

CITY OF GEARHART
Worksession of the City Council
Thursday, August 28, 2025
6:30 pm On-site and Virtual/Telephonic

A worksession of the Gearhart City Council was held Thursday, August 28, 2025. Council members, City staff, and the public were able to attend on-site, virtually, or by dialing in on a telephone.

Present were Mayor Kerry Smith, Councilor Paulina Cockrum, Councilor Preston Devereaux, Councilor Dana Gould, Councilor Sharon Kloepper, City Administrator Chad Sweet, Fire Chief Josh Como, Executive Assistant Krysti Ficker, and City Treasurer Justine Hill. A quorum of the Council was present.

Mayor Smith opened the worksession and explained that Councilor Cockrum would be leading the meeting. Councilor Cockrum requested that Administrator Sweet assist with timekeeping to keep the meeting on schedule.

Councilor Cockrum talked about the Public Safety Building task document that she had created, which was a format used in the last police/fire relocation effort. The objective of the task document is to provide a framework to move forward with a May general obligation bond. She mentioned that Administrator Sweet had made modifications to the task document and also translated the data into a Public Safety Building Action Plan. Administrator Sweet noted that the documents are to provide a pathway to move forward, not to give guidance on a specific direction on the Public Safety Building project. He also felt that if all options were being investigated, location should again be considered.

Councilor Cockrum explained that the City's current police and fire working areas are unsafe and inadequate. She felt that doing nothing was not a good option and noted that May 2026 was the next realistic opportunity to request voter approval. She felt that the Council needed to decide on a pathway to move forward in regard to the Public Safety Building project. She noted the current proposed costs (\$33-\$35 million) and mentioned the potential of scaling down and/or remodeling options. She felt that public opinion was an essential component. She indicated that she wanted to move forward with what the majority of voters supported. She requested any Council member's input.

Councilor Gould had concerns over the remodel terminology. She felt there were many interpretations of what a remodel entails. She requested further discussion on what a realistic remodel would be. Mayor Smith felt someone needed to follow up with Leonard Brogden, Building Official, on information from the Oregon Building Codes Division in regard to what is legally allowable on a remodel of an essential facility. Administrator Sweet indicated he has been having continued discussions with Building Official Brogden and would be willing to share

any of that information. Councilor Cockrum requested clarification on the type of remodel information that Building Official Brogden was investigating. Administrator Sweet indicated that Building Official Brogden was trying to find out if there was any work around to the State's unfunded critical infrastructure building code mandates, which would potentially allow a less resilient, less expensive facility. He did indicate that Building Official Brogden had received information that would allow the City to remodel the current fire station without having to implement the critical infrastructure requirements. Administrator Sweet reiterated that it was his understanding that because the current fire station was being used and the main portion of the station would still be operational, remodeling (including additions) was feasible without critical infrastructure upgrades. He noted that he did not have the information in writing. Councilor Kloepper wanted clarification that this type of renovation on the current fire station would not require any soil remediation, which Administrator Sweet indicated was accurate (no soil remediation on current site remodel). Councilor Kloepper requested clarification on whether or not a remodel would bring the fire station into compliance with OSHA requirements, which Administrator Sweet indicated that due to building constraints, it would not be OSHA compliant (e.g., vehicle width). Councilor Kloepper was also curious how a remodel would impact insurance rates (OSHA compliance), which Administrator Sweet did not know. There was continued discussion on insurance and OSHA compliance. Councilor Gould again mentioned that a remodel would require identifying what would be an essential need at the current fire station. She felt a comprehensive list from the fire department would be critical for the Council to make a decision on whether or not to proceed with the concept of a facility remodel. Councilor Devereaux felt it was critical to evaluate the current fire station's foundation to see if it is even feasible to remodel (e.g., thickness of slab). There was continued discussion on looking at all options; meeting essential safety needs; relocation of public works; solidifying what Oregon Building Codes Division would allow; and having Building Official Brogden meet with Council. Mayor Smith volunteered to meet with Building Official Brogden. Administrator Sweet was going to talk with Building Official Brogden about his availability to meet.

Councilor Cockrum inquired if there were any comments on scaling down the Public Safety Building project. Councilor Gould had some concerns over investing 5-10 million dollars in an old facility. She felt a short-term facility upgrade may not be adequate for long, which may alienate voters when additional funds became necessary. She mentioned keeping the police department at the current City Hall and potentially looking at another site for the fire department. She would like to revisit the Cottages location. She felt it would behoove the City to have the Cottages property annexed in and not be County controlled. There was discussion on Councilor Gould's thoughts about leaving the police offices at City Hall and potentially building a smaller, non-essential operating fire facility (e.g., restrooms, decontamination) at another location. Councilor Devereaux felt other Councilors should do more citizen research because he has found that the fire station is wanted to remain in downtown Gearhart. There was continued discussion on when he did location research; the cost of the project in terms of data gathering; and access to citizens who do not have a post office box in Gearhart. Administrator

Sweet updated on timekeeping. He indicated that they had completed the “Options for Consideration” and were transitioning into “Council Input & Discussion.”

Councilor Cockrum conducted an informal Council consensus that doing nothing was not a feasible option (Cockrum, Devereaux, Gould, Kloefer, Smith). She reiterated that discussion had occurred about a scaled-down facility, as well as a hybrid model. Councilor Cockrum also received feedback that the proposed 33 million dollar project should remain an option. Councilor Gould felt there was an obligation to keep the full project on the table out of respect for the people who invested their time and input. She acknowledged that not everyone would be happy. There was continued discussion on the benefits of mutual aid; vehicle equipment requirements; giving all options; and alternative locations (e.g., park). In continuing due diligence with exploring the Cottages location, Councilor Kloefer supported an idea by Councilor Cockrum of a vector analysis of fire response calls in Gearhart. Councilor Gould agreed that information would be valuable. There was continued discussion on the time commitment to gather this data and the feasibility of paying to get it. Fire Chief Como mentioned his department’s software may have the ability to provide this data (e.g., heat map); however, he was unclear how detailed the information would be (e.g., call type). Councilor Kloefer felt that the call type was essential in making a decision on location response (e.g., fire alarm battery change vs medical emergency). Councilor Cockrum requested that Fire Chief Como provide incident response data that was easily produced by his software. Councilor Devereaux pointed out that response time was contingent on where people are located and that it varies depending on the time of year (e.g., summer).

Councilor Cockrum transitioned into “Councilor Input & Discussion.” She noted some initial reactions from Councilors may have already been shared. Other task list items discussed were: a vector analysis from the fire department; a meeting with Building Official Brogden regarding information from the Oregon Building Codes Division (Mayor Smith); the need for a Public Safety Building project survey; compiling a list of essential needs for fire and police in a remodel scenario (Cockrum/Gould/Como/Gregory); and a discussion about facilities with Public Works Director (Kloefer). By consensus the Council felt that the task list discussed could be delivered within a 1 month timeframe.

Councilor Gould was interested in any information relating to impacts on a bond rating if the City decided to remodel without tsunami resilience. Administrator Sweet was going to verify with the City’s financial bond advisors. Councilor Gould also noted that she felt the remodel option would not be viable on a long-term debt arrangement (e.g., 20 years). Councilor Gould shared changes in the community that may impact the emergency services staff (e.g., growth in surrounding areas; crime levels; staffing levels; future equipment; size of building; current facility construction), which may also impact facility needs. Councilor Kloefer would like information from a professional on how long a remodel would be serviceable. Councilor Cockrum thought having community

feedback before asking for any additional professional services on cost projections was prudent. Councilor Devereaux again reiterated the importance of doing more due diligence on the current fire station's foundation. There was additional discussion on distribution of tsunami resources; other emergency events besides tsunamis; and spray-on concrete reinforcement products. Councilor Cockrum segued into points of alignment versus divergence. Councilor Gould felt that the priority was making the working environment safe for first responders. She was very suspicious that a remodel would not be the most cost effective solution. She had concerns that many voters will say no to the location and no because of the lack of resilience. Councilor Cockrum requested input from the Council on whether or not there was any desire to look at the 33 million full project plans and try to revise the scope of the project. There was continued discussion on the potential of Gearhart's future growth; information in the Buildable Lands Inventory; prioritizing financial future needs; a strategic plan; determining what the citizens will financially support; looking at all the options; the potential that a remodel does not build for the future; and engaging all citizens (e.g., Instagram, 3 second thoughts). Councilor Gould does not believe that everyone will get involved. She felt the best action was to put together a comprehensive project plan and put it out to the voters. She noted that doing nothing would indicate a leadership failure.

Councilor Cockrum moved to "Next Steps & Surveys." There were no sample survey questions distributed at the meeting; however, there was discussion on what information the Council wanted out of the survey. Mayor Smith felt that location and cost were essential points. There was continued discussion on survey language; price point/financial thresholds; cost for each project package; and building for the short-term or long-term. Administrator Sweet pointed out that the survey professional indicated that the results should lead to clear decision points on the project (e.g., proceed, pause, recalibrate). He felt that the key was to find the threshold for voters' support, which leads to next steps. Administrator Sweet mentioned he had talked with the architects, and they would be willing to help with a remodel scenario. Councilor Cockrum felt that Building Official Brogden's input was critical at this point. Mayor Smith indicated the Governor will not be coming to Gearhart. He indicated there was going to be a Critical Infrastructure Summit at the Seaside Convention Center, which he planned to attend. According to the Mayor, there are no waivers for critical infrastructure on essential facilities. Councilor Gould indicated the City has to take ownership of the City's infrastructure needs. She also mentioned that she may not be the best person to advise on what kind of questions to put on a survey. Administrator Sweet noted that Councilor Cockrum had some questions and Mayor Smith also had some. He went over some potential survey questions. Mayor Smith cautioned about using specific financial costs in the survey because the City currently does not have cost breakdowns on alternative options. There was discussion on the timeline of the survey (development in September, release to citizens in October); the type of technology used (e.g., SurveyMonkey, other); and compiling past survey data that is easy for citizens to review.

If Council would like to meet the May 2026 voter timeline, Councilor Cockrum and Administrator Sweet requested that they look over the task documents distributed and give any input by next week. Mayor Smith confirmed monthly Public Safety Building project worksessions. Councilor Cockrum confirmed the tasks assigned during the worksession.

Fire Chief Como felt that meeting basic operational needs was essential and he hoped the focus of the Public Safety Building project did not distract from meeting basic financial requirements. He did feel that there are alternative options to explore; however, he does not think citizens will be able to make a decision without a price point assigned. He noted the tight timeline and the need to increase momentum. He again cautioned that when looking at downsizing the project, the current facility is already too small.

Treasurer Hill reiterated the next month's list of tasks assigned in the worksession, which included reviewing and providing input on the Public Safety Building project task documents distributed (Council); a vector analysis (Como); meeting with Building Official Brodgen regarding information from the Oregon Building Codes Division (Smith); a Public Safety Building project draft survey (Cockrum, Sweet, w/Council input); compiling a list of essential needs for fire and police in a remodel scenario (Cockrum/Gould/Como/Gregory); and a discussion about facilities with the Public Works Director (Kloepfer). Administrator Sweet added he would be investigating potential impacts on insurance costs; impacts on the general obligation bond rates; and fire station foundation depths. He also noted that at this point, the survey was going to be done in-house.

The Mayor adjourned the worksession at 5:35 pm.

Mayor Kerry Smith

Chad Sweet, City Administrator