

Forum: Transparency, school purchase at issue

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“It used to be a crown jewel in this town and it’s not anymore,” he said. “The stewardship on the part of this board of directors toward that pool is simply lacking.”

Jackie Evans, who is running against board member Erika Marshall-Hamer, agreed she was displeased with the state of the pool, adding the board should “always make sure there is pride in the staff, pride of ownership and pride within the membership.”

For the other three challengers — Patrick Duhachek, Stephen Morrison and Al Hernandez — a perceived lack of transparency and financial mismanagement are the sticking points.

Hernandez, who is running against board member Su Coddington, claims there are too often mistakes or omissions in financial documents, going so far as to suggest board members are “hiding” something. He also brought up concerns about the board adding line items during meetings and not following parliamentary procedure.

“My goal is to get transparency,” he said. “Too many of my questions have gone unanswered by the board and staff.”

In response, Bodner explained the park district works with the highly respected accounting firm, Kern Thompson, for its audit, and the board members review financials monthly and adhere to applicable laws.

“For you to make a claim that we’re trying to hide something is unacceptable, in my opinion,” she said.

Cultivating decorum

During the forum, the incumbents provided historical



Katherine Lacaze

Al Hernandez, Su Coddington and Celeste Tuhy Bodner at the public forum.

ical context relevant to the board, which over the past few years has experienced high turnover, sexual harassment complaints against former board members, allegations of mismanagement, personal interests taking precedence over district goals and a lack of decorum. “I feel like a survivor,” said Michael Hinton, the longest sitting board member, who is being challenged by Duhachek.

When two board members resigned last year and Bodner and Marshall-Hamer were appointed, the new group “committed ourselves to better self-governance,” Bodner said. They adopted four main values: teamwork, diverse programming, a bold vision and fiscal responsibility.

Part of that vision included purchasing the old middle school building from the Seaside School District this year for \$2.15 million.

Evans said she believes the purchase was “well-intentioned,” but during her campaign, she said she has heard from residents who are upset by the decision. The building, which is being used for some of the district’s youth programs, will need extensive work.

“I would like to see that

building be something that is useful for our community, but I have some great concerns about how you’re going to recoup those costs and offset them,” Evans said.

Morrison, who is challenging board member Katharine Parker, also expressed concern about the cost to taxpayers and a lack of information surrounding the acquisition.

“There should be a huge amount of openness,” he said. “There shouldn’t any rumors out there about what’s going to happen with this new building. That should all be addressed now.”

Huisman doesn’t believe the building should be occupied at all without certification from an engineering firm because of issues with asbestos, lead and black mold.

According to the incumbents, children are only in the part of the building constructed in the 1990s, after asbestos and lead paint were banned in Oregon, and they acquired the proper permits from the city and Clatsop County to occupy the space. In areas where there is asbestos, they said, it is contained.

Additionally, they said

the park district won’t raise taxes to cover the purchase or cost of repairs, inspections and consultation, as they secured a type of financing available to special districts that was previously used for construction of the warm-water pool.

“We felt we could very easily justify using that type of financing again to support the middle school,” Parker said.

Marshall-Hamer added that it’s “important right now to stay positive, to come together and to actually have a solution rather than continuing to talk about all the problems without doing something about it.

“Let’s be bold as a community, let’s go to the next level,” she said.

Financial concerns

In Duhachek’s opinion, park district decisions should not be made in a vacuum but with consideration for the community as a whole. For example, he said taxpayers are already paying “a hefty price” for the new school campus. He claims the park district doesn’t manage funds properly, referring to the district having a surplus that has significantly declined.

“Even when they have a surplus of funds, they continue to whittle them away,” he said.

He also took issue with some staff members seeing a substantial salary increase over four years.

Marshall-Hamer responded that stating numbers without providing context was misleading and shortsighted. The salary increase, for example, is a reflection of making adjustments according to the market and what is equitable.

“The public needs to not just take those numbers at face value, but to ask us questions,” she said.

Budget: District anticipates revenue from leagues and fitness programs

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The total assessed valuation of the park district — the sum of all taxable properties — is nearly \$2 billion, a 2.4% increase from 2020-21. The permanent tax rate for the district is 92 cents per \$1,000 of assessed property value. Of the entire budget, the district generates about 22% through user fees.

The bulk of the district’s revenue is generated by property taxes of \$1.8 million, with the remainder derived from timber tax, donations, program fees, and facility rentals.

Expenditures of \$2.7 million are divided into administration, aquatics, the Bob Chisholm Community Center, recreation, special events, youth center and maintenance.

Other expenses include \$120,000 of capital improvement funds, \$16,400 Broadway Field fund and the Sunset Recreation Center capital improvement fund, budgeted at \$125,400.

The district added three positions: director of operations, director of facilities and maintenance and director of programs, filled by Darren Gooch, Levi Conner and Justin Smith. Each reports to the executive director.

District staff includes nine full-time and 55 part-time staff. The district has seen rising costs for payroll and labor since 2016, when the minimum wage rose annually to \$12.75 per hour this year and \$13.50 in fiscal year 2022.

The largest department expense, aquatics, is budgeted at \$614,000, up from last year’s coronavirus pandemic level of \$507,000 but down from a high of \$966,000 in 2017-18.

Overall, the administration budget represents a 1.3% decrease in budgeted personnel expense and a

13.9% overall decrease in budgeted total expense.

Among administrative personnel, the district will see a 1.3% decrease and 13.9% decrease in total expenses.

The senior meal site program served more than 21,000 meals last year, about 18% more meals served over the course of the previous year.

Revenues are up for youth programs, particularly learning ladder and preschool education programs.

The Sunset Recreation Fund, at about \$421,000, includes expected revenue from facility rental, general fund transfers and accounting for a strategic building consultant under contract services.

Future recreation center costs remain to be determined. “Staff is anticipating the high probability of another supplemental budget, depending on the outcome of the consulting processes, public input, and direction from elected officials,” said Skyler Archibald, the park district’s executive director.

With restrictions in place in 2020 as a result of the pandemic, the district shifted some events to a virtual format. The district anticipates revenue for leagues and fitness programs to return, including pickleball and indoor soccer.

The Seaside Farmers Market, budgeted at \$15,000 was one event that was able to occur with almost no interruption. The market continues to grow, with more than 30 vendors and more than 650 attendees weekly.

An additional committee meeting will take place on Tuesday, with board approval of the budget expected later this month. The budget is scheduled for adoption in late June.

Hernandez: Win could lead to board vacancy

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of votes will be mailed to each district, showing the results for each position that was on the ballots.

The park district would then verify receipt of the abstract of votes and determine that “those persons having received the highest number of votes are qualified to hold the office.”

Any exceptions would be noted by the park district, she said. “This is where you would indicate any candidate that had the highest number of votes does not meet the requirement to hold the position for your district.”

If Hernandez was the higher Position 1 vote-getter but determined to reside outside of the district, the

position would become vacant as of July 1.

“Your board can then proceed with the process of appointing someone to fill this vacant position,” Holcom said. “This position that is filled by appointment would be a two-year unexpired term position, and be on the ballot again in May 2023 regular district election.”

An appeal process is limited to only those who are district residents, according to Holcom.

Last week, Hernandez said he did not know how or where the record of his permanent place of residence changed. He said he was in the process of working to correct records to reflect the reality of his permanent residence.

At the meeting, he asked that any decision on his residency be taken after the election.

“I feel the current board has a conflict on this issue and should recuse itself from making any decision on this matter, but rather table the matter until after the election, and let the new board make any decision that may be.”



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AB8207 NOTICE OF BUDGET COMMITTEE MEETING

A public meeting of the Budget Committee of the Union Health District, Clatsop County, State of Oregon, to discuss the budget for the fiscal year July 1, 2021 to June 30, 2022, will be at Seaside Civic & Convention Center, 415 1st Ave, Seaside, OR. The meeting will take place on May 12, 2021 at 10:00 am. The purpose of the meeting is to receive the budget message and to receive comment from the public on the budget. This is public meeting where deliberation of the Budget Committee will take place. Any person may appear at the meeting and discuss the proposed programs with the Budget Committee. A copy of the budget document may be inspected or obtained on or after May 3rd, 2021 at 610 18th St, Astoria, OR, between the hours of 9:00 am and 5:00 pm.
Published: The Astorian May 4 & 6, 2021 and the Seaside Signal May 7, 2021.

107 Public Notices

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The City of Astoria’s Parks and Recreation Department is seeking responses from qualified firms to provide project management services for improvements to be installed along the Astoria Riverwalk. Details and information can be obtained via email: jdart@astoria.or.us or by calling 503 298 2467. Submissions due June 1, 2021.

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