

CITY OF GEARHART

Staff Report

For City Council Meeting - 4/3/2024

Subject - Old Business - Zip Code Update

Synopsis: Councilor Fackerell requested a zip code update as part of her March Councilor Concerns. We are happy to report that the timing couldn't be better! With Seaside very recently hiring a new Postmaster, we were able to meet and bring her up to speed on the situation. Since this has been in process for almost three years, here is a brief historical timeline for our newest Council members:

- Fall 2021 - Councilor Warren began collecting support and research for Gearhart to obtain its own zip code
- December 2021 - Council passed Resolution #965 directing staff to actively pursue zip code reassignment and request USPS issue Gearhart 97139
- February 11, 2022 - Representative Bonamici penned a letter to USPS District Manager William Schwartz in support of our request; Senators Wyden and Merkley also signed
- February 16, 2022 - Mayor Cockrum submitted an official Boundary Review letter, Resolution #965, and supporting correspondence to Mr. Schwartz
- March 2022 - Mr. Schwartz replied to Bonamici's letter stating his Ops Team would start the process as we'd already done most of the legwork
- August 2022 - First 90 day waiting period up; spoke with Mr. Schwartz's office for an update; promised a return call
- September 2022 - A second call made; still no response
- November 2022 - Message left for Postmaster Tony in Seaside hoping he could get a response on our behalf
- January 2023 - A third call to Mr. Schwartz which resulted in him calling Seaside
- February 2023 - Ryan Anderson, Seaside's Interim Postmaster, calls to be debriefed after Mr. Schwartz's call; emailed all copies of correspondence, letters and timeline, confirmed received a week later and forwarded to Manager of Postal Operations Scott Buss
- March through May 2023 - Multiple requests for updates to Ryan via email and phone, no response; learned in June he'd been on LOA for months
- June 2023 - Oregon Press Secretary Hank Stern gives Karen at Gearhart Post Office the name Ree Armitage from Senator Wyden's office for help
- June 30, 2023 - Ree calls City Hall and is debriefed; emailed all copies of

- correspondence, letters and timeline and we discover the ball was dropped
- October 2023 - Follow up with Ree at the end of the 90 day Boundary Review waiting period; no update
 - November 2023 - Ree says he'll inquire with USPS and get back to us
 - January 2024 - No response to additional update request
 - February 2024 - We learn Seaside has a new Postmaster, Trish Christian
 - March 2024 - Trish is debriefed via phone; emailed all copies of correspondence, letters and timeline, and is supportive of separate zip codes for Seaside and Gearhart
 - March 2024 - Ree introduced us to postal service caseworker Fatima Kenworthy who is reaching out to regional USPS leadership; Privacy Act Release form signed to speak on our behalf

Recommendation: N/A

Legal Analysis: According to Postmaster Christian, it is no secret there is a long term goal to turn the Gearhart CPU site into a full service USPS site. She agrees with the unnecessary confusion a shared zip code causes, and has seen single cities receive multiple zip codes. Trish sees no reason why this cannot be accomplished now that active parties are on board and facilitating the process.

Financial Analysis: N/A


Respectfully Submitted,



Chad



CITY OF
GEARHART

 COPY

February 16, 2022

Mr. William Schwartz
USPS District Manager
7007 NE Cornfoot Rd. Dept. #100
Portland, OR. 97218-9300

RE: Gearhart Request for Zip Code Boundary Review

Dear Mr. Schwartz:

The City of Gearhart Post Office became a contract "satellite" office of Seaside Post Office in 1961. According to print media at the time, the change was made as a cost- saving measure. The US Postal Service agreed Gearhart would continue to receive mail addressed to "Gearhart, Oregon". In 1964, the US Postal Service implemented geographic Zip Codes to expedite mail sorting and delivery throughout the United States. (It is still unclear whether Gearhart was ever assigned its own Zip Code. A few residents seem to recall a Gearhart Zip Code, but we could not find any official documentation to that effect.)

So why is Gearhart having the same Zip Code as Seaside an issue?

- The shared zip code creates confusion and results in misdirected letters and packages at both post offices. Most, but not all, confusion centers around numbered and lettered streets or other identical or very similar names. Our Gearhart PO staff estimates an average of a dozen misdirected pieces of mail per day. Due to its larger population (6,700) and mail volume, Seaside's misdirected mail could easily be double that figure. With each misdirected piece of mail requiring human intervention to research and solve this causes delays in delivery. To coin a phrase, "Time is Money!"
- Friends, relatives and retailers trying to send mail and packages from other Post Offices are frequently told that, "That address is invalid. Are you sure you have the right address, city and zip code?"
- Zip Codes are not only used for delivery of US mail, they are utilized by private package delivery services. Consequently, we consulted with both local UPS and FedEx personnel. They agreed Gearhart having a shared Zip Code with Seaside causes a significant number of delivery

issues for them. They stated problems occur even more frequently whenever there is personnel turnover, which is fairly constant. The best-case scenario involves manual research (which may result in additional fees), delivery delays, and the added costs of additional re-delivery fees. Worst case is the package or mail gets returned to the sender as "undeliverable". This issue grows larger as volumes of online shopping increase.

- The USPS National Zip Code Database is also used by virtually all mail order and internet vendors, such as Amazon, eBay, big box stores, pharmacies, and others. Because our Zip Code is shared, the database defaults to "Seaside" and many websites either do not allow city names to be manually overridden or when "Gearhart" is allowed to be manually entered, the computer programs sometimes change the city name back to "Seaside". This city name reversion can happen at the time the order is transmitted and the purchaser may not even be aware until there is a problem.

- Another issue has been brought to our attention by local Realtors. Many online real estate search engines such as Redfin, Trulia, Zillow, etc., also use the USPS database to populate listing searches. Gearhart home listings frequently come up as being in "Seaside", regardless of how the listing was typed in, simply because of the USPS database. As a result, some prospective buyers who may want to purchase a home Gearhart may skip over the listing entirely. Home sellers are needlessly missing out on sales opportunities and Realtors are potentially missing commission income.

From what we are able to determine, the City has previously performed some research about obtaining our own unique Zip Code; however, as far as we can determine, Gearhart has never made a formal request to do so. In our research and community conversations, we have discovered there is extensive misunderstanding such as:

- 1) Gearhart (population 1,800) does not have sufficient population to warrant its own Zip Code. (Our population is expected to increase significantly in the near future.)
- 2) USPS mail carriers are not allowed to work outside of their own Zip Code area.
- 3) Some citizens are concerned if Gearhart obtained a separate Zip Code it would have "unintended consequences", such as the elimination of street delivery in our City.

However, as the information below reveals, none of these views are factual:

- Arch Cape (population 205) has a contract post office with its own unique Zip Code 97102. Mail staging and delivery is done by Cannon Beach 97110 by USPS employees.
- Hammond, Oregon (population 1,400) is an unincorporated neighborhood within the City of Warrenton and has its own Zip Code 97121. Hammond PO Boxes and Hammond Street Delivery is served by USPS personnel from Warrenton 97146. (Warrenton has a total population of 5,000, which includes Hammond.)
- Manzanita (population 393) has its own Zip Code 97130 and is serviced by Nehalem (population 355) 97131.
- Tolovana Park (population 400) has its own 97145 Zip Code and is a contract post office within the Tolovana Park Store. Tolovana Park is served by the USPS Post Office in Cannon

Beach 97110.

Telephone conversations with both the recently retired Seaside Postmaster and the current interim Seaside Postmaster revealed it is actually common for a host post office to work in neighboring Zip Code areas. Consequently, Gearhart obtaining its own Zip Code would have absolutely no impact on the service current home deliveries receive. Both concurred the shared Zip Code situation causes delivery issues and wasted research time and were anxious for Gearhart to initiate the process with USPS.

SUMMARY:

The shared zip code is a problem that impacts many or most people in our city whether they are aware of it or not as a result of the extra effort postal and private delivery workers make behind the scenes. Worker time costs us all money. Delays and returns cost us all money. Overlooked home listings potentially cost us money. As more medications are purchased online, some of the delays and returns have potential life-threatening consequences.

Having an independent Zip Code from the City of Seaside should not preclude the USPS from continuing to deliver our mail as the City of Gearhart's host post office.

This issue has been discussed at multiple City Council meetings, it has been the subject of several local newspaper articles and social media groups, and we have received overwhelmingly positive response from our citizens to pursue this effort. The City Council passed a resolution to demonstrate our desire to formally request a Zip Code boundary review from the USPS (see enclosed).

The City of Gearhart having its own Zip Code will not solve every issue, such as having an insufficient number of PO boxes. However, it should provide an incremental improvement for all of our residents and businesses. Any costs for implementing the change will be a one-time expense with the long-term benefits far outweighing the cost.

Thank you for your consideration and support.



Paulina Cockrum
Mayor, City of Gearhart



Chad Sweet
City Administrator, City of Gearhart

Enclosures: City Resolution, copies of correspondence, sample online real estate listings



CITY OF GEARHART

RESOLUTION NO. 965

THE CITY OF GEARHART MAKES THE FOLLOWING RESOLUTION:

WHEREAS, the City of Gearhart is a growing independent municipality in Clatsop County Oregon, with an estimated population of 1,800;

WHEREAS, the City of Gearhart has its own US Postal Service (USPS) Contract Office, it shares its 97138 zip code with the City of Seaside, its neighbor to the south containing a population of approximately 6,700;

WHEREAS, many online sites utilize the USPS national zip code database and do not allow overriding the default city name based on the zip code;

WHEREAS, Gearhart and Seaside have many street names that are identical or similar, mail is frequently misdirected to the wrong city, requiring costly research, redirection, and delays. Some of these delays could impact mail-order prescriptions and other necessary medical supplies;

WHEREAS, some delivery companies such as FedEx and Amazon incorrectly notify purchasers that their package may be picked up at the Seaside Post Office, causing needless trips and phone calls;

WHEREAS, some of the more economical insurance companies use zip code as part of their underwriting process, some Gearhart homeowners have been denied homeowners insurance or may have paid higher premiums because the distance to Seaside was mistakenly considered too far from their residence;

WHEREAS, many nearby coastal cities and communities have populations considerably smaller than Gearhart, they have been assigned their own unique and individual zip code (See attached Exhibit A);

NOW, THEREFORE the City of Gearhart requests the United States Postal Service (USPS) to review assignment of zip code 97139 or another zip code unique to our city.

This Resolution was passed by the City Council of the City of Gearhart this 1st day of December 2021.

YEAS: 4

NAYS: 1

ABSENT: 0

ABSTAIN: 0

Signed and approved by the Mayor of the City of Gearhart this 7 day of Dec 2021.



Paulina Cockrum, Mayor

ATTESTED BY:


Chad Sweet, City Administrator

EXHIBIT A

Coastal Cities within 25 miles of Seaside

| Zip | City | County | St | Population |
|-------|---------------|------------|----|------------|
| 97016 | CLATSKANIE | COLUMBIA | OR | 1,750 |
| 97064 | VERNONIA | COLUMBIA | OR | 1,850 |
| 97102 | ARCH CAPE | CLATSOP | OR | 205 |
| 97103 | ASTORIA | CLATSOP | OR | 9,900 |
| 97110 | CANNON BEACH | CLATSOP | OR | 1,500 |
| 97121 | HAMMOND | CLATSOP | OR | 1,400 |
| 97130 | MANZANITA | TILLAMOOK | OR | 393 |
| 97131 | NEHALEM | TILLAMOOK | OR | 355 |
| 97138 | SEASIDE | CLATSOP | OR | 6,700 |
| 97144 | TIMBER | WASHINGTON | OR | 131 |
| 97145 | TOLOVANA PARK | CLATSOP | OR | 1,490 |
| 97146 | WARRENTON | CLATSOP | OR | 5,000 |
| 97147 | WHEELER | TILLAMOOK | OR | 357 |
| 98643 | ROSBURG | WAHKIAKUM | WA | 320 |

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

February 11, 2022

William Schwartz, District Manager
U.S. Postal Service
7007 NE Cornfoot Rd. Dept. #100
Portland, OR 97218-9300

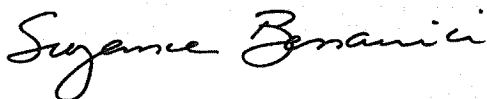
Dear District Manager Schwartz,

We are writing to draw your attention to the City of Gearhart's request to initiate a boundary review process with the goal of securing a new ZIP code for the city. Gearhart currently shares the 97138 ZIP code with the City of Seaside, and the two cities also have many similar street names. The shared ZIP code regularly causes confusion and misdirected mail. These mistakes require manual human intervention to rectify, so they reduce the efficiency of USPS operations. Gearhart city officials note that the misdirected mail problem extends to private mail carriers, who report that the shared ZIP code causes significant delivery challenges.

Assigning a separate ZIP code to the City of Gearhart would alleviate this confusion and improve the rate of correctly delivered mail. The City of Gearhart has completed a rigorous public review process and found overwhelming support for this proposal. The pandemic has increased the public's need for reliable mail service, especially in rural communities like Gearhart. We support the City's request for its own ZIP code and request that USPS provide our offices with a status update on the City of Gearhart's request.

Communities in Oregon and across the country rely on secure and timely postal service for many reasons, and USPS employees work hard to serve them. Thank you for your dedication. We appreciate your full and fair consideration of this matter, and look forward to your prompt response.


Sincerely,



Suzanne Bonamici



Ron Wyden



Jeffrey A. Merkley



March 22, 2022

Tracking # 9114 9012 3080 1463 3312 05

The Honorable Suzanne Bonamici
12725 SW Millikan Way – Suite 220
Beaverton, OR 97005

RE: Congressional Inquiry – Gearhart OR Boundary Review Process

Dear Congresswoman Bonamici:

I am writing in response to your letter dated February 11, 2022, in reference to the City of Gearhart's request to initiate a boundary review process with the goal of securing a new ZIP code for the city. I want to assure you that the U.S. Postal Service welcomes these requests when there is a potential to better serve our customers and improve post office operations.

It is my hope that you have had a chance to review the USPS Delivering For America vision and 10-year plan for the U. S. Postal Service. It references our vision to realize two central and complimentary goals: Service Excellence and Financial Sustainability. Only through service excellence can we maintain the confidence and trust of the public.

I have asked my Operations Integration Team to initiate a boundary review based on the information the City of Gearhart has proposed. I appreciate that they have completed a rigorous public review process and are approaching us with this proposal.

I am committed to providing the best service possible for the customers within the City of Gearhart as well as all customers within my district. I look forward to the outcome of this review and communicating with the City of Gearhart Officials during the process.

If you should have additional questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to reach out to me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "William Schwartz".

William Schwartz
District Manager

cc: Senator Ron Wyden
Senator Jeff Merkley