

Building a new fire station: If not now, when?

I wrote this a couple of weeks ago, in anticipation of putting out a bond measure for the new fire/police station at the November election. The bond measure has been delayed until next year, due to a challenge to the bond measure wording by several Gearhart residents.

Last week we attended a hearing with Clatsop County Judge Beau Peterson. His conclusions on the matter will be given to the city in the next several weeks, any necessary changes will be made and the measure will be ready to move the project forward at a later date. The City Council will consider the timing of putting the bond measure on the ballot for the voters in the coming months.

I've been a part of the team working on the very real need for a fire station in Gearhart for quite a while. Following what is stated in the Gearhart Comprehensive Plan that the city will support a volunteer fire department, I have advocated for the building of a new fire hall.

As a former risk manager for a local hospital, I was involved in early discussions about what to do

GUEST COLUMN

PAULINA COCKRUM



to prepare for the Cascadia Subduction Zone earthquake and tsunami. Of major importance, then and now, is the relocation of all critical infrastructure to higher ground. The protection of our children was the first priority, and the community has accomplished that by the relocation of schools outside of the tsunami inundation zone. These new schools were also built to meet the current earthquake standards.

Was this goal achieved overnight? No. It was a very long and expensive process involving many steps. But after more than a decade of work, our children have the opportunity to begin a new school year in a place safe from earthquakes and tsunamis.

The need for a new fire station has been long debated and is, as evidenced by multiple surveys, supported by a majority of the Gearhart community. The current station location is at an elevation of 28 feet and

would likely flood even in a moderate event, hindering response and causing equipment failure and loss of emergency response capability. Our firefighters use one bathroom, have no shower or other decontamination room or equipment or changing rooms for males and females. These are all needs that have been evident for a while to staff and the volunteers and they have "made it work" for the past 10 years.

During a recent exit interview, I asked one of our former police officers, "What could Gearhart do better to help our police department?" He instantly replied, "We do not have adequate storage, so if a bicycle was stolen and then recovered, we have no secure storage for that evidence." The new building will give the Gearhart police department adequate facilities to meet our community's needs for many years.

Years ago, as part of the Gearhart Community Emergency Response Team, we educated ourselves on what a response to a Cascadia earthquake event might look like. When new tsunami maps were published in 2015, I remember poring over them at one of our meetings. What

would be a good location for a new fire station? We noted an undeveloped spot that was the highest ground in the Gearhart area. While the undeveloped land seemed like a good option, the land was not available. Other options have been proposed and dismissed for various reasons. Every potential site has pros and cons.

City Administrator Chad Sweet and I have discussed NIMBY issues regarding a new fire/police station. Now a high location — an unavailable location identified but not chosen in 2015 — has become available. The developers consider having a fire/police station an amenity for their neighborhood.

On the financial side:

We have the most accurate cost estimates I have seen. The cost of building the station is \$10.5 million. The cost of building two independent access driveways is \$900,000. We have built in a generous 20% contingency line item, making the total budget approximately \$13 million.

City staff are already working with U.S. Rep. Susanne Bonamici's staff applying for the brand

new Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities grant program, specifically for moving critical infrastructure out of the tsunami zone and other federal and state and private grant options. Any grant funds awarded will reduce our bond financing needs.

Assuming absolutely no grant funds are available and the total maximum bond amount is required to build the station, property taxes would increase by \$1.05 per \$1,000 of tax assessed value. However, one of our two water facility loans will be paid off within three years. Consequently, at that time when debt is paid off, our property taxes will return very close to the amount we are paying currently.

Every year we wait on this issue, construction costs increase about \$500,000 to \$650,000 due to higher wages and material prices.

Some Gearhart residents have argued that this isn't a good time to ask the voters for a bond to build a new fire/police station. And I say, "If not now, when?" We now have an opportunity to build a modern station outside the tsunami zone. Please join me in voting yes on authorization of the bond for a new fire station in 2022.

Paulina Cockrum is mayor of Gearhart.

Parks: Dunes is considered the most popular park area



Yellow dots mark location of the survey respondents.



Historic photo of Neacoxie Creek.

Continued from Page A1

Committee members did substantial work independently, studying relevant maps, historical documents and master plans adopted by other jurisdictions. In 14 public meetings, they worked with city staff including Planning Director Carole Connell, Mayor Paulina Cockrum and City Administrator Chad Sweet.

In mid-August, the committee concluded that the draft parks master plan was sufficiently developed to be presented to the Planning Commission and City Council in a joint meeting for consideration.

The plan, designed to look 20 years into the future, was developed after the state awarded the city \$15,000 grant funds for the project, part of the 2019 local government grant program from the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department. The state's contribution will be met with an additional \$4,000 from the city toward the project cost.

More than 75% of respondents support spending on city parks, Van Hoomissen said, and 65% said that why will support increased funding for additional parks.

By far, the most popular city-controlled park area is the dunes, with 325 respondents indicating that the dunes are one of their top three parks and 220 respondents listing the dunes as the park they use most frequently.

The second most important park area is the Ridge Path, with 273 respondents indicating that the trail is within their top three parks.

The Ridge Path, described by Van Hoomissen as "a key element of the community from the very beginning," could continue north to Highland Lane. The Lesley Miller Dunes Meadow Park and 10th Street beach access follow as most popular park facilities.

Park planners hope to provide improved public access to Neacoxie Creek through cooperation with owners of adjoining private properties to enable public access along the banks of the creek, and to preserve existing forested areas along the Neacoxie. Open space preservation, improved accessibility and increased availability of park and ballfields are among goals.

The committee proposed development of a public outdoor performance and event area, potentially the Lesley Miller Dune Meadows Park, Trails End Park or some new

park property. The city could consider potential acquisition of additional properties for new parks, with particular focus on areas east of U.S. Highway 101.

The parks plan would be coordinated with other city and state plans for addressing elk issues.

Committee members voted unanimously to recommend that the city adopt a final version of the parks master plan. The committee hopes the plan, to be reviewed at the October Planning Commission meeting, will be adopted and added to the city's master plan.

DINING on the NORTH COAST

Great Restaurants in: GEARHART • SEASIDE CANNON BEACH

WANT TO KNOW WHERE THE LOCALS GO?

- Breakfast
- Lunch
- Dinner
- Junior Menu
- Lighter appetite menu

RILEY'S RESTAURANT & LOUNGE

BEST BREAKFAST IN TOWN! Fish 'n Chips • Burgers • Seafood & Steak
Friday & Saturday - Prime Rib
Lounge Open Daily 9-Midnight
All Oregon Lottery products available
1104 S Holladay • 503-738-9701 • Open Daily at 8am

Excellence in family dining found from a family that has been serving the North Coast for the past 52 years

PIG 'N PANCAKE

- Great Breakfast, but that's not all...
- Great lunch and dinner menu, too!
- Great pasta, steaks & seafood!
- Homemade Clam Chowder, Salads!

Seaside • 323 Broadway • 738-7234 (Open 7 Days)
Cannon Beach • 223 S. Hemlock 436-2851 (7am-3pm Daily)
Astoria • 146 W. Bond • 325-3144

Firehouse: Measure will need to be refiled for a future election

Continued from Page A1

Zimmerman and Harold Gable asked the court to suspend the bond measure until costs for the project are more fully determined.

They said the ballot title was vague and failed to specify a single firehouse location. They also said the wording failed to make clear that geotechnical reports were preliminary.

"We're going to simply try to protect the Gearhart voter and make sure that they are fully informed about what's happening and what is going forward," Zimmerman said at the hearing.

Voters who are going out for a bond measure to build

infrastructure understand that architecture and engineering will go into that, Watts said. "I only have 175 words in the summary," he said. "I'm not going to say whether the light bulbs are going to be LED or not."

Watts said he is trying to provide voters of the condition of the current fire station at 670 Pacific Way and what the financial impact of a new fire station off Highlands Lane would be, up to \$13 million.

"We anticipate the station will have certain elements," Watts said. "Those are the elements that are described in the ballot title. There could be other elements — we can't predict every pos-

sible thing that will be part of the fire station, nor could I summarize that in the word limit."

Since the court hearing took place after the ballot deadline, the measure will need to be refiled for a future election.

"I don't know how I'm going to rule, obviously, but it's my understanding that the city is consenting to me ruling on this so it's settled for when it does hit the ballot," Peterson said.

Peterson said he will rule as to whether the ballot title is "sufficient, concise and fair."

His ruling will be considered the first and final review.

"I'm not intending to rule on anybody's dictates here," Peterson said. "It's simply the rule whether or not the ballot title submitted is appropriate."

As the judge deliberates the city plans to move forward, City Administrator Chad Sweet said at last Thursday's Planning Commission meeting. "I'm going to make a recommendation to City Council that we continue to move forward and that we then go for the May election," he said. "We wanted an opportunity to go through the process so that we could find out if there was anything that we needed to change on our description and ballot title."

CHOCOLATE CAFE

Cannon Beach Chocolate Cafe

10% OFF your purchase through 9/30/21
MILKSHAKE HAPPY HOUR
4 pm to close, \$1 OFF SHAKES!
232 N. Spruce • Cannon Beach, Oregon
Open 10 am-5 pm Daily! • 503.436.4331

Call Sarah Silver
503.325.3211
ext 1222

YOUR RESTAURANT AD HERE.

Find Your Next Regular Customers!