

Foreclosure could complicate school sale

By R.J. MARX
Seaside Signal

One tax lot for sale at the former Seaside High School campus may not actually be the school district's to sell.

Lot 4900, a parcel included in the marketing package for the sale of the high school, is owned by Clatsop County, the county's property management specialist, Sirpa Duoos, said earlier this month.

"There's a conflict with how the school district has been handling that piece through their marketing of the rest of the property," Duoos said.

Tax lot 4900 was originally decided to the Seaside School District by its owners, Leonard and Eleanor Kiser, in 1956.

But when the school district failed to pay property taxes on the 0.82-acre property, the county foreclosed in 1961.

The county retains ownership, even as the parcel is included in the school's sales packet.

The disclosure comes after the school district's board of directors authorized the superintendent to negotiate and execute a \$3.2 million contract for the sale with Harry Henke, a registered agent of HTA Properties LLC.

When the former high school property is sold, almost 8 acres used as ballfields at the north end of the high school campus will also revert to the city.

Referred to as "the north 40," the property, zoned medium residential, is not included in the school district sale.

"Staff has been informed the city of Seaside is interested in these properties to use as recreational fields," Duoos said.

While other school properties for sale have no reversionary clauses, there's "no conflict there," Duoos said. "But we do have to figure out how to resolve tax lot 4900."

Commissioner Lianne Thompson, who represents District 5, leaned to turning tax lot 4900 over to the city for park space.

"It makes sense we allow them to use it for recreational purposes and still have the reversionary clause, so that we have both flexibility and accountability to happen in a humane way and a sane way," Thompson said.

Commissioner Sarah Nebeker, who represents District 4, agreed that recreational use is beneficial for the community, but added the county should seek some compensation.

The land could be sold for public auction, Duoos said in her summary to commissioners.

"Most of all I'd like to hear from the school district and the city of Seaside," Pamela Wev, county commission chairwoman, said. "I'd like to hear what their wants would be from this."

City eyes role in elementary school future

By R.J. MARX
Seaside Signal

As Gearhart Elementary School moves closer to sale, city officials are seeking ways to retain portions of the land for playground and athletic field space.

Mayor Matt Brown said he and City Administrator Chad Sweet met with with Robert Morey, a potential owner of the property, to discuss a possible role for the city if the transaction takes place.

That could involve a zoning change for a portion of the property and use of the park space, soccer and baseball fields for the city, Sweet said at the August City Council meeting.

"They want to do a project at the site knowing that it's going to be difficult to go through zoning that will benefit both the community and maybe get a little bit of this person's money back out," Sweet said.

If Morey does purchase the former school, the city could partner after the purchase helping to maintain the park space, the soccer fields and the baseball fields. "Matt and I thought that was pretty interesting," Sweet said.

Gearhart Elementary School sits on 8 1/2 acres with almost 32,000 square feet of building space. Students will move to the new Pacific Ridge school in Seaside.



Gearhart Elementary School in July.

Seaside Signal

the best project," he added. "By community, I mean the Planning Commission, City Council, the buyer and city staff. Insurance is covered, and I think that would work out really well."

Whether a deal would include the playground equipment is unclear. Councilor Dan Jesse said moving the equipment would likely be "cost prohibitive" for the school district.

"I think they'll leave it," Jesse said. "I think we should consider that before we offer to pay anything for it."

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Landmark outdoors law will boost Arch Cape water project

By KATIE FRANKOWICZ
The Astorian



A stream helps feed the Arch Cape watershed.

Colin Murphey/The Astorian

Local efforts to conserve the Arch Cape watershed received a crucial boost this week from the Great American Outdoors Act.

The landmark measure, signed into law Aug. 4 by President Donald Trump, gained bipartisan support and will put funds toward deferred maintenance at national parks and other projects in Oregon and across the United States.

The Arch Cape Water District is set to receive \$1 million this year and — with the law fully and permanently funding the Land and Water Conservation Fund — appears to be on solid footing for a request for \$2.5 million next year.

Phil Chick, the district manager, estimates it will cost around \$5.5 million to purchase 1,521 acres of commercial timberland around the source of Arch Cape's drinking water.

But the news was huge. "This was the whole project," Chick said. "I don't think there's a whole lot that's in our way for doing it now. ... It definitely opens up the door for optimism."

The Great American Outdoors Act is the most significant investment in decades for national parks and public lands, according to Oregon Outdoors, an advocacy coalition representing the outdoor recreation industry, nonprofit recreation groups and conservation organizations.

The Arch Cape Water District is in a due diligence period with property owner

Onion Peak LLC to purchase the acreage by 2023, but they do not have a purchase price yet.

The information the water district is collecting now all seems to be pointing to go, Chick said.

Like many coastal communities, Arch Cape does not have full control of its watershed and residents have worried about how to ensure water quality long term while commercial logging is still a possibility on the land. The Arch Cape Water District oversees 290 water connections.

The water district hopes to create a community forest on the acreage, managing the forest for both social and ecological benefits.

The property the district hopes to purchase would tie into an additional 3,500 acres the North Coast Land Conservancy is in the process of acquiring for its \$10 million Rainforest Reserve project.

That project also received

significant funding this year in the form of a \$2.1 million Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board grant.

This year has highlighted another need besides water quality, Chick noted.

When much of the state shut down in the spring to slow the spread of the coronavirus, outdoor recreational options were limited in the southern portions

of the North Coast. Large state parks like Oswald West, Ecola and Nehalem and other state lands closed, restricting access to beaches and forests.

The proposed community forest property was one of the few places people could go, Chick said.

"It's a really vital recreation area for people from all over," he said.

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