

Faith leaders focus on homeless

SEEN FROM SEASIDE

R.J. MARX



Faith leaders came together last week at the Seaside Civic and Convention Center to discuss Seaside's rise in homelessness.

"We need to learn about what's going on in our town. We need to learn from each other," said City Councilor Tita Montero, an organizer of the event. "And we need to perk up the ideas, because what might work in one town may not work in Seaside. But we aren't going to know that if we haven't had the chance to bat that around a little bit."

The conversation, the first of several meetings happening on Thursdays through May 20 and on June 3 and on July 1, comes as the consequences of homelessness have come to the fore in Seaside. Montero, Mayor Jay Barber and others proposed a series of forums last year before being delayed because of the coronavirus pandemic.

At a City Council goal-setting session in January, homelessness, addiction and mental health issues were listed among the city's top priorities. In the months since, the topic has

widened into a regional conversation.

Daniel Baker, of Lighthouse Christian Church, said he saw the forum as "a great opportunity for us to take a lead and lead in an area that needs us. And we want our communities to know that we are here as a part of the community."

Baker recommended conversations with the homeless.

"If we have a real conversation with people, I think we might be able to get to the root that will actually help them understand that there's a way out," he said. "A lot of these folks have lost their purpose. It's easier to just live on the street because they don't really have anything they're looking for. How do we help them have purpose? Again, it goes back to the individual person."

Baker advocated for programs, but also sought accountability. "We've got to continue to have programs," he said. "But I believe that there has to be some accountability, and not making it so easy to live on the street."

Pastor Michael Avila serves at both the First United Methodist Church in Astoria and Seaside United Methodist Church. In Astoria, the church also hosts the Astoria Warming Center. As of April, it was offering free showers three days a week.

"The warming center is there for anybody and everybody," Avila said. "It's not one of



Martin Letourneau addresses faith leaders at the first Seaside homelessness forum.

those places where you have to be in recovery before they let you spend the night. You can be whatever condition you're in. ... There's nothing in the Scriptures or in these sacred texts that judges someone for being poor."

Martin Letourneau, of the organization Love on the Streets, said his group was interested in immediate remedies.

"Right now, we're in the business of Band-Aids," Letourneau said. "What we're doing is we're going out to where the homeless people are. And we'll go to a variety of places. We go to the south entrance of Safeway, we go to the Mill Ponds, we go down to the Turnaround, we go up by 12th and Necan-

nicum. And we try to find as many people as we can. And we ask, what do they need?"

Letourneau said his dream for Seaside was an all-year shelter, drop-in center and a resource center. "We need a system that's going to meet needs and provide the resources," he said.

Barber said he is "proud to be the mayor of a city that cares about all people, not just some people, but all people. It's so easy to talk about this problem. But that doesn't solve anything. ... As the mayor of the city, I need to learn more about what it is that we can do together to deal with these situations of people who are homeless or houseless."

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

You can't be reelected if you weren't elected in the first place

I keep seeing election posters saying, "Reelect Su Coddington; Celeste Bodner; Erika Marshall-Hamer; Katherine Parker; and Mike Hinton, to the Sunset Empire Park and Recreation District Board of Directors."

What a joke! The only member of the board that could be reelected is Mike Hinton. You can't be reelected if you weren't elected in the first place and it just so happens that the remaining four board members were all appointed to their positions to complete the terms of those board members who had been systematically eliminated by Skyler Archibald, the district's general manager.

Speaking of jokes, in a chat box during last Thursday's forum, Archibald's wife, Chelsea, said if Skyler leaves the district, staff would too. I doubt that those individuals would leave their well-paying jobs in a show of loyalty to Archibald, especially in light of the pandemic we're facing right now!

I ask voters to cast their votes for the following candidates to fill those board positions: Al Hernandez, Steve Morrison, Jackie Evans, Patrick Duhachek and John Huismann. These candidates will do a much better job of protecting our tax dollars.

**Marti Wajc
Seaside**

Think again before sticking with status quo in SEPRD

As a resident of Seaside, the current election is of great concern to me.

After reading from the paper, Facebook and hearing about the current positions on the ballot, I was eager to accept an invitation to Tuesday night's Sunset Empire Park and Recreation District candidate forum at the Astoria Country Club.

Of particular interest to me is the reelection, or more accurately the election of the current SEPRD board or choosing to elect a new board. I was looking forward to hearing how the current board would justify their unilateral decision to purchase the Broadway Middle School.

I was confused by the purchase of a school in a tsunami zone with mold, lead-based paint and asbestos being used for day care after the recent completion of the new middle school built to remove our children from those hazardous and unhealthy surroundings.

Well, what I heard was they got a good price for it and only half of it really is affected by the unhealthy environs, so it was a wise and sound investment. Buying something because you were able to negotiate a good price doesn't make it a good investment. One incumbent took pride in saying she brought decorum to the board.

I heard this while sitting across from two of the women incumbents as they snickered, sneered and rolled their eyes when the candidates spoke. Perhaps the decorum doesn't extend beyond their meetings.

I encourage you to think again before you go with the status quo and vote for a clean skate and the five candidates with the experience to take care of the future of SEPRD and the safety and health of our children.

**Debra Holmes
Seaside**

It's time for a change in Sunset Empire Park and Recreation District

Expenses are rapidly accumulating for the Sunset Empire Park and Rec District's recent acquisition of Broadway Middle School, now renamed the Sunset Recreation Center.

The district falsely claimed the debt payments would nearly equal the previous loan utilized for the warm water therapy pool addition. The proposed budget indicates debt payments for Sunset Recreation Center exceeding the previous loan of \$112,000 per year by 56%, at \$175,000 per year.

The district also expects to pay \$75,000 in contracted services this year in a desperate search for revenue sources. Utility costs, insurance and maintenance for the recreation center are proposed at nearly \$140,000 this year.

The center's expenses far outweigh its revenue.

It's time for a change.

**Patrick Duhachek
Warrenton**

Transparency revisited in Sunset Empire Park and Recreation District

Since fall, sunsetempire.com has had a dedicated tab on their website: Sunset Recreation Center/Broadway Middle School. You can listen to three December webinar topics: the financial plan, community input process and the strategic plan, supplemented with written information and responses to questions. The building inspection report (due diligence) and a community input category is there also.

The community needs assessment survey, conducted over 10 weeks, was posted in the Signal, on Sunset Park and Recreation District sites and discussed with community organizations. The survey results' slides represent feedback from everyone who responded to the survey, and is not limited to counting only those respondents who made additional comments. Comments help us understand reasons for a survey response but not everyone chooses to make additional

comments: their vote counts too.

Patrick Duhachek's posted response, on Transparency for SEPRD Taxpayers, to the question of what process he would use to approach a major purchase in respect to taxpayers: "I understand that some taxpayers may not agree with the ultimate decision, but I will be sure they have the opportunity to weigh in."

We are not at the mercy of that approach. The quality of the incumbents' stewardship has been recognized by the survey sample of the community, who support: Purchase of Broadway Middle School (65%), expansion of youth programs in support of working families (66%), expansion of indoor recreation options for all (68%) and drive economic growth by scaling up sports tourism (61%). Please vote to keep our winning team — Progress for SEPRD.

**Diane Somers
Seaside**

Build for the future at SEPRD

In real estate, you must move quickly if an opportunity presents itself, especially if other buyers have offers in hand. The Sunset Empire Park and Recreation District Board of Directors used the Special District Association of Oregon's low-interest loan program for the purchase of Broadway Middle School. SEPRD has used these loans twice before for structural improvements. With approval of the loan by the board, the district followed all legal steps to fund the purchase through SDAO, not taxpayers.

One of the challengers said at the candidates' forum that the building's issues can be overcome. "Honestly, the group (incumbents) has a good start on it." Board members also clarified that the childcare program is in the portion built in 1994, after Oregon had banned asbestos and lead paint. With asbestos areas encapsulated, keeping our children safe from exposure, consultants are now advising for best uses of the entire space for future patrons.

Four incumbents were appointed in the last nine months. They have transformed meetings from chaos into consensus building. The cohesive team has dedicated, long-term residents with broad skills: grant writing, international human resources, banking, nursing and a national youth foster club.

The board's vision, with community input, is for a hub of community preschool/child care, summer camps, senior social activities, well-being through exercise and of economic growth through scaled-up sports tourism. Transparency is there if you look at the district website.

Elect the incumbents to make our community richer through good health ... let's build for the future!

**Victoria Daggatt Fuller
Seaside**

Does the current board have your best interest at heart?

On May 4, "Citizens of Clatsop County Political Forum" sponsored an event permitting the candidates the opportunity to state their views.

During the questions and answer period a panelist asked the board if taxes would increase due to the purchase of Broadway Middle School. Celeste Bodner's response was no.

Keep in mind that we are already at the maximum tax rate permitted by law and the taxpayer eventually ends up paying one way or another.

For example, they can increase the fees for programs, reduce the level of services or discontinue programs to save costs, (i.e., decrease pool hours, or drop some services).

Be watchful of budget decreases in the pool budget as this may be used to fund these costs. They can pass the property to the county and let the county increase the tax to pay for this potential debt.

Alternatively, the board could investigate lowering the taxes we are currently paying or reduce the fees the district charges to the public. The current board consistently states "they love their community," so why not show it. Let's look at the actual cost to the taxpayer. The district finished paying the warm water pool loan in December 2019, at an annual cost of about \$120,000.

The new loan will cost approximately \$175,000 annually, plus any costs of repairs and mitigation. Together this is about \$295,000 per year of lost opportunity cost (benefit by choosing and alternative option) to give back to the taxpayer.

Does the current board have your best interest in mind by allowing tax dollars to increase every year, yet seniors on fixed incomes fall behind due to inflation?

It's time for change! Vote for Al Hernandez, Patrick Duhachek, Jackie Evans, John Huismann and Stephen Morrison for SEPRD board.

**Al Hernandez
Seaside**

Reelect our SEPRD Board of Directors

I am asking you to please join me in voting for the reelection of the current board members of the Sunset Empire Park and Recreation District: Su Coddington, Celeste Tuhy Bodner, Mike Hinton, Erika Marshall Hamer and Katharine Parker.

Having had the privilege of serving as the general manager of the district from 1984-2012 and the pleasure of swimming almost everyday for the past 37 years, I know the critical importance of good leadership. This group of qualified directors brings with them deep connections to our community through decades of

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PUBLIC MEETINGS

Contact local agencies for latest meeting information and attendance guidelines.

TUESDAY, MAY 18

Sunset Empire Park and Recreation District Board of Directors, 5:15 p.m., 1225 Avenue A.

Seaside School District, 6 p.m., www.seaside.k12.or.us/meetings.

Gearhart Small Business Committee, 6 p.m., cityof-gearhart.com.

Town Forum with Open Mic, 6 p.m., Seaside Civic

and Convention Center, 6 p.m.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 19

Seaside Tourism Advisory Committee, 3 p.m., 989 Broadway St.

Seaside Tree Board, 4 p.m., 989 Broadway St.

Gearhart Parks Master Plan Citizens Advisory Committee, 5:30 p.m., work session, cityofgearhart.com.

THURSDAY, MAY 20

Seaside Transportation Advisory Commission, 6 p.m., 989 Broadway St.



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