

Lower pointed to state fees for paddleboarding and canoeing as inappropriate, as well as protecting vulnerable populations on fixed incomes from property tax increases and addressing the high cost of medication.

### Democrats

Boothe-Schmidt announced her candidacy the same day Mitchell publicly revealed she wasn’t running for reelection. Kiepe, a former Clatsop County commissioner, also filed at the last minute for the Democratic primary.

Boothe-Schmidt said it seemed like a good time to parlay her experience with the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees to serving Oregonians as a whole.

“I can fight for better wages, safer working conditions, affordable health care,” she said. “I can take my experience working with the union, and hopefully take that to Salem and benefit the whole district, not just the union local.”

She has so far raised more than \$17,000 from her union and \$1,000 from the Service Employees International Union, which helped propel Mitchell to victory in 2018.

It’s been challenging to get her name out amid government restrictions over the coronavirus, Boothe-Schmidt said. She’s so far focused on phone- and text-banking, with flyers coming out soon.

Kiepe said he’s been doing online forums and interviews with unions, Realtors and other interest groups. He said the first priority is getting the economy back on track, in part by getting Democrats and Republicans to work together in the Legislature. The last two legislative sessions have been stymied by Republican walkouts over cap-and-trade legislation.

State legislators “have got to be able to improve relationships where we can sit down at the table and talk about things and come up with a consensus, and not have this supermajority crammed down your throat,” he said of Democratic advantages in the state House and Senate.

Aside from teleconferences, the election has not featured the usual public forums where candidates stake their positions. The American Association of University Women canceled a forum planned for last week. Andy Davis, the chairman of the Clatsop County Democratic Central Committee, said the party has been inviting candidates for all offices to speak at its monthly meetings.

## Seniors: Coping with the new normal

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The company also recently completed a major renovation at Avamere at Seaside and was preparing to open its independent living housing, which includes 41 apartments for seniors looking to retire on the coast. Now, the grand opening is postponed and depositors are unable to move in, which was a disappointment for Avamere, as “everyone is excited to open that,” Cloutier said.

### Above and beyond

Although the situation has challenged both residents and staff, it’s also created opportunities for caregivers to develop creative solutions for meeting the social, physical and intellectual needs of seniors within each community.

“People have gone above and beyond to make it as normal as possible given the circumstances,” Cloutier said.

They’ve implemented a communication software called LifeLoop, designed for senior living communities and helps connect families, staff and residents. Cloutier said it keeps people “in the know and engaged in what’s going on in the community,” as well as streamlining communication and boosting life enrichment services. Other solutions have required a touch of creativity and extra effort, such as one-on-one reading or exercise sessions with residents.

Avamere is using social media to celebrate its “#AvamereHeroes,” or staff members who are going above and beyond to serve residents and mitigate the hardship engendered by the current public health crisis. Recently, they featured Hannah Voelker, the life enrichment director at Avamere at Seaside. A social media post praises Voelker’s natural creativity for bringing new activities to residents and setting up phone calls and video chats.

Walt Plummer, a health care coordinator who has served the senior living community for nearly 10 years, is noted for picking up shifts to ensure care, his sense of humor and worth ethic.

On April 11, a group of community members from the Seaside area organized a vehicle parade that started at Suzanne Elise and then passed by Neawanna by

they’re going to be ticketed,” she said.

The bakery offers pre-ordering and pickup options and is looking to add home delivery several days a week.

“I absolutely feel like we can weather this storm,” Hammond said. “I’m not saying it’s going to be easy.”

After all, she added, “we’re not going to be able to pay our rent in May. We’re just not. Maybe a portion of it — and when does this stop?”

Like many others, they will be looking to help from the government or from grants.

The Cannon Beach Chamber of Commerce sent a poll to business owners asking what would be the most helpful assistance from the city. More than half responded that they would prefer assistance through a grant program, Jim Paino, the chamber’s executive director, said. Several hotels also asked for a deferment of lodging tax payments.

The City Council is discussing potential relief options.

In his most recent message to residents posted on the city’s website on April 13, Mayor Sam Steidel acknowledged the difficulty of the situation for businesses.

But Cannon Beach is a unique draw, the mayor wrote.

“When the time does come, we will see business return with a fury,” he wrote. “People have been cooped up and our sands are too much the temptation to resist.”

The question of when to reopen to visitors is a difficult one, though, and balance is key, he added. Like other coastal leaders, Steidel is worried about a flood of people too soon.

Oregon and Washington state’s governors will ultimately make the call about when to change stay-at-home orders and other closure policies and cities like Cannon Beach “are somewhat at the whim of those higher powers,” Steidel wrote.

“That said, I will keep the closed sign up as long as possible,” he said.



Seaside Signal

The Suzanne Elise Assisted Living Community.

the Sea, Providence Seaside Memorial Hospital, the Columbia Memorial Hospital clinic at the Seaside Outlet Mall, the Seaside Fire Department and the Seaside Police Department. Participants held signs letting residents and patients know they aren’t forgotten and expressing appreciation for those on the frontlines of combatting the pandemic, such as emergency responders and health care professionals. Honking, balloons,

smiles and music were also on display.

“It was great fun for all that participated, and we heard from care facilities and hospital staff that they really appreciated it,” said Shirley Smith-Yates, who helped organize the parade.

The expressions of community spirit go both ways, however. On April 24, Suzanne Elise hosted a drive-thru barbecue for essential workers from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m.

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