

Can Gearhart learn lessons from Banks' Buxton Station?

Scott Adams is the public information officer as well as a firefighter engineer for Banks Fire District. The Banks fire station on U.S. Highway 26, prominent along the trip to Portland and back, has been cited for comparison by both proponents and opponents of Gearhart's upcoming fire bond vote. Is the Banks' Hornshuh Creek Fire Station #14 on Highway 26 — also known as Buxton Station — a viable source of comparison? Adams spoke to the Signal at a Gearhart Fire Department open house on Saturday.

Q: A lot of people in Gearhart are commenting on the Banks' facility on U.S. Highway 26.

Scott Adams: Well, it's something that's pretty visible to your folks as they come over the hill. A lot of comparisons are getting drawn between the beautiful station that we've been able to build there and the program that Gearhart is trying to put together out here.

Q: Do you think the two sites are an "apples to apples" comparison?

Adams: It's apples and oranges in that they're both fruit. Out of both stations, you're going to be providing fire services. So much more is going into the facilities that they're putting together here in Gearhart, with fire, with police, with the community resiliency station than we've done with our Station 14 on Highway 26.

that residents and guests in our community don't segregate where those county lines are. They don't segregate where those district lines are. Someone driving off Highway 101 doesn't care whether they're in Seaside or whether they're in Gearhart or Warrenton.

Likewise, we all have our own home area that we have to provide services to. But we're all one big community fire watch. All fire departments — Gearhart and Banks included — engage in mutual aid agreements with their neighbors.

In Banks, for example, we spend a lot of time covering Highway 6, which heads out to Tillamook. The vast majority of this area is in the Forest Grove first access area. And so we mutual aid with Forest Grove on that. Likewise, Forest Grove helps us a lot on the south end of our district. It's a give-and-take. No one district is able to have enough resources to cover just their district without help and without helping others.

Q: Obviously you're not in a tsunami inundation zone out there.

Adams: We're talking apples and oranges between what you guys are doing with the station. Heck, that's not even talking fruit. We don't even have the ability to imagine what it would have added to our system if we had to deal with the tsunami inundation.

I'm sure that the requirements just purely because of the building are massive. And then the need to build there is so much more important for you guys because you are building a resiliency station where the whole community is going to have a place to gather. You're building on a safe spot where the community can come to.

Yes, if we had some local emergency for us, the community could come gather at our station. But being a community gathering point in case of an emergency is not built into our mission as much as it is into the new Gearhart station.

Q: At what point did you become aware of the Gearhart effort to build a new station?

Adams: We started getting lots of questions recently, over the last six months anyway, about people comparing Banks and comparing Gearhart. So as the public information officer, I started getting some of these questions.

I'm a longtime guest and visitor of Gearhart, so I'm familiar with the station here and driving by and forever, over 40 years, I've driven by here going, "Wow, that's really an old station, I can't believe they're still working out of that." It was kind of exciting to be asked to be able to provide some comparisons and see the program put together here.

Q: Have you seen the plans?

Adams: I have seen the rough plans. I have not seen detailed drawings on it.

Q: Do you think it's a reasonable bond request?

Adams: I'm not an architect, I'm not a contractor. I don't handle the money side of things. But what I am able to comment on is as a user of the facilities. And when I'm looking at the plans here, what they are putting together and doing in a facility smaller than what we use — my initial reaction is, wow, I can't believe how much services they're cramming into that smaller space.

What they're doing with the 2 acres of land, we're doing less with our 4 acres. It's just amazing to me, how many services they put into a small space.

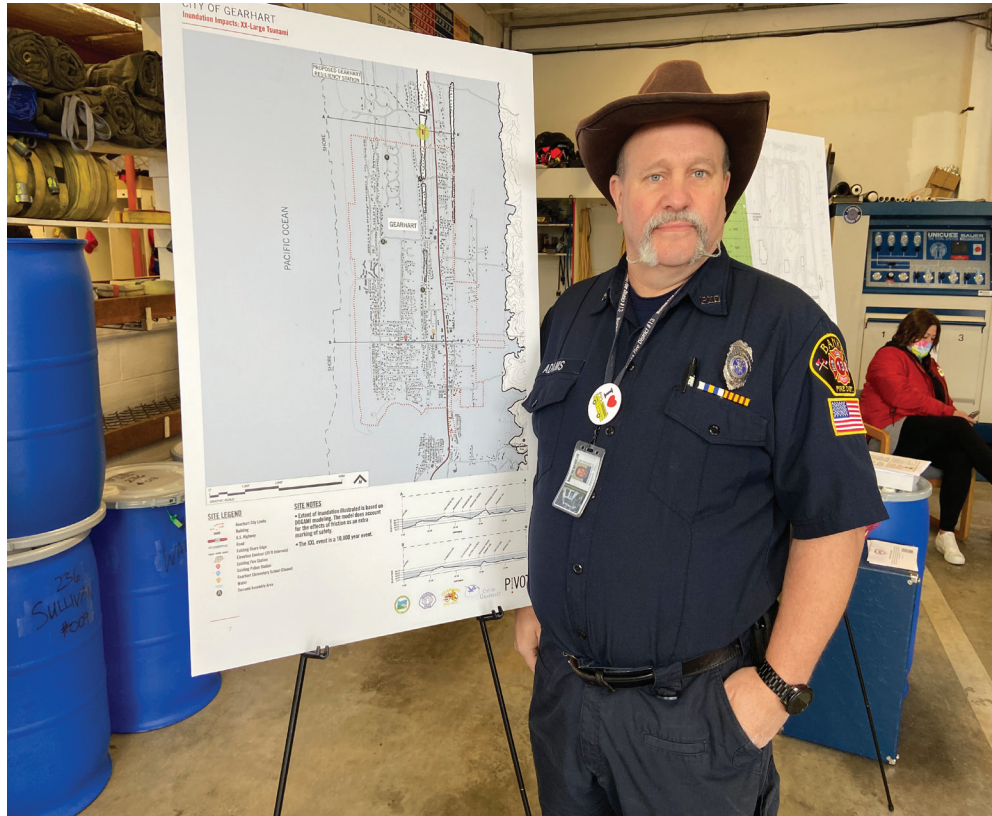
I'm very impressed by the plan. Having walked around the old station here where we are today and having looked at the plans for the new station, it's surprising to me that they've even been able to provide the services that they do out of this station. The ability to have interns, the ability to have out-of-district people come help you out, all of that's contingent on having resources that this existing old station doesn't have.

Q: Did social media play a role on the Banks vote at all?

Adams: I think social media is playing a role in everything right now.

Q: Do you follow the Gearhart issue online, pros and cons?

Adams: I have been trying to keep tabs on it. I can't say that I wake up every morning and look at it, first thing, but I have been watching it. I'm really pleased at how many of the community members on social media understand the value that I'm seeing in it.



R.J. Marx

Scott Adams, public information officer of the Banks Fire District.

SEEN FROM SEASIDE

R.J. MARX



Q: What year was Banks fire station built?

Adams: We started in the 2017-2018 time-frame, and predominantly built during 2019 and 2020. The cost of that for just the construction part of it alone was between \$3.5 and \$4 million.

Q: Did the city of Banks own the land?

Adams: The land was completely donated to us, so that's not included in that cost. And what's also not included in that cost is a huge amount of upgrades that the community provided to us with the donations and in-kind service and labor. We were able to for that dollar spec out and build a very bare-bones station. Our contractors, the community, said, "We're not going to allow that, we want something really nice here, so we're going to step in and we're going to add to it. We're going to add beautiful siding, we're going to add timbers, we're going to donate all those and put them in for you."

A large part of what you see visually was either donated or from grants, and not included in our base bond cost of \$3.5 million. The solar that's in our roof, which helps pay our electricity, was grant-provided. Our training tower, that was provided by a FEMA firefighter training grant. So a large part of what you see visually was either donated or grants, and not included in our base bond cost of \$3.5 million.

Q: Do you know how much it would have cost without donations or grants?

Adams: We really don't, because it was put together bits and pieces here. Three have been numbers thrown out there that if we were to rebuild it today, it would be two or three or four times what it cost us to do if we actually just paid for everything that's there.

Q: How does your geographic and population area that you cover compare to Gearhart?

Adams: It's a little bit misleading to just look at pure geography, because we have such a larger square-mile area, but so much of it is uninhabited and unused. What's probably a more appropriate measure is the types of calls and the call volume that we get. Gearhart is pretty close to rivaling what Banks is right now. We were just under 1,000 calls this last year and Gearhart has been growing to 500, 600, 700 over the last few years.

Q: One of the issues that's arisen is that some people say that a large majority of Gearhart fire calls are mutual aid calls. Is it the same in Banks?

Adams: It absolutely is. The reality is



Banks Fire

Banks "Buxton" Station 14 (Hornshuh Creek Station) on U.S. Highway 26 was put into service in 2020 and is 8,800 square feet. Station 14 has two extra long double bays for four full-size apparatus or six medium-size apparatus. It has living quarters for six (could be expanded to 12) in six rooms plus full kitchen/day room facilities, a medium sized training room/conference room, weight room, and offices for a front desk person and up to three personnel.

I'm a little shocked at some of the detractors that I see. In some, people might be looking at one very small area and not understanding the big picture and the overall value that they are getting for what Gearhart is trying to put together here.

Q: What about the argument that Gearhart doesn't need a training facility because Camp Rilea is already providing training for the region?

Adams: I have trained at Camp Rilea, and it's a wonderful place. It's a resource that is great to have. But it's not a dedicated fire training service. It's not something that a district can just run to every Monday night for us in Banks, or whatever it is here, for training that we can just pop into.

It's got to be more of a planned and a specific event type training, rather than the daily weekly ongoing training that firefighters really need to stay on top of things.

Q: Are you saying that's something they can only get from the local department?

Adams: It's the training that you can get when you have the ability to say "let's go out back and work on this for an hour" versus "I have to spend five hours setting up a program with another district."

Again, back to mutual aid. We all work together in many different ways. Just because Seaside has a ladder truck doesn't mean we need a ladder truck all the time. But we do need to train all the time. And to say that we can only train if we go somewhere else just doesn't make a lot of sense in today's fire service.

Q: What brought you out here today? How did you hear about it?

Adams: I knew that there was an open house here today. I saw advertisements for it. And I knew that there were a lot of ques-

tions with regard to the comparison with Banks Fire.

So I reached out to some of the firefighters here and said, "Do you have any questions that I can help answer? Anything we can do to help your community answer those questions?"

They issued the invitation for me to come down today. I've had wonderful opportunities to talk with lots of different people today and it's something I'm always open to do.

Q: Is there anything else you'd like to add at this point?

Adams: I think you've covered it pretty well. You know, I just want to emphasize again that I'm impressed with the plans that I saw. And I'm really proud of what we've done at Banks. And what I'm seeing in the plans here. Gearhart is even greater.

Q: What does it mean to the volunteers and the firefighters to get a "yes" vote in a bond vote like this?

Adams: Well, I think that the value of the volunteer fire department is not understood by a community until they lose those volunteers and have to implement a paid fire program costing them many, many times what a volunteer program does.

When you have a community behind you, whether that's financially, emotionally or otherwise, it's far easier to build and maintain your volunteer program.

I know that morale plays a role in where our volunteers choose to spend their time and volunteers have a heart for serving their community and saving lives in this community.

And if they don't feel like the communities behind them, whether that's financially or otherwise, it's really easy for them to go somewhere else.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

City is at turning point

The city of Seaside is at a crucial turning point, as we begin the process of hiring a new city manager. Mark Winstanley will be retiring soon, so the recruiting, vetting, and interviewing needs to move quickly.

As a longtime city employee, recently retired, I have seen, and personally experienced the inner workings of the city, and want to share my opinion.

While I am all for hiring from within, in this case, it isn't our best option. The city deserves a capable leader who has the edu-

cation, experience, a deep history of leadership, and a proven track record who can hit the ground running. An individual who will honor our history, while having a vision for the future. There are many issues needing to be addressed, ones that have no easy fix, and perhaps a fresh eye would be useful. We need to seek out the best candidate, with a nationwide search. My hope is that our City Council will not take the path of least resistance, and truly search out the very best candidate for our city. As citizens, we deserve it.

Gretchen Darnell
Seaside

PUBLIC MEETINGS

Contact local agencies for latest meeting information and attendance guidelines.

MONDAY, March 7

Seaside Housing Task Force, 6 p.m., 989 Broadway.

WEDNESDAY, March 9

Seaside Houseless Task Force, 4 p.m., camping workshop, 989 Broadway.

THURSDAY, March 10

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

MONDAY, March 14

Seaside City Council, 7 p.m., 989 Broadway.

TUESDAY, March 15

CERT, 5 p.m., 989 Broadway.

Seaside School District, 6 p.m., <https://www.seaside.k12.or.us/>.

WEDNESDAY, March 16

Tourism Advisory Committee, 4 p.m., 989 Broadway.

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

THURSDAY, March 17

Transportation Advisory Commission, 7 p.m., 989 Broadway.



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