

Duncan's Crossing: Ridge Path project gets new push from volunteers

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by the original plat of Gearhart Park, as laid out and recorded by M.J. Kinney in 1890.

The path deviated through the years as houses sold and lot lines shifted, but the trail retained its magic and became an iconic symbol of Gearhart.

In 1985, the city's master plan called for the city to preserve and enhance the Ridge Path as a recreational asset for the city and a segment of the Oregon Coast Trail by establishing connections to the path, allowing public access and maintenance.

The city procured an easement for an extended path from 10th Street to Gearhart Loop Road, Russ Taggard, a planning commissioner and Ridge Path volunteer, said, with the vision of a "seamless path to follow the founders' lead."

Duncan's Crossing

At the request of his widow and with the interest of volunteers, the city set up a memorial fund in honor of Duncan, the proceeds to be used to complete Duncan's Crossing, with the goal of wooden walkways to span wetlands along the path between Eighth and 10th streets, along with extensions north to Gearhart



Steve Urman

Gearhart public works employees Gage McFadden and Stephen Petersen place a rail onto a concrete base.

Loop Road.

Duncan's unfinished plan was revised by Widdop, but met with state and federal regulatory hurdles.

In 2019, the city hired consultant Austin Tomlinson to work through the process and write the application to extend the walking path through the wetlands. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, in conjunction with local tribes, also required an archaeological survey to make sure there wasn't anything of historical significance in the area. Survey and wetlands

maps were updated and the Army Corps and Oregon Department of State Lands approved the joint permit application in March.

Part-time resident Steve Urman and his wife were walking along Gearhart Loop Road last June when they saw a small sign for the Ridge Path. "We had never seen this part," he said. "It's beautiful."

He contacted the city and asked City Administrator Chad Sweet for an update.

"Chad said, 'Oh my gosh we've been waiting for someone to come out and



Steve Urman

Randall Sullivan and Vicki Romm were among volunteers along the Ridge Path.

get this thing back to life again."

Urman, a physician based in Portland, got involved.

He sent letters to residents, set up meetings and gathered new groups of volunteers. Work parties resumed in August.

Keith Keranen Excavating donated time and labor to dig in the stream and lay the 18 supporting beams. Mark McFadden, of the city's public works staff, brought city staff to help put in the supporting beams, railing support and decking.

With \$12,000 raised from donors and an additional \$12,000 budgeted from the parks budget, the city hopes to meet or exceed the anticipated \$25,000 to \$30,000 project cost. The city has also applied for a grant through the Pacific

Power Foundation.

In September, Urman began additional fundraising to meet a rise in the cost of materials.

Teams are now installing railing support and will complete the bridge with decking.

"The current status is we are working with the volunteers, public works and appropriate weather to complete the beam installation," said Taggard, who plans to work on the project through completion. "This stage requires young muscle to pack the beams from 10th to the concrete piers. Once the beams are set with the help of public works, the rest of the project is all volunteer."

New signs

New signs will be placed all along the trail. In the

spring, maintenance is expected, especially at the north end of the trail.

"We have a great group of volunteers and public works staff pulling together to get this job done," Sweet said. "Building the Ridge Path extension and the bridge crossing has been a wonderful experience."

Sandy Duncan said she's happy the work is proceeding. "Very happy. We're anxious to be able to walk on it, be able to push our baby carriages and ride our bicycles," she said.

It is the wide participation of longtime and more recent residents that Duncan would have appreciated most, Widdop said.

"Although he would probably be shocked by the delay and expense of getting the federal approval for the work between Ninth and 10th, I think he would be more pleased that a maintenance work party five years later drew mostly new and longtime residents who hadn't been involved previously and that the final work to 10th Street has significant volunteer input," he said.

Volunteers will be out again on Feb. 16, Sweet said. "It's nice to see people pulling together to accomplish something positive that will be used by many. I imagine John Duncan would approve."

Warming: 'This is an important service we could provide'

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and when temperatures dip below 32 degrees.

Cots would be spaced at least 6 feet apart in two classrooms, with an estimated capacity of 10 to 20 people. The cots and sleeping bags have already been purchased by Clatsop Community Action" after "purchased, Skyler Archibald, the executive director of the park district, said.

The program, if implemented, would have been operated by Clatsop Community Action and staffed by volunteers. The program would run from 6 p.m. to 7 a.m. Additional liability costs would be funded by Clatsop Community Action, which said it has money to support the program through the winter.

Viviana Matthews, the executive director of Clatsop Community Action, declined to comment on the potential changes.

The proposed warming center came as Seaside and Clatsop County grapple with homelessness. Last year, Clatsop Community Action provided more than 600 services to the homeless population in Clatsop County, with about 25% of



R.J. Marx

Homeless often seek shelter at the public restrooms on the former Broadway Middle School property.

those services to people who reside in the Seaside area.

Opinions among board members were diverse on the warming center.

The former middle school lends itself well to a temporary shelter, board member Mike Hinton said, with the capability to separate parts of the building to control access. "I would like to see this as a super-duper opportunity for the homeless to get warm," he said.

Hinton said the program could provide lifestyle improvements for those in need.

The park district purchased the former school for \$2.15 million in January. The middle school was

among Seaside School District properties relocated to the new Spruce Drive location outside of the tsunami inundation zone.

The former school, used for emergency child care but otherwise closed to park district programs, is managed by about five or six staff, Archibald said. "This is an important service we could provide," he said.

The meeting ended without a clear path to operation of the warming center.

"I'm afraid for the precedent we're setting in our community, and the reverberation we might get from the very people we need to get behind the Broadway project," Bodner said. "I'm worried about that. I don't think the project itself is a match for our mission."

"There may be a way to do it, but I don't think we can figure it out in three days," Bodner continued. "I think this pressure of coming up with a solution in this short amount of time is problematic. I propose that we all as individuals get behind supporting the homeless problem in our community, but I feel very worried about taking on this project at this really important moment when we've got a huge hill planning for Broadway Middle School."

Board members asked

Archibald to look into using other buildings, like the Bob Chisholm Community Center or the Seaside Civic and Convention Center, to meet the need.

"There are commercial spaces all over Seaside," Bodner said. "We're not the best people to solve this problem."

"I reached out to the other agencies involved and shared that news this morning," Archibald said on Wednesday. "I did not feel comfortable proceeding with the warming center unless the board was in full support. Hence the conversation and discussion last night."

Chief: 'An interesting ride'

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times and to Santa Rosa, California, in 2017.

Eddy spent many years advocating for a replacement to the firehouse building, constructed in 1958 and considered vulnerable in an earthquake and tsunami.



Fire Chief Bill Eddy

Gearhart voters turned down a request for a fire station in 2006 when the city wanted to construct a municipal building that combined the firehouse with City Hall. A new proposal at the High Point site on North Marion is undergoing review.

While Eddy said he is saddened that a new firehouse has yet to be built, he has hopes his successor will be able to fulfill that goal.

His successor will be chosen by a committee, with input from Eddy.

The City Council will discuss next steps before their regular March meeting.

"It's been an interesting ride, I can tell you that," Eddy said. "I've seen a lot of things changed in the fire service, a lot of things for the good, some of the things not for the good."

"Volunteerism is not what it used to be, that's probably not one of the good things. But as far as the quality of volunteers that we have now across the county, volunteers are a lot more educated and trained than we were when I first started, not only for fire but for the EMS (Emergency Medical Services) side."

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