Members of the City Council, Cannon Beach

First, thank you for you efforts to listen to all sides on the dune grading for views issue.

My husband, Douglas Hadley, and I have owned our home near Chapman Point for 19 years. I am strongly opposed to the “grading” (actually bulldozing) of the dunes for the sake of the view of a few home owners.

I have spoken up at 2 of the meetings but ran out of time to complete sharing my thoughts. The last point I was in the midst of making was that the REAL problem was not; which type of grass should be used, or Snowy Plovers, or safety; it is that people chose to build on the ocean front in the leeward side of the dunes that keep on growing. Ocean front home owners ought to have known what was obvious on the face of things by plain observation and history: that the north dunes will continue to do what they have been doing for many years, which is continue to grow! The problem here is “assuming” that you will be able to stop nature and/or maintain the status quo. As much as a person may hope nature will bend to their will, or that they can force it to, that is not (and should not) be the case. Beach front home owners do not have the right or the privilege at everyone else’s expense to bulldoze the dunes just to maintain “their” view.

If that were the case, our house, (which according to photos and maps, appears to have practically been beach front property back in 1938) should still be beachfront! As the dunes expanded, and people wanted to build on the beach front, the city made decisions (good or bad) to allow building further and further out. Our house was built in 1935. After that (as the dunes extended further west) homes were built on the east side of Oak street starting about 1945 and 1946. Then when the beach front was built out, homes were built in the 50’s through the 80’s east of the homes on Oak Street, on the west side of Ash. But the process of dune expansion continued, and so, eventually starting in the early 2000’s, homes were built on the west side of Oak street (literally on the dunes). So now there are 3 rows of homes between me and the beach. It seems that the human tendency to want to be the last one in the door, or the last one with a front row seat with a view, is alive and well in CB. I imagine that the folks at Breakers Point would scream holy hell if anyone were to try and build in front of them! But why not? That has been the progression for almost 100 years.

I would like to clear up what I consider misrepresentations of the “facts” (reminding you that just because someone restates something over and over again does not make it a “fact”).

1. Those in favor of grading have stated that they are in the majority. I don’t see any way that that claim can be supported. Especially given the number of folks who live in Cannon Beach as compared to the number of those who own homes in Breakers Point and or the Presidential Streets ocean front homes (5%). And based on the number of people who have signed the Friends of the Dunes petition, not to mention the number of Oregon residents who come here to visit, enjoy the beauty of the dunes and are not even aware that they may be bulldozed the next time they come to visit.

Someone who supports dune grading suggested as support, the beauty of the beach front homes. Beauty of course is in the eye of the beholder, but while I would agree that there are a “few” quaint, cottage looking homes along the beach front, I don’t
think most people find the “mcMansions” or the condos anything but an eyesore, and would be happy to see the dunes hide them completely from view. These same folks find the dunes “ugly” or unappealing. Again, that is not the experience of most of us who actually walk the beach and enjoy the full sweep of the views from the mountains to dunes, to beach, to ocean, to sky, to cliffs. These are all of one piece and you can not bulldoze one aspect of the tapestry without decimating the whole piece.

3. Graders have stated that the dunes are a “wasteland” and barren of wildlife. Just last Saturday we watched as a herd of 15 elk grazed in the dunes. We watched this with some folks from Eastern Washington, strangers we met on the beach, who said that this was one of the reasons they come to the Oregon coast, Cannon Beach in particular; our natural coast. They were appalled to hear that there was even consideration of grading the dunes.

I heard it said that because the grading decision in the past was made by the City Council the decision NOT to grade also has to be made by the Council. But I wonder if that is the wisest course or even truly necessary. Maybe this should be a state wide issue, seeing as the law (the Oregon Beach Bill) which made Oregon’s beaches public, was a state wide initiative. Oregon’s public lands claim was challenged in 1966, when a Cannon Beach motel owner fenced some dry sands above the high tide line for private use. After citizens complained to the state government, state legislators put forward the Oregon Beach Bill. Coastal developers called the bill a threat to private property rights, and it nearly died in the legislature. In response, Governor Tom McCall staged a dramatic media event on May 13, 1967, flying two helicopters to the beach with a team of surveyors and scientists. The ensuing media coverage resulted in overwhelming public demand for the bill. The bill was passed by the legislature in June and signed by McCall on July 6, 1967. With each town up and down the coast making individual decisions to grade or cut trees or impact the beach in one way or another (Gearhart is in a similar process, different stage) I am afraid that much of the intent of the law will be lost. Maybe this decision needs to be taken to the state level. I am worried that the Oregon Coast will become a patchwork quilt and lose its unique quality. We should ALL have equal voice in what happens to our dunes! Do we need to get the Governor and the media involved to rally support to protect our beaches, including the dunes?

Doug and I love to walk on the north beach. It is therapeutic and healing to body and soul. We do not want to have the beauty of our walks destroyed by having to look at “bull dozed dunes”. Doug is the family theologian, but I want to share what our Orthodox Metropolitan recently said regarding our duty to preserve the earth: He said “It is easy to take creation for granted, to see the world around us as comprising inanimate objects and dumb beasts, servants to our purpose and delight, or obstacles in our way. ... yet while God gave us dominion over the earth we are not to dominate nature, but humbly commune with it in a relationship of love, of care, and of stewardship.” I pray that you have the wisdom and grace to be good and faithful stewards of our dunes.

I want to end by quoting Joni Mitchell, “don’t it always seem to go that you don’t know what you’ve got till it’s gone ...”. Let’s not Bulldoze our dunes and live to regret it.

Thank you,
Karen J. Hadley

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