

Gearhart moves to amend downtown zoning

By **R.J. MARX**
Seaside Signal

A nearly two-year process turned around the bend last week as the Gearhart City Council reviewed recommendations of the Planning Commission to clean up outdated code language, make downtown commercial zoning less restrictive and encourage new businesses.

If adopted, the amendments could bring outdoor and sidewalk seating to neighborhood markets and limit chain or formula use businesses with four or more locations.

The amendments would eliminate restrictions that require neighborhood cafes to be open 11 months a year and lift the 10 p.m. closing time.

Amendments would bring existing stores into compliance with the code



R.J. Marx

Gearhart City Council agreed to consider amendments to downtown business zoning code.

by eliminating restrictive language, members of City Council said at a public hearing to consider the changes.

Downtown businesses would be able to use 50% of their property for residential purposes.

Changes would allow retailers, including the

Pacific Way Cafe, Sweet Shop and By the Way, to continue operations as they are rather than face enforcement for violating terms of the code.

“This is going to really help not only existing businesses, but help new businesses come into Gearhart too, hopefully a new

grocery market, as well,” Mayor Matt Brown said.

The City Council tasked planning commissioners with the revisions in early 2019 after the closing of Gearhart’s only grocery.

The amendments aim to modernize language in the code to allow businesses to have more options, increase

revenue and be more successful in the downtown C-1 zone.

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 the proposed changes remain overly restrictive, would make it difficult to seek financing and discourage new businesses from opening.

Business owners had sought to lift a requirement for a conditional use permit for retail stores and neighborhood cafes.

“Not only would this move to make two more outright uses save the city money in administrative costs, it would ease the city administrator’s job of enforcement and eliminate the costs associated with appeals,” the coalition of 11 business owners wrote the

Planning Commission earlier his month.

The new amendments fall short of listing retail and restaurants as unconditional uses.

The comprehensive plan, which stresses the city’s residential nature, directed much of the language in the amendments, City Attorney Peter Watts said at Thursday’s meeting.

“The goal is serve the community, not attract tourists,” Watts said. “There are limits to what we can do because of the very restrictive language in our comprehensive plan.”

City councilors voted 4-1 to approve a vote on the first reading of the amendments at the city’s Dec. 2 meeting.

Brown and councilors Rita Fackerell, Paulina Cockrum and Kerry Smith voted in favor, while Councilor Dan Jesse voted against the move.

Gearhart businesses to receive CARES Act funds

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Eight Gearhart businesses will receive a combined \$40,000 in relief funds from the federal CARES Act. The city will receive \$10,000 of the total \$50,000 distribution.

The Gearhart City Council unanimously approved the allocations at a special meeting last Thursday.

The money is part of funds delivered to the state by the federal government during the coronavirus pandemic. The \$2 trillion CARES Act, signed into law in late March, provides financial assistance to individuals, businesses, community organizations and state and local governments.

Funds for businesses are distributed through Clatsop Economic Development Resources. More than 210

businesses in Clatsop County have applied for relief through his group.

“CEDR had more than double the application requests than they had the funds,” City Attorney Peter Watts said.

Relief fund money must be used for non-budgeted COVID-19-related expenditures incurred between March 1 and Dec. 30.

Businesses have a lot of discretion as to how the

money is applied, but CARES funds must be spent by the end of the year, Watts said.

While advocating that the larger portion be distributed to local businesses impacted by the pandemic, government does need to be protected, City Administrator Chad Sweet said. “We need some of those funds to protect our volunteers, to protect the city, and our administrative staff,” Sweet said.

The city’s share will go to personal protective equipment like face shields, gowns, sanitizer, disinfectant, neck gaiters, aerosol and disinfectant, wipes and ventilation upgrades at public buildings.

Extra cleaning of the public restroom alone incurred an additional cost of \$2,300 since September, Sweet said.

Another round of CARES funding will be available through the state and Business

Oregon, he added.

This is the fourth round of coronavirus funding, Kevin Leahy, executive director of Clatsop Economic Development Resources, said.

“The applications that came in from the Gearhart businesses were from our round four applications, and we started with a large gap between applied for and confirmed funding,” Leahy said. “This is a significant help.”

Gearhart: ‘My hope is this arrangement lasts well into the future’

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The city will provide appropriate liability insurance and maintenance, he said.

“We want to thank Mayor-elect Cockrum for her efforts on behalf of Gearhart citizens and we look forward to working with her in the future,” Morey said.

Scofi Gearhart purchased the property earlier this month for \$500,000, which included a \$100,000 educational grant to the seller in addition to the \$400,000 purchase price.

After the sale, Mayor Matt Brown and Cockrum expressed shock at what they called a lack of transparency, and urged the owners to reconsider fencing

off the longstanding recreational space.

Their letters led to a meeting and follow-up from Sweet.

“I couldn’t be more ecstatic for the families of Gearhart and youth in our community that Mr. Morey has decided to do the right thing and keep the ball fields open for youth sports and resident recreation,” Brown said. “Mayor-elect Cockrum has shown why she will be excellent leader for Gearhart by helping to facilitate such an outcome for the community. My sincerest appreciation to our wonderful city staff and Mr. Morey for his generous consideration. My hope is this arrangement lasts well into the future.”



Aerial view of the school, with fields in the foreground.

Delay: ‘The strength of the community is hinged on its children’

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“Please stop the speeding train and do some research before the SEPRD makes a huge decision that could have a very negative impact on our community,” former recreation district board member Margene Ridout said.

The project was rushed, lacked public scrutiny and comes with potentially high remediation costs, said Tita Montero, administrator of the Facebook group.

Montero, a City Council member, said she was speaking as a private citizen.

She questioned if the recreation district has funds to remediate the 71-year-old building or operating capital to make loan payments.

“No matter where the money comes from, the taxpayers are ultimately holding the bag,” Montero said.

She proposed a community-based task force to determine district needs.

“My vision is community conversations” rather than confrontations,” Montero said. “My vision is that SEPRD plays well with the community.”

Randall Frank, also a city councilor speaking as a private citizen, suggested the district take more time before deciding on a purchase of the property, closed by the school district this year for a new campus out-



Norris & Stevens

Broadway Middle School from the air.

side of the tsunami zone.

“I might not be opposed to this proposed purchase, but show me the business plan or projections,” Frank wrote in a letter to the Seaside Signal.

Seaside’s Diane Wells described the middle school as “a property that will require extensive upgrade, deferred maintenance, and will create a liability for the district.”

The purchase was approved by the current board, Wells said, without voter approval, sale specifics and inspection results.

Youth sports, day care

With a negotiated price of \$2.25 million, the mid-

dle school is vacant after the school district moved the campus to a new location on Spruce Drive outside the tsunami inundation zone.

Proponents of the project see an opportunity to anchor an important location in the city, provide child care, add recreational facilities and programs for all ages.

“The strength of the community is hinged on its children,” said Andy Klumper, a coach and father of four. “Broadway Middle School is very important for the community and the health of our kids.”

Kerry Januik of the Pacific Basketball League said the acquisition could enable competitions to be

held in Seaside in the winter months when we are slowest.

Broadway Middle School has been the league’s mainstay, she said. The middle school’s basketball courts, in addition to courts at the new campus, would allow players to participate without leaving Seaside.

“I am relieved the board extended the deadline,” Wells said. “I feel they listened to our valid concerns. It’s going to be a large task to accomplish true due diligence. More detailed inspections are needed with true numbers for remediation. My wish is for the district to rescind the offer, make a realistic plan, and take it to

a vote.”

Board members unanimously agreed to authorize Archibald to seek a 60-day extension, which, if accepted by the school district, would provide time for extended inspection reports, a business plan and public input.

While the recreation district had sought 60 days to complete inspection reports, “the school district set the clock at 30,” Archibald said at Monday’s work session.

If the recreation district and school district come to terms, a closing would follow on Jan. 15, Archibald said.

While an inspection report is complete, board members sought additional information.

Working with consul-

tants, the recreation district asked for additional information on the building’s structure, roofing and heating system. Those reports should be available early next week, Archibald said.

Three presentations will provide information to recreation district residents on the proposed purchase, at 7 p.m. on Dec. 3, 10 and 17.

The webinars will detail financing, partnerships and potential uses for the property.

While there was no vote at the work session, board members supported the 30-day extension plan.

“I think we have to respect what the school board desires,” Michael Hinton said. “I’m sure they have issues on their end.”

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