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Agreement calls for \$2.25M middle school purchase

By R.J. MARX
Seaside Signal

Sunset Empire Park and Recreation District board members got a look at the district's newest purchase, Broadway Middle School.

Visiting in shifts with executive director Skyler Archibald, they toured the middle school, looking everywhere and opening every door, both to inventory what's already there and note items that may require remediation.

Park district board members approved a resolution

to seek financing for up to \$2.5 million in a special meeting last Thursday.

With a purchase price of \$2.25 million, 3 acres are zoned residential and 2.4 acres are zoned for commercial use of the 5.4-acre middle school property. The 73,000-square-foot building includes the school with two gyms, cafeteria and kitchen. The school is vacant after the school district moved the campus to a new location on Spruce Drive outside the tsunami inundation zone.

In seeking tax-exempt debt financing, the park

district is represented by a member of the Special Districts Association of Oregon, Archibald said, using financing options the district has used in the past to expand the Sunset Pool and acquire park district property.

The park district has 45 days to conduct due diligence, at which point the earnest money would become nonrefundable.

With a building inspection underway and expected to be complete this week, "that will give us plenty of time to assess whether we need to order more reports

or look into the boiler or HVAC," Archibald said at a Tuesday board of directors work session.

"I don't think we saw anything today that was crazy or alarming, but there were a few puddles that had accumulated inside in a couple of spots," Archibald said.

These included moisture near a classroom, the weight room and a gym area, he said.

The school, built in 1949, received upgrades in 1979 and a new gym in 1994.



Norris & Stevens

Aerial view, Broadway Middle School. Sunset Empire Park and Recreation District is located at top right-center.

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CANDIDATE FORUM



Dan Jesse and Jack Zimmerman, candidates for Gearhart's Position 4.

Katherine Lacaze

GEARHART

Firehouse, school are hot issues

By KATHERINE LACAZE
For Seaside Signal

The site of a new fire station, the performance of City Administrator Chad Sweet, and the old Gearhart Elementary School property were the main topics of discussion among candidates seeking seats on the Gearhart City Council in the Nov. 3 election.

"We're trying to put forward some of the big-picture questions and hoping to ask questions of candidates that require them to carefully reflect on the issues," said R.J. Marx, editor of the Seaside Signal and moderator of the forum that was held in Seaside last Thursday in collaboration with the American Association of University Women.

Candidates discussed the City Council's recent deci-

sion to forgo giving Sweet a salary increase, but rather proposing a performance review in the spring.

Paulina Cockrum, who is running unopposed for Gearhart mayor, said Sweet's employment agreement requires an annual review to be completed before the city budgeting process. Gearhart missed the review this year. "We want to get back on track with what that contract says to have another review in six months," Cockrum said.

Dan Jesse, the incumbent for Position 4, said the decision wasn't based on the city administrator's performance. "I wouldn't read into the review process and the fact that (Sweet) didn't get a raise. Frankly, I don't think we had a discussion whatsoever about his pay."

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SEASIDE

Candidates focus on housing, pandemic

By KATHERINE LACAZE
For Seaside Signal

Housing, response to the coronavirus pandemic and an open carry rally in September dominated the discussion of those running for the Ward 4 seat on the Seaside City Council during a candidate forum last Thursday.

Candidates David Posalski, Adam Wood and Kathy Kleczek discussed ways to balance the housing needs of local residents with those of vacation rental owners.

Posalski said as a member of the Planning Commission, he and commissioners established a code enforcement officer whose job is to monitor and verify the regulations and restrictions.

At first, the decision got "a lot of pushback from vacation rental dwelling

owners because it added to their fees for business licenses," he said.

Over time, however, they showed appreciation for the ability "to know when their management companies are actually doing the job they're supposed to be doing," Posalski said. "It ended up becoming a win-win."

This type of measure, along with caps on the percentage of vacation rental dwellings, can help improve the livability of the community, Posalski said.

Kleczek responded that blaming vacation rentals for the city's housing crisis is "a falsification."

"It's not to the point where we have empty and vacant rooms during the summer," Kleczek said.

The problem is skyrocketing property values, she

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Gearhart wrestles with conflicting goals

By R.J. MARX
Seaside Signal

Calls from businesses and residents to abandon commercial zoning amendments came at a Gearhart Planning Commission public hearing last Thursday.

They say restrictive zoning is "strangling" existing businesses, particularly at a time when they are limited by coronavirus restrictions.

As the commission considered updates to the code before sending it to the City Council for action, hearing participants said the changes were vague, overly restrictive, poorly timed and presented without adequate public input.

"When the entire country and world are in the midst of a pandemic and an ever-changing business landscape," wrote Ocean Avenue resident Jamie Gay-

lord wrote in a letter to planners, "why do you feel it is necessary to impose restrictions on them before we even know what the reality will be for them in the near future?"

Business owner Joy Sigler asked the city to abandon the downtown commercial zone altogether and begin a new one.

"The language and direction of the changes do not favor the promotion and support of entrepreneurs who would risk investing in this small community," Sigler said.

Patricia Roberts was among the almost two dozen to write letters to the commission or speak at the meeting. "Are any of you small business owners?" Roberts asked planning commissioners. "Do any of you have a small business in the

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Gearhart buildable lands lower than study indicated

By R.J. MARX
Seaside Signal

Gearhart's buildable land inventory is significantly less than Clatsop County's 2018 housing study indicated, a new study reports.

Gearhart officials went back to the authors, Matt Hastie and Andrew Parish, of Angelo Planning Group, to refine the city's buildable lands inventory and found the building capacity had shrunk by more than 45%,

from a projected 701 units in the 2018 report to the potential for 381 new lots on 100 buildable acres in the revised study.

If that capacity is reached, Gearhart could face the need to expand its urban growth boundary.

"This is really a basis for our housing element and urban growth boundary location in the event that we ever need to expand," City Planner Carole Connell said at last

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Seaside child care options stretched thin

By KATHERINE LACAZE
For Seaside Signal

Adequate child care has long been an issue in Clatsop County, but the coronavirus pandemic and temporary closure of schools to in-person classes has put additional strain on the area's limited options.

In the Seaside area, a few organizations are striving to fill the gap.

"We're in it for the long haul," said Shelly Owen, youth program manager at Sunset Empire Park and Recreation District, which has been operating emergency child care for students in kindergarten-through-fifth grade since the start of the school year. "We'll be doing this until things change."

The park district is providing full, five-day-per-week care for nine kindergartners, 10 first- and second graders, and 10 third-through-fifth graders — along with their usual Learning Ladder pre-

school program. The kindergartners meet at the park district's youth center, while the two classes of older elementary students take place at the former Broadway Middle School.

Planning scenarios

The park district isn't simply offering child care services but also providing support for the Seaside School District's Comprehensive Distance Learning program.

"It's a whole new ballgame," Owen said, adding it was "a big step" for the park

district. "When you are supporting a totally new style of learning for children, and you're learning it yourself, it makes it really challenging."

According to Owen, there is enough demand for child care from local families to open a third classroom, and the district has the space because of their access to the middle school building.

However, the staff of 14 — including Owen, who travels among the classrooms to oversee operations and fill in

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Sunset Empire Park and Recreation District

Jase Litehiser, playing with slime at the Learning Ladder preschool program.



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