

SignalViewpoints

Think tank, task force face urgent necessities

SEEN FROM SEASIDE

R.J. MARX



Two Seaside volunteer groups met at City Hall this month with Seaside's homeless problem in mind. The Seaside Homeless Task Force and the Seaside Think Tank met in separate sessions, hearing officials, business leaders and homeless advocates to address a growing need.

The city has until 2023 to bring the city's code into sync with state laws, adjusting to legislation that decriminalizes camping or loitering on city property and provides a 72-hour window before enforcement. A person experiencing homelessness may also sue to challenge the objective reasonableness of a city or county law, and be awarded attorney fees if they prevail.

Police need the ability to offer a shelter or location for the homeless to go before they can take action, Police Chief Dave Ham said. "We need a place to say, 'This is where you can go.'"

Along with the two county liaisons already designated, police need to have an ongoing point person to interact with the homeless, he said, whether the community service officer or other contact.

Over 1,000 people are homeless in Clatsop County, Viviana Matthews, Clatsop Community Action's executive director, said in July. About 35% to 40% of homeless services in the county are focused in Seaside.

Addressing mental health issues, documentation for people without a permanent address and transportation are among top goals, she said at the task force session.

"We need a drop-in center and Seaside, we need a warming center, we need low-barrier shelter," Matthews said. "We need a shelter. We need a lot of different things but mainly, probably a drop-in center in South County would be helpful. The unsheltered population needs a place to go and do their laundry, to charge their cell phones, that's what a drop in center is."

Without the ability to offer full solutions, Matthews said, at the point, it's important to focus on those who can be and are willing to be helped.

"Right now, you know, you aren't putting out services and you don't have the strategies yet," Matthews said. "So rather than design your approach for kind of the outliers, to really be focusing on serving those who you will reach."

Hotelier Masudur Khan of Seaside Lodging LLC described the impact of homelessness on tourism, and asked for direction for the city. "I think it's a big problem for all of our hotels," Khan said.

Homeless advocate Seamus McVey called for a change in the way that homeless are viewed in the community. "Not everybody is what they see on the outside.



Photos by R.J. Marx

An early morning beach scene on the Prom.

The way people who are housed see the unhoused is also often not as the person that they are as the individual that they are," he said. "This is who I am now. This is who I hope to be. I'm a person."

McVey suggested a set of interactive sessions where homeless and formerly homeless can engage in an individual basis in a group. "You need to be able to access all of the information that's available about all these different options."

Mayor Jay Barber made a plea for patience, from both homeowners and businesses concerned about the impacts of homelessness, and those who are without shelter and living on the streets.

"The city task force meeting is working on these issues," Barber said. "It takes time to come to a consensus, and it takes time to bring about change, and we're working on it, and a lot of good things are happening. I know it seems like forever but we've been working on this, but there's a lot yet to be done."

Montero recognized the challenges ahead. "If you bite off more than you can chew, you won't be successful at all. But if you pick and choose where you can be successful, then you can move forward and then you can have those stories to tell the community. This is what we've done. And this is how we've been successful. And you, the community, have been successful. In my mind, this is probably the thorniest, most difficult, most multifaceted issue I have ever dealt with."



Homeless often sleep overnight or store belongings in the city parking lot next to the Seaside Civic and Convention Center.

OP-ED

Time to acknowledge true costs of fire station

GUEST COLUMN

JACK ZIMMERMAN



Gearhart mayor Paulina Cockrum asks, "A new fire station: If not now, when?"

Let's answer: We will build a new fire station when the taxpayers who fund this project know their money will be well spent, and not wasted on something that this community does not want, need, or understand.

The community likely does want and need a new fire station, as the old one, veteran of a few minor earthquakes, will not withstand a major one. But the community does not want or need an "emergency response and resiliency station" costing citizens upwards of \$13 million over the next 20 years, twice the size of the current emergency stations, and the biggest, most opulent and expensive such station per capita in all of Clatsop County.

Among the expanded functions noted on the city website are dormitory rooms and increased space for a regional training program for cadets and interns pursuing a "fire-fighting profession," new training and equipment for "water rescues" as one example, and space and facilities for "emergency headquarters" including a separate helipad and space for medical/food/water and assembly before and after a catastrophic earthquake and tsunami.

Gearhart residents will support a modest and sensible project proportionate to their needs, that plans for neighbors such as Seaside who are ready and willing to assist, and recognizes that the county already boasts a regional emergency training and response headquarters at Camp Rilea, college certifications for a "fire-fighting profession," and expert water rescue capability by the U.S. Coast Guard. City hall seems to have forgotten that the last time a Gearhart fire fighter attempted a water rescue, the outcome was the tragic death of hero Robert

Chisholm and a firm resolution by surviving members of Gearhart Volunteer Fire Department that water rescues and their legal liability are the sole responsibility of the Coast Guard.

Gearhart is a small community; some years there are no fires, and most years there are scarce emergencies within city limits needing anything more than an ambulance ride to Seaside. It is hard to understand how city hall came to promote this massive project as necessary for this small community, with many retirees living on small fixed incomes who are already struggling to pay for the water treatment facility and the new school, and who will next be saddled with yet another large project, the construction of a new city hall, and with long-needed infrastructure repairs that have been deferred for over a decade to focus on this new station project.

Moreover, the proposed Highlands Station location was already soundly rejected five years ago. The reasons this location was rejected by the citizen firehouse

committee, Mayor Matt Brown, city manager, and city councilors, including Paulina Cockrum, are still displayed on the city website: "A location on Del Rey Beach Access Road north of Gearhart was not selected because of medical and fire response times, inaccessibility during a tsunami, and proximity to our satellite Hertig Station."

This proposed location is outside the current city limits of Gearhart. It is over 2 miles via U.S. Highway 101 to many homes within Gearhart, farther than allowed by many home insurance policies, and as far from southern Gearhart as the Seaside Fire Station. Response times will not be much better than the city's Hertig Fire Station, which lies directly on the highway and is ready now to serve the Highlands. Mayor Cockrum is concerned that a location in central Gearhart will not be useful after a large tsunami, but fails to note that the Highlands location will not fare any better: it has no chance of assisting anybody need-

ing post-tsunami rescue in central Gearhart. And, at the far northern city boundary east of the creek, it is perhaps the most inconvenient location possible for any western assembly function.

Indeed, Cockrum already voiced these criticisms years ago to promote other locations as safer options. Why has she forgotten them now?

And finally, geotechnical consultants recently determined that a "shallow slope failure" in the dune might occur during an earthquake, making the \$13 million guess highly speculative.

If Mayor Cockrum wants to build a new station, then she needs to honestly acknowledge these facts, and work hard to engage the public and independent experts, as partners in a unified discussion of them, within a transparent democratic process.

When and if she does, then the citizens of Gearhart will be ready and willing to build a new fire station.

Jack Zimmerman is a Gearhart resident.

PUBLIC MEETINGS

Contact local agencies for latest meeting information and attendance guidelines.

TUESDAY, SEPT. 28

Sunset Empire Park and Recreation District, 5:15 p.m., Bob Chisholm Community Center.

Seaside Airport Advisory Committee, 6 p.m., 989 Broadway.

TUESDAY, OCT. 5

Seaside Community Center Commission, 10 a.m., 1225 Avenue A.

Seaside Library Board of Directors, 4:30 p.m., 1131 Broadway St.

Seaside Planning Commission, 6 p.m., 989 Broadway.

WEDNESDAY, OCT. 6

Seaside Improvement Commission, 6 p.m., 989 Broadway.

Gearhart City Council, 7 p.m., cityofgearhart.com.

THURSDAY, OCT. 7

Seaside Parks Advisory Com-

mittee, 6 p.m., 989 Broadway.

MONDAY, OCT. 11

Seaside City Council, 7 p.m., cityofseaside.us.

THURSDAY, OCT. 14

Seaside Civic and Convention

Center Commission, 5 p.m., 415 First Ave.

TUESDAY, OCT. 19

Seaside Planning Commission, 6 p.m., work session, 989 Broadway.



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