

Seaside: COVID-19, election and protests mark 2020

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Meetings are now conducted via Zoom or broadcast on the city's YouTube channel.

Auxiliary tents went up at Providence Seaside Hospital and Clatsop County has struggled with a rising case-load. Hotels and restaurants struggled to adapt to new rules in a changing landscape and longtime businesses closed their doors as they considered their next steps.

Amidst this, emotions from a heated national election spilled over to Seaside, with rallies in front of City Hall and the Prom. Annual hallmarks of the city like the Miss Oregon competition, Hood to Coast and the Seaside Beach Volleyball tournament were all canceled. Even the Fourth of July fireworks were scratched, along with the typical parades and parties.

"We're telling people they need to be responsible," City Manager Mark Winstanley said in March. "Whether they come to Seaside or don't come to Seaside, it's very important for people to make responsible decisions. It is not business as usual. This is a very serious and different situation. We think people should pay attention to that situation."

Relief

To help businesses survive during closures, the council unanimously approved a \$1 million relief package to help businesses and residents get through the coronavirus.

Lodging taxes for the first quarter of 2020 were waived and property owners universally saw a \$50 credit on water bills.

Downtown businesses



City meetings went electronic in 2020.

struggled to meet pandemic safety requirements, including masks, social distancing and limits to the number of customers indoors.

The council approved \$250,000 in relief for businesses that suffered economic harm from restrictions during the pandemic. Restaurants, shops, galleries, cafes and entertainment venues operating in Seaside for at least one year were among those eligible.

With 142 applications by the deadline, the city received requests for more than \$520,000 in funding requests by retailers, food service, businesses and professionals.

Of eligible applicants, 126 of 135 received all or part of their request, with 11 of those fully funded.

Election 2020

Three candidates sought to fill the Ward 4 seat after City Councilor Seth Morrissy, citing professional and family commitments, said he would not seek a new term.

David Posalski, the owner of Tsunami Sandwich

Co., edged Kathy Kleczek, a former transit district board member, for Ward 4 on the City Council.

Posalski moved to Seaside in 2010 and opened Tsunami Sandwich Co. He now owns five local businesses with more than 60 employees. He ran on a record of six years on the Seaside Chamber of Commerce board and Seaside Transportation Commission and three years on the Seaside Planning Commission.

City Councilor Tom Horning won reelection unchallenged in Ward 3, while Councilor Randy Frank was returned unopposed to the Ward 1 and Ward 2 at-large position.

Horning, a geologist who has called for greater disaster preparation, was first elected in 2016. Horning said tsunami preparation and bridge replacement remain his priorities.

Frank, a former business owner entering his third term, said he sought to continue the work the council has accomplished. He is a 20-year member of the Seaside Downtown

Development Association, with nine years on the board. He serves with the Seaside Airport Advisory Committee.

A heated summer

With a divided electorate and bitter debates nationwide, Seaside experienced some of the unrest seen elsewhere. Residents and visitors exercised their right to free expression with signs to close the beach in March while others sought their reopening.

The killing of George Floyd by police in Minneapolis inspired protesters to gather at the Prom in June. For days the group carried "Black Lives Matter" and "Justice for George" signs and observed eight minutes and 46 seconds of silence at Seaside's Turnaround on June 4.

In August, supporters bearing American flags and banners calling for the reelection of President Donald Trump gathered in front of Seaside's City Hall. Many of them carried firearms in plain sight. Interactions led to tense



R.J. Marx

Reader board outside the Seaside Civic and Convention Center in April.



Katherine Lacaze

David Posalski, a local businessman, won the Ward 4 seat for the Seaside City Council in November.

moments as groups converged at the Turnaround.

Less than a month later, Seaside business owner Jimmy Griffin of Seaside Brewing Co. called for a discussion on open carry of weapons. His online message was reposted thousands of times.

"For the safety of the citizens of Seaside, I am

patently not all right with people wandering the streets of Seaside with loaded assault weapons, guns, bats, knives and all the things they brought with them," Griffin said.

In September, rallies proceeded without incident after three hours of marches, drums, chants and sometimes heated discussions.

Gearhart: Business revitalization, a new mayor and elk on the rise

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development would need to go through the public rezoning process.

Plans will not be rushed, Morey 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."

Downtown business

Even before the pandemic, the City Council tasked the Planning Commission to look at ways to stimulate existing businesses and bring new ones to downtown. The process began in January 2019 with a call to look at the commercial downtown zoning code and continued through this year.

The drive took special urgency as businesses sought to expand options for customers at the same time withstanding increased costs associated with the pandemic.

The goal, City Planner Carole Connell said, in a series of meetings throughout the year, is to modernize uses in downtown to allow current and future businesses more options to increase revenue. While restricting chain stores or franchises, the amended code expands descriptions for cafes, galleries and salons, and allows more options for variety stores and increases residential options downtown.

Downtown businesses will now be able to use 50% of their property for residential purposes. Parking requirements for eating and drinking establishments are eased, and a 10 p.m. closing time eliminated. Cafes may offer outdoor and sidewalk seating for patrons.

Some business owners felt the new wording didn't go far enough and sought an end to conditional use permits for most uses in the downtown zone. They said restrictive zoning is "strangling" existing businesses, particularly at a time when they are limited by coronavirus restrictions.



Neal Maine/PacificLight Images

The Gearhart Golf Course hopes to curb elk-human interactions.



R.J. Marx

Gearhart reelected Reita Fackerell and Dan Jesse to the City Council.

Meet Mayor Cockrum

When Mayor Matt Brown announced that he would not seek reelection, citing professional reasons, Gearhart faced an opening at the top. The PGA golf pro and course owner served as mayor since 2016, when he won on a campaign of citizen involvement and adherence to the city's comprehensive plan, which he described as "a blueprint for a sustainable, residential Gearhart."

Brown threw his support to Cockrum, then a city councilor, endorsing her "key role in making fiscal decisions that have led to a budget surplus and a strong financial position for the city over the last four years."

Brown also pointed to her record on vacation rental regulations, affordable housing, environmen-

tal issues and emergency management.

Cockrum, who ran and won unopposed, said she plans to prioritize the needs of firefighters and implement the city's hazard mitigation plan.

In the city's other two races, City Councilor Reita Fackerell and Councilor Dan Jesse won reelection by substantial margins, a voter endorsement of the direction of the City Council.

Cockrum's first act as the new mayor was to appoint Brent Warren to her vacated Position 3 seat. Warren worked for Bank of America, Key Bank and Banner Bank, serving as a vice president of community development in Portland for 33 years before his move to Gearhart.

Herd mentality?

From a herd of about 40 elk a decade ago, the population jumped to about 100 elk in Gearhart just a couple of years ago.

That number is now estimated at about 150 and will exceed 200 elk in the near future.

Gov. Kate Brown designated the Clatsop Plains Elk Collaborative as an Oregon Solutions project in April 2019.

Oregon Solutions, housed in the College of Urban and Public Affairs at Portland State University, works across jurisdictional lines to help solve problems big and small. Their findings



R.J. Marx

Owners Lisa and John Allen announced the closing of the Pacific Way Cafe after 32 years in Gearhart.

are ahead, and with it, some difficult decisions given the low mortality of elk and the lack of options to reduce the population.

The city could review subdivision ordinances as they relate to elk or work with partners to propose land use changes that would alleviate pressure on elk habitat. They could create elk movement corridors, refuge areas or high-

way crossings as nonlethal ways to provide a safe habitat and reduce elk and human interactions.

In October, Tim Boyle, president and CEO of Columbia Sportswear and the owner of Gearhart Golf Links, suggested a trap-and-transfer plan that could move elk from Gearhart to state parks or reservations, but that plan is still in the planning stage.

Hazing methods, designed to drive elk off property in Gearhart, have been shown to lead to even more damage and risk. Some members of Oregon Solutions have suggested landowners in more rural areas to the north or south might consider an arrangement to allow hunters. The city could also get a permit to cull the herd within its limits.