

# LCDC Tour, Gold Beach, March 10, 2016

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## **Background**

Gold Beach is a small town, population 2,500, on the southern Oregon coast. The community sits on the bank of the lower Rogue, a river that is internationally renowned for its white water, scenic beauty and exceptional salmon fishing.

To the casual observer, Curry County, like much of the Oregon coast, appears to be relatively prosperous. Expensive homes line the shore and can be seen nestled along the bluffs and in the hills overlooking the water. But these impressive homes are mostly built by people who don't live or work on the Oregon coast. Although the construction of custom homes boosts the local economy, real estate speculation can drive home prices up, pinching the market for more affordable housing that local wage earners need (leading some to argue that the benefits are fleeting). About 37 percent of wage earners in Curry County cannot afford market-rate housing.

Over the past three decades, the Oregon coast has lost many family wage jobs in the timber and fishing industries. The tourism industry and the retirement industries on the Oregon coast have not replaced family wage jobs. The situation was exacerbated when Oregon's fishing industry had to downsize in the late 1990s and in 2001 and 2002. The Oregon coast has not recovered from these structural changes. The recession, beginning in 2008, dealt yet another blow, leaving a significant segment of the Oregon coast's population trapped in a cycle of poverty.

In 1994, the Oregon Coastal Zone Management Association (OCZMA) published the first comprehensive report on economics and demographics for the Oregon coast. When the economic report was first released, many people were shocked to learn that the tourism industry only generated 7 percent of the total earned personal income on the Oregon coast. When the report was updated a few years ago, things have not changed much. In fact, tourism was contributing slightly less to the economy at that point.

Social security and other government assistance constitute about 23 percent of total personal income on the Oregon coast. Investment income, including retirement accounts and pensions constitutes another 23 percent of the total personal income. These two major sources of income come largely from retirees living on the coast, and clearly show how important retirees have become to the Oregon coastal economy. Coast-wide, the timber industry contributes about 9 percent, fishing 5 percent and agriculture about 2 percent. Of course, the relative contribution of these resource industries varies from county to county. The remainder of coastal personal income (about 27 percent) stems from government, professional and small business employment.

It is becoming clear that in many rural places, like Curry County, future economic prosperity will derive from the comparative advantages of coastal living. An extraordinary quality of life attracts talented people, but coastal communities will need to be able to offer infrastructure, education, services, and amenities to make living and working on the coast a viable option for new businesses and their employees. To this end, some communities are beginning to focus on enhancement of public services and the quality of the natural and social environment. Local economic policies are increasingly aimed at facilitating business development related to eco-tourism and forming strategies aimed at creating attractive and vibrant urban places.

## **1<sup>st</sup> Tour Stop – Sebastian Shores**

In 2004, a proposal to develop this site was submitted to the city of Gold Beach. A geologic study in the record, noted that the proposed housing site would be subject to rip embayments along the ocean shore that could erode the low fore dune fronting the proposed homes. The study also stated that the northward migration of Hunter Creek had directly impacted the building site in the past. Letters from the Department of Land Conservation and Development (DLCD or department) and Oregon Parks and Recreation Department (State Parks) warned of the risks associated with this site and explained that the proposed development would not be eligible for a shoreline protective structure (e.g., rip rap).

Nonetheless, the proposed subdivision was approved and home construction proceeded at a rapid pace from 2005 through 2007. During construction, the developer dug a trench in front of the several homes on the southern edge of the property, filled it with large boulders and buried it in sand. Three years later, during the spring of 2010, the ocean outlet of Hunter Creek began to shift northward, severely eroding the south end of the development site and exposing the improvised rip rap. The developer placed additional rip rap at that time to protect homes now perched on the edge of the erosion scarp.

Later that year, State Parks issued a Notice of Violation for unauthorized alteration of the ocean shore. Homeowners sued the developer and the developer in turn, filed a lawsuit against State Parks. In 2011, Oregon Consensus facilitated a collaborative process in an effort to find a solution. A nonstructural solution, referred to as a “log jam,” was proposed that would facilitate restoration of the foredune. State Parks has ordered that the rip rap be removed, but the land owner has taken no action to remove the rock or to restore the foredune. The case remains in litigation.

## **2<sup>nd</sup> Tour Stop – Curry General Hospital**

Several years ago, the state fire marshal told Curry Health District (health district) officials that their hospital building represents a risk to life and safety, and ultimately ordered that the building be brought into compliance or closed by mid-2016. In 2013, voters in the Curry Health District approved a bond measure for construction of a new building to replace the aging 60 year old structure. Although the proposed building site, next to the old hospital, did not lie within the statutory tsunami inundation zone established by ORS 455.446 (SB 379), updated modeling for tsunami inundation suggests that the proposed site could be impacted by a “large” tsunami event. Our selection of this tour stop is to show that some cities are very constrained in key community facility siting choices and to discuss possible future partnerships with the city to assist in increasing resilience to natural hazards.

The fact that the site is subject to tsunami inundation risk, as confirmed by recent Department of Geological and Mineral Industries (DOGAMI) tsunami inundation mapping and analysis, has resulted in some controversy and criticism being levied on the health district and the city for constructing the new hospital at this location. However, a review of the following facts shows the decision-making challenges:

1) Regulatory Requirements: The hospital location meets the current tsunami regulatory requirements established by ORS 455.446. It is likely that in the future, possibly within the next year, the regulatory line will be changed to align with one of the tsunami inundation scenarios (i.e., S, M, L, XL, XXL) established in the new DOGAMI mapping. Most likely the line will be either the M (Medium) or L (Large) line. The current regulatory line generally aligns best with the M or Medium inundation line on the new DOGAMI mapping. Additionally, the current hospital location is approximately in the middle of the L or Large inundation area with the lower portion of the site being potentially inundated by 6-8 feet of water in a Large scenario event.

2) Area Geology and Hazards: Some have suggested that the new hospital should have been constructed at a higher location within the city. However, the city is at the foot of the steep and unstable slopes of the Siskiyou Mountains which include significant landslide hazards, and is flanked to the north by the Rogue River and to the west by the Pacific Ocean. Department staff looked at other locations and agreed with the hospital district representatives that siting a hospital anywhere in this area is extremely challenging. There simply is no practicable alternative site in Gold Beach.

3) Other Alternatives Within the County: Some have suggested that the hospital might be located in another part of the county (e.g., Brookings) but, the hospital district's southern boundary is Pistol River, so Brookings is not within the health district. The health district does include Port Orford and unincorporated areas of the north county, which makes the Gold Beach location central to the district. In addition, the hospital has been part of the Gold Beach community for 60 years.

4) Timing: As often is the case, timing is everything. In this case, the time constraints imposed by the fire marshal's order may have prevented a more lengthy deliberation over site selection. The bond was approved by district voters on November 5, 2013 and engineering and construction planning was soon underway. Although the new tsunami inundation maps had recently been published by DOGAMI, the ORS 455.446 line was the applicable regulatory line when the building plans were reviewed by the building codes division. The ORS 455.446 line is still the regulatory standard and will remain so until the governing board of DOGAMI adopts a new inundation line, based on the new maps.

So, if a new higher regulatory line had been in effect during the site selection and building codes review, would the outcome have been different? Probably not. It is possible that a more deliberate and comprehensive review of the building design might have provided further mitigation for potential tsunami flooding at the site, but in terms of site selection, it is likely that an exception would have been approved, based on the controlling locational factors for this particular facility.

Finally, we appreciate our good relationships with the city. The city has indicated their interest in further preparing for a Cascadia Subduction Zone tsunami and department staff is happy to partner with the city in this endeavor.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Tour Stop – County Courthouse**

At the county courthouse, the Land Conservation and Development Commission will meet with local officials and staff to talk about the GIS tools that they've been developing as part of their public-facing website. The Geospatial Enterprise Office now located at DLCD has been advising the county as they proceed with that development. It has been a good partnership and it will be useful to hear from the county about this collaboration and the challenges inherent in developing GIS tools and data on a shoe string budget.

## **4<sup>th</sup> Tour Stop – Gold Rush Center**

Built in 1938, the Gold Beach Elementary School operated at this site on Highway 101 until its closure in 1990. The property sat vacant and forlorn for many years, before the current owner planned and executed this redevelopment project. The Gold Rush Center has repurposed as a central public space for art, entertainment, dining and fitness. The center hosts events, including art shows, educational events, and community gatherings. The hallways display bronze, stone and wood sculptures, as well as world class paintings. In addition to art galleries, you will find a variety of fitness, dance, dining and entertainment venues.

## **5<sup>th</sup> Tour Stop – Port of Gold Beach (South Coast Ports Dredge)**

Our final stop is to see the south coast ports dredge which is tremendously important to small ports where dredging resources have virtually disappeared. A portable hydraulic cutter head suction dredge was contracted in May 2015 for purchase through a process that included the Department of Administrative Services Procurement, Oregon Business Development Department (Infrastructure Finance Authority), and south coast ports. An intergovernmental agreement has been executed between the state and the ports for use and operations. The portable dredge is currently working in the Port of Gold Beach. In addition to dredging services, the state is working with US Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) to streamline the permitting process.

Permit Coordination and Equipment for Port Managed Dredging: Both navigational channel and inner harbor dredging remains vital for the operation of coastal ports. While the Corps plans for and manages permitting for dredge work within the federal navigational channels along Oregon's coast, ports are in charge of planning and permitting dredging activity within the marinas, around the docks and fuel stations, boat launches, ice houses, and other areas adjacent to the federal navigational channels. Permitting this activity is extremely complex and time consuming. Private contracting for dredge work along the south can be cost prohibitive. In early 2013, the Regional Solutions Team initiated a partnership with the south coast ports to provide technical and funding assistance on permitting and equipment. Milestone A. Most of the background work required for joint state/federal applications was completed this spring/summer for many ports along the Oregon coast. The Port of Bandon has worked through all sediment testing and disposal plans with the Portland Sediment Evaluation Team, and obtained

the final Corps permit in September. Milestone B. The Department of State Lands (DSL) has initiated rulemaking to create a new DSL General Permit to provide quick turnaround state authorization for certain maintenance dredging projects in as little as 40 days. This new streamlined permitting option is expected to be available in time for the winter 2016-2017 coastal dredging season. DSL is also coordinating with the Corps for the development of a parallel Federal Regional Permit.