

Signs: Campaign signs in Gearhart getting bigger

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fellow councilor and members of GEARpac2022, a political action committee composed of community members and volunteer firefighters from Gearhart.

"I had previously been educated by the city administrator that Gearhart does not have a political sign ordinance," Cockrum said.

In the formal complaint filed by Jane and Harold Gable delivered to city election officer Chad Sweet, they ask that the 32-square-foot sign be removed immediately.

"We ask that this illegal sign, per Gearhart's zoning code be removed immediately," they write. "By allowing it to remain you are setting a precedent and other opposing parties will be allowed to place banners/signs that may even be larger in size in any Gearhart city zone."

According to the city's zoning code, temporary and permanent use signs in the neighborhood commercial zone are limited to no more than 8 square feet. The code does not have a provision for campaign signs.

Gearhart's Joy Sigler said the city has "flippantly set aside all city sign code claiming 'political sign exemption.' There is no adopted city code with this title."

Bob Shortman, who ran



R.J. Marx

Two sides of the firehouse bond issue in Gearhart.

for mayor in 2012, said that at the time he was asked to remove a sign in support of the candidate

"I was basically ignorant of the law," Shortman said Thursday. "Within hours, there was a barrage of complaints to City Hall."

Shortman said he was told the sign was oversized.

"I complied instantly," Shortman said. "The last thing I want to do is have the look of doing something wrong. So I ran down there and removed the sign."

Shortman said the city had failed to address their decision in 2012, in which he lost the mayoral election by five votes. Jeff Bennett was the city attorney at the time.

City Attorney Peter Watts said the U.S. Supreme Court has invalidated laws restricting the size of political signs. The court's decision holds that signs are an import-

ant medium of political, religious, or personal messages for which there are no exact alternatives.

That opinion was related to signs in a residential zone, Watts said, but should not make a fundamental difference in interpretation.

"The sign causing the controversy in Gearhart is in a commercial zone, so the facts are not entirely the same," he said. "The freedom to engage in political speech via sign, seems like it would be applicable regardless of zoning, though I can't say that with 100% certainty."

Mitch Cogan, a retired

attorney living in Gearhart who is opposed to the bond measure, said the city is "getting themselves in some trouble here and causing all kinds of consternation by taking an alternate interpretation to the sign rules now than they took a few years ago, when they wanted to take down a sign promoting the mayoral campaign of somebody who apparently they didn't want to be mayor."

Watts' interpretation of the Supreme Court ruling is incorrect, Cogan said. That ruling, made in 1994, stated that a city that had banned all political signs was acting

unconstitutionally. "The court in no way said what Mr. Watts is saying they said, which is that you can't regulate political signs. That's just not accurate at all."

According to the Oregon Elections Division, the law does not specifically address the size, location or timing of political campaign signs. These may be regulated by the local jurisdiction where the sign is located.

"Although this office cannot generally offer advice as to the applicability of these provisions to particular locations," the Elections Division states, "there is a concern that public employees enforce such regulations in an equitable manner so as not to indicate any support or opposition to political candidates or issues."

The sign situation could turn into a "tit-for-tat" thing now, Cogan said, with bigger and bigger signs on both sides.

"There's a lot of people who are very upset about this thing on the no side, and they're going to run out and

they're gonna buy the biggest signs they can find," Cogan said. "And I think it's not the intent of the rules to begin with. We've gotten ourselves going down a troublesome path here."

Shortman said the sign at Pacific Way and Cottage should come down. "If it was me, I would suggest that they take the sign down because now other people are making big signs," he said. "They should just remove the sign. We shouldn't flood the town with big signs — just go back to the regular signs."

Watts said while he does not have a definitive action, he is trying to weigh legal considerations.

"I think there is substantially more legal risk/liability of removing the sign versus taking no action," Watts said. "I have advised Chad that my advice is to not take action. I know that that is not popular with some people, because I am getting emails, but that is my position until I have explained it to the City Council and they have given us instructions to the contrary."

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World TB Day should be a wake-up call

Thursday, March 24 is World Tuberculosis Day, commemorating the approximately 1.5 million people killed by this horrible disease every year. In 20 years, global efforts to eradicate tuberculosis and other preventable diseases, led by groups like the Global Fund, have made enormous progress. The Global Fund alone has saved 44 million lives since 2002.

That progress is now in jeopardy. When the world shut down to prevent the spread of COVID-19, it disrupted access to diagnostics and treatments for tuberculosis. One million fewer people were treated for TB in 2020 than in 2019 and, for the first time in a decade, annual tuberculosis deaths rose.

This must serve as a wake-up call. Members of Congress, including U.S. Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley, must go on the record in support of a \$2 billion per year pledge at the Global Fund replenishment conference this year so it can continue its vitally important work.

2022 can be the year we end COVID-19 once and for all, but it must also be the year we get the world back on track to end tuberculosis and other preventable diseases by ensuring everyone, everywhere has access to lifesaving tests and treatments.

Michael Kalkofen
 Beaverton

Station on higher ground is needed

We retired to Gearhart after falling in love with its peaceful and beautiful surroundings, along with the friendly community. For us, safety was and is a priority! We all want to feel secure that in case of criminal activity, fire or medical emergency, responders are prepared and able to come to our aid.

Unfortunately, Gearhart's aging fire and police station, built in the 1950s, are inadequate for our full-time and volunteer responders safety needs, and most likely will not withstand a future catastrophic event, like an earthquake or tsunami.

A new fire/police station being located at a higher elevation, as was done with the school being moved for this reason, will provide us with the security and safety that our community needs going forward.

Deanna Mancill
 Gearhart

Please vote "yes" on Measure 4-213.

Brad and Georgia
 Wenger
 Gearhart

Water issues should be considered at Highlands site

The proposed Gearhart Fire Station and the development of a subdivision on property south of Highlands Lane concerns me a great deal. This proposal will only work if the Clatsop County Planning Commission and the Clatsop County Board of Commissioners agree that the land should be included in the Gearhart urban growth boundary.

Including this land into the Gearhart urban growth boundary, is a very lengthy process with public hearings for concerned citizens. A pre-application county hearing with the developers and 30 neighbors met with opposition. Concerns were the elk population and butterfly habitat preservation areas at Shamrock Pines and the Reserve.

In March 2020, Warrenton adopted a moratorium which prohibited the issuance of new water connections outside the incorporated boundaries of Warrenton. The Clatsop County Comprehensive Plan, Goal 10, Housing, dated March 2, board of commissioners' agenda, indicate this water restriction for the Clatsop Plains is still in effect.

The developers in spring 2021 realized the land could not be developed unless they had Gearhart water. The city of Gearhart has only a partial water right permit from the Oregon Water Resources Department from July 1 to Oct. 31. According to MurraySmith, 2016 Warrenton water master plan, Gearhart purchased an average of 4,628,833 gallons a month from May to October.

Clatsop Plains communities are concerned about water quality and quantity and want to initiate a moratorium on building homes with septic systems on less than one acre. Because Gearhart gets their drinking water from the Clatsop Plains aquifer, will higher housing density affect the city's future water supply?

There are so many issues with this land to be considered. Please vote no on the Gearhart Fire Station bond measure.