

Gearhart: Officials concerned about plans to close off schoolyard

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ment will also be removed. The site will be fenced and closed to public access by the end of the year. “Creating something welcoming and visually interesting when entering the city is the goal,” Morey said. “We look forward to working cooperatively with the council, staff, and the community to achieve something special.” The sales announcement caught Gearhart leaders by surprise. Mayor Matt Brown said he was deeply concerned about the lack of transparency during the acquisition process. “It is unfortunate that you have decided to take a secretive and adversarial tone in your new acquisition of the Gearhart school property,” Brown wrote. “As a citizen, public official, and former student of Gearhart Elementary I believe our youth and community needs should be put first and foremost ahead of profits.” Brown objected to the fencing of the property which could block access to the property to the commu-

nity and youth sports. In an email to the Moreys, the school district and the city, Councilor Reita Fackerell said she was upset to read that the school property would be fenced off and that all playground equipment would be removed. “I believe that the citizens of Gearhart will be angry as well,” Fackerell said. “My hope is that we can work together to continue to provide park and recreational space for our community with no impediments whatsoever.” The site is designated public-/semi-public, zoning code limits used for a government facility, community meeting building, public service use or educational purposes. Any planned development of the property would need to go through the public rezoning process and no new commercial zoning can be created under the city’s comprehensive plan. In mid-July, the school district authorized Penrod to enter purchase negotiations with the Moreys. Originally listed at \$1.9 million, the school district lowered the price to \$1.2



R.J. Marx

New owner Scofi Gearhart LLC closed on the Gearhart Elementary School property Monday, with tree pruning and removal underway.

million earlier this year before authorizing the sale in August at \$750,000. When that deal didn’t materialize, the school district lowered the price and entertained additional bids. In late-October, the school district opened talks with Jeff Bodner, a general contractor, and Celeste Bodner, founder and executive director of Foster Club. At a City Council this month, the Bodners proposed to repurpose and revitalize the school building as a community hub for arts

and cultural activity, community gathering and as a place for philanthropic organizations, such as the Foster Club. Morey, who participated in the Gearhart meeting electronically, did not provide details of his plans at the time. Brown addressed that in his letter to the Moreys this week. “As you know we gave all parties interested in the property a chance to publicly speak at our last City Council meeting and you

decided not to inform the public on your vision, plan, or intention,” Brown said. He asked the Moreys to include the whole community in the planning process, and to “put transparency and the intentions of the comprehensive plan at the forefront of any decision you make.” Mayor-elect Paulina Cockrum said she was shocked by the Moreys’ intentions to close off the schoolyard open space with fences and intentionally limit residents from walk-

ing and playing in the long-standing recreational space. “I hope that a satisfactory solution to the property can be worked out in the future,” Cockrum wrote in an email. Morey, his engineer and architect will look at existing structures with an architect and structural engineer in December, he said. “We will be collaborating with the entire community of Gearhart as we determine the best long term uses of the former elementary school property. This will not be a rushed process.”

Shelter: ‘We wanted to come up with something that was fun for people’

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she said. “We don’t want a dog returned to or a cat returned. We’re hoping for the right match the first time.” Some visitors walk in and fall in love at first sight, while others take months of searching to meet just the right one. This year, the shelter will hold its first electronic fundraiser as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, Marcy Dunning, president of Clatsop Animal Assistance, told members of the Seaside

Chamber of Commerce last week. “We wanted to come up with something that was fun for people but that would be virtual.” The Pup Strut and Kitty Cuddle 2020 runs through the end of November, with the opportunity to share pet photos on social media. All pets are welcome. Donors can create fundraising teams with family, friends, businesses or neighbors to support the animal shelter. The shelter is always looking for volunteers, including dog-walkers,

drivers, people to work in the cat room or feed animals in the late afternoon, Hannam said. Videographers and people to assist on the website are also welcome. “If you’ve got a talent, come help,” Hannam said. To adopt, visit PetFinder.com, the county website or the Clatsop Animal Assistance webpage, dogsncats.org. Fill out the application and make an appointment to meet the pet at the shelter. “You can always change your mind once you’re in there,” Dunning said.



Clatsop Animal Assistance

Clatsop Animal Assistance's annual fundraiser goes virtual this year.

Gearhart planners hope code changes give businesses a boost

By R.J. MARX
Seaside Signal



R.J. Marx

Downtown Gearhart in late October.

No big chain stores would be able to set up shop on Pacific Way, and surrey rides are definitely off the table. But hard liquor could be sold downtown and pickleball players could rent paddles. Franchise restaurants would be prohibited, as would amusement parks and arcades. These were among the proposed changes to Gearhart’s downtown commercial zoning code, which moved from the Planning Commission to the City Council for review. The council will consider the recommendations at a public hearing Thursday. The goal is to modernize language in the code to allow businesses to have more options, increase revenue and be more successful in the C-1 zone, City Planner Carole Connell said at last week’s meeting. If the amendments are adopted, downtown businesses would be able to use 50% of their property for residential purposes. Parking requirements for eating and drinking establishments would be eased, and a 10 p.m. closing time would be eliminated. Cafes could offer outdoor and sidewalk seating for patrons. Planning commissioners weighed public com-

ment and the city’s comprehensive plan, which aims to “preserve and maintain the predominantly residential character of Gearhart.” While a neighborhood market would be considered an outright use, the commission fell short of removing conditional use permit requirements for cafes and variety stores. “If you took all those uses away and said, ‘Let’s just allow retail uses in the neighborhood commercial zone whatever they might be, you would be in opposition to the comprehensive plan,’” Connell said. According to the comprehensive plan, the city must limit commercial activity to a level compatible with residential character.

After a public hearing in October, a group of business owners said that despite the new amendments, the code remained overly restrictive. “We as business owners understand current zoning hardships for existing business and the barriers to entry for new business,” the group wrote in an October letter delivered at last week’s meeting. “While the changes the commission proposed were undertaken with the best intentions, they will actually deter business, make it harder to obtain and seek financing and won’t allow for flexibility in these very uncertain times.” Planning commissioners unanimously voted to send the recommendations to the City Council.

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**Eric, Tarah, Isabella, Olivia, Kyle,
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Holidays have a different meaning to everyone, and that meaning can change from year to year, depending on what fate has brought your way. For some, it has been a year of prosperity...for others, it has been a year of loss. Fortunately, time has a way of healing, and letting us go forward-to celebrate again. Whatever the year has brought your way, we want you to know our family’s thoughts are with you.

Eric J. Anderson
Owner Since March 2019

Eric & his Daughters, Isabella & Olivia

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