# City of Bandon

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**BACKGROUND:**
Meeting Minutes of the Planning Commission as submitted by Richard Taylor, Minutes Clerk.
- March 28, 2019 – Regular Meeting

**FISCAL IMPACT:**
None

**RECOMMENDATION:**
For information only.

**SUBMITTED BY:**

[Signature]
Denise Russell, City Recorder
Regular Meeting of the Planning Commission
at Bandon City Hall
March 28, 2019

COMMISSION:
✓ David Kimes, Chair
✓ Sheryl Bremmer, Vice Chair
✓ Paul Fisher, Commissioner
✓ Sally Jurkowski, Commissioner
✓ Gerald Slothower, Commissioner
✓ Donald Starbuck Commissioner
✓ Blythe Tiffany, Commissioner

STAFF:
✓ Robert Mawson, City Manager
☐ Fred Carleton, City Attorney
✓ Dennis Lewis, Planning Director
☐ Charli Davis, City Planner
☐ Megan Lawrence, Planning Assistant

1.0 CALL TO ORDER
Kimes called the meeting to order at 7:01 p.m., and Roll Call was taken as indicated above.

2.0 CONSENT AGENDA
2.1 Joint City Council and Planning Commission Study Session Minutes—February 25, 2019
2.2 Regular Planning Commission Meeting Minutes—February 28, 2019
Starbuck moved to approve the consent agenda for the February 25, 2019, Joint City Council and Planning Commission Study Session and the February 28, 2019, Regular Planning Commission Meeting. The motion was seconded by Fisher and was approved with no corrections or additions. The vote was 6:0:1 (Slothower abstained).

3.0 PUBLIC COMMENTS—Opportunity for Citizens to speak on issues not on the Agenda
There were no Public Comments.

4.0 PUBLIC HEARINGS
No Public Hearing was held.

5.0 FINDINGS OF FACTS
5.1 Findings of Fact—230 15th Street SE—Application #19-008 to site a manufactured home for residential use on property within the Light Industrial (LI) Zone in the City of Bandon.
Kimes asked Staff for comments about the Findings of Fact prepared for Planning Action #19-008. Lewis said the Findings adequately and completely reflect the Planning Commission’s decision on the application, and he asked for the Commission’s approval. There were no questions for Staff from the Commissioners. Fisher moved to approve the Findings of Fact. The motion was seconded by Jurkowski. The vote was 6:0:1 (Slothower abstained).
6.0 DISCUSSION/OTHER

6.1 Discussion—Section 8.08.150—Noxious Vegetation Amendments.

Kimes explained that in the Commission's recent Joint Study Session with the City Council, the Commissioners were tasked with exploring potential changes to the City's noxious vegetation ordinance. City Manager Robert Mawson has agreed to take charge of this project, and he provided the Commissioners with some background information for their assignment.

Mawson noted that the Commission's assignment grew out of a City Council discussion around six months ago. He introduced three people who have been closely involved with combatting noxious weeds in the area: Will Bailey, Chair of the Coos County Weed Advisory Board; Jim Seeley, Executive Director of the Wild Rivers Coast Alliance; and Liza Ehle, owner of Windward Gardens. All three have been active in the Gorse Action Group (GAG). About a year ago, a declaration of cooperation was signed by over 30 federal, state, and local government agencies and private entities that joined to work on solving the problem of gorse and other noxious weeds.

Mawson drew attention to the GAG website, gorseactiongroup.org, where the public can learn about best practices, see examples of demonstration projects, and access research papers and studies from around the world. Problems with gorse are not isolated to the south coast of Oregon; it is found in Australia, Hawaii, and elsewhere as well.

The GAG website offers resources for private landowners, homeowners, and larger land managers, with examples of how local ranches and farms have dealt with gorse. The website also spotlights and documents projects such as the Bullards Bridge Gorse Removal along Highway 101 north of Bandon, involving State and tribal participants as well as local landowners; the Highway 101 Gorse Removal Demonstration south of Bandon; efforts to work with property owners to combat gorse in the unincorporated “Donut Hole” section inside Bandon’s urban growth boundary; and the Coquille Point Gorse Removal, where crews from Shutter Creek Correctional Institution scaled the bluff to clear out gorse with no apparent harm to the landscape.

Mawson continued that the Demonstration Project consists of eight plots that are identified with signs telling how they have been treated to combat gorse, providing examples that can be applied in a variety of circumstances.

Despite all the efforts to control and eradicate gorse on the southwest coast of Oregon, the Bandon Municipal Code (BMC) continues to have exceptions allowing landowners to have gorse on their property. The City Council would like to minimize or remove these exceptions, so the City would no longer allow gorse to grow in the community and to propagate seeds that travel and spread gorse from one location to another. Mawson observed that part of the problem is that gorse is blooming this time of year and people think it's pretty.

According to Mawson, the City of Bandon has been stepping up its enforcement activities in the past year and a half to try to deal with gorse. It has worked with other organizations to help put GAG together, and to develop methods and avenues to educate people about gorse. There has been a specific focus on educating contractors in best practices of gorse removal. Mawson sees this as an economic development engine, as businesses begin to hire more workers and purchase needed equipment to accomplish gorse eradication.
Mawson provided the Commissioners with a section of the City’s current ordinance dealing with noxious vegetation, so they could examine some of the exceptions that need attention. Additionally, he shared copies of a written proposal Ehle has submitted that details an approach the City could take to control gorse, including compliance procedures. Written comments and recommendations from Bailey were also included in materials given to the Commissioners.

Mawson pointed out that although the City’s ordinance names other invasive species that are listed by the State and the County, such as Scotch broom, gorse is the main object of the City’s attention. He suggested Coquille Point will be the most difficult exception to address, because of concerns about stability of the bluff, and he urged examination of each exception in the Code and a discussion of the merits or drawbacks of scratching that exception.

Mawson encouraged the Commission to hear comments from the attendees.

Kimes mentioned that he had a conversation at the grocery store with Ehle about a month before the meeting, and much of what they discussed is reflected in the proposal she submitted. He thanked her and said it is an excellent document. Then, he urged the attendees to speak.

**Jim Seeley, Executive Director of the Wild Rivers Coast Alliance**

Seeley identified the Alliance as the granting department of the Bandon Dunes Golf Resort. He and his wife have lived on the South Jetty for seven years.

As part of the start-up team helping Mike Keiser plan Bandon Dunes, Seeley made many trips during the layout of the initial golf course, and he saw the extent of gorse on the property. Nobody involved with Bandon Dunes knew a thing about gorse, but they had to do something about it. The fact that the property was gorse-choked made it unsuitable for practically every use, but it was a desirable location for a golf course. They cleared, uprooted, and burned enough gorse to build an 18-hole golf course, and thought they had whipped it, until the gorse came back and took over one of the golf holes. Bandon Dunes began to fight its gorse with regular mowing and herbicide treatment.

Seeley said the grounds of the Resort are still about 40 percent covered with gorse, and he recounted how the lodge at Bandon Dunes had to be vacated once during the first two years it was open, due to a gorse fire in part of what is now the Resort’s second course. There have been two major fires since then—the most recent being two years ago.

When Seeley became director of the Wild Rivers Coast Alliance, Keiser assigned him the task of figuring out what to do about gorse. He began to meet others with a common interest, such as Bailey, Ehle, and Carri Pirosko of the Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA). Initially, they found it difficult to get others—those in government agencies or private landowners—to talk with them and come up with solutions. But they were persistent and attracted the attention of State Representative Caddy McKeown, who joined Seeley as a co-convener. They asked for and received Oregon Solutions designation from the Governor’s office, which cause more people to look at the gorse issue and take it seriously. Over 30 people are now involved in GAG.

Seeley urged the Commissioners to give Ehle’s document serious consideration, and he emphasized the timeliness of acting while there is increasing public awareness of the gorse threat. He also encouraged the City to pursue agreements with Coos County to involve unincorporated areas in the City’s efforts, because gorse could be suppressed within the City, yet easily reestablish itself due to careless landowners who don’t understand how to manage it.
Mawson added that the City of Bandon has a pending agreement with Coos County to allow the City to enforce its noxious weed ordinance within its urban growth boundary, including the “Donut Hole,” Sunset City, and around the airport. The agreement would provide for Coos County to adopt Bandon’s ordinance, then delegate authority to the City of Bandon to administer the ordinance within the urban growth boundary. Mawson stressed the need to fine-tune the ordinance before the agreement is signed and the County adopts it. The gorse problem will not be fixed if it’s only taken care of within the City, he said, while Bandon continues to be surrounded by forests of gorse.

**Will Bailey, Chair, Coos County Noxious Weed Control District Advisory Board**

Bailey stated that the Advisory Board is fully onboard with Ehle’s proposal. He emphasized the importance of attacking gorse in a coordinated fashion, not haphazardly, to minimize cost and get things done in a uniform way. By using contractors who can be monitored to make sure the gorse removal and equipment cleaning are done properly, there is less likelihood of spreading gorse into areas where it doesn’t currently exist.

Coos County is able to offer an herbicide cost-sharing program that allows property owners to purchase herbicides at half-price for treating gorse and about 15 other noxious weeds on the County’s target weed list. Bailey said English ivy is one of the worst offenders, as it entangles trees and weakens them, so ultimately strong winds will bring them down. But gorse is far and away the number one problem. You can see it everywhere in Bandon.

Bailey asserted herbicides are the only way to get on top of the gorse problem. A lot of people are concerned about the use of herbicides, but GAG has thoroughly studied the safest and most effective herbicides that work on gorse and posted their names on the GAG website with instructions on how to use them safely and when to use them.

Spraying tall gorse plans will not be effective, according to Bailey. They should be cut down, ground up, and mulched. Leaving the mulch in place helps suppress the roots and keep them from re-sprouting. Then, only a small amount of herbicide has to be applied to the small root sprouts and seedlings. These kinds of techniques have been learned by researching what has been done everywhere that gorse is being attacked.

Fisher asked if a homeowner will be required to have an herbicide applicator’s permit. Bailey replied that part of the participation in cost-sharing involves a required safety training taught by the Oregon State University (OSU) Extension in Myrtle Point. The kind of herbicides GAG is providing can be sprayed and are not restricted-use herbicides that would require an Oregon Pesticide Applicator License. For those who aren’t comfortable handling the herbicides, GAG maintains a list of licensed applicators, in addition to contractors who can remove their gorse.

Bremmer referred to an OSU gorse study in the 1990s that determined there are four factors that contribute to a successful gorse removal program. The first is rigorous code enforcement, which is also stressed in Ehle’s proposal. Asked by Bremmer if he agreed, Bailey said he did, specifying the need for simultaneous removal to be coordinated among neighboring parcels.

The second factor identified by the OSU study is long-term community-wide involvement in pursuing the best management practices. Bremmer interpreted this to mean there is need for a multi-pronged approach to community awareness, including the GAG website for those who are conversant with using that medium, along with something like a newsletter for those who aren’t.
Bailey interjected that he would recommend holding workshops and public meetings. It will take a number of them to get enough people to attend and to make sure all their questions are being answered. GAG has tried to hold public meetings and has encouraged the public to come to the Gorse Blossom Festival. At this year’s festival, GAG had experts there all weekend to answer questions. Over 300 people participated. Bailey advised using a variety of venues and media for public outreach and education about gorse, and he recommended those efforts in Bandon should be focused on homeowners in districts, such as the ones described in Ehle’s proposal.

Bremmer concurred with Bailey on the effectiveness of this approach to communication.

Bailey remarked that building on success is a great way to “sell” the gorse removal program. There are already good examples around Bandon of how to attack gorse, including projects at the Moore Mill on Riverside Drive and in the area near Pacific View Senior Living.

Bremmer brought up another factor cited in the OSU study, “a reliable public entity to step in and help when the members of the public are not able to do this for themselves,” and Bailey indicated GAG would fill that role in Bandon. This one group would pull together all available resources.

Noting that some people are averse to the use of herbicides, Starbuck asked if alternatives had been considered, especially for homeowners with a small gorse infestation. He described his personal success spraying gorse seedlings with a vinegar and salt solution.

Bailey countered that a study in which pyroligneous acid, or wood vinegar, was used to treat gorse was only marginally successful.

**Liza Ehle, owner of Windward Gardens**

Ehle began by addressing Starbuck’s vinegar and salt method. She acknowledged that it might be successful, but pointed out that an acetic acid solution can be destructive to microbial action in soil. GAG has seen diesel and other concoctions used, all of which will work, but there are questions about how quickly they are broken down in sunlight, what effect they have on microbial action, and what residual effects they might have. With salt, for example, there may be moss buildup in the soil, because the pH has been changed. Gorse actually likes an acidic pH, which salt and vinegar encourage. Adding lime would increase the alkalinity, which gorse does not like.

Ehle recommended disking or tilling small gorse sprouts, which she said is effective and good for the soil, with no chemicals involved. Grinding is encouraged, because it leaves behind a nitrogen-rich mulch that adds humus to the soil.

Having worked for 35 years in vegetation management, Ehle has been waiting for others to recognize that Bandon has a gorse problem. When Seeley introduced her to a roomful of nearly three dozen representatives from agencies throughout southwestern Oregon, she was happy to see them coalesce around the need to address gorse, other noxious weeds, and vegetation issues such as sudden oak death.

Ehle reported that one immediate result of the gathering was that the Oregon Department of Forestry opted to fly its polygon mapping at a time of year when gorse was blooming. For the first time, the ODA could see the extent of the gorse infestation, and it became apparent that Bandon is at ground zero. The aerial mapping shows how gorse has moved up and down the coast from Bandon, and up
rivers and along highways. It moves primarily by vehicle transfer and to some extent by animals, when it catches on their fur. Equipment, such as an excavator at a logging site, can transport gorse seeds from one location to another if proper cleaning doesn’t take place. The knowledge hasn’t been available to promote equipment cleaning habits, Ehle said.

At the State level, best practices for vegetation management have been employed in a wide variety of agricultural settings, from onion fields to wheat grass to orchards to berries. But best practices have not been applied to gorse. When they are applied, with early detection and rapid response, Ehle believes positive results will follow. We now have the benefit of almost worldwide gorse education, which leads to development of best practices.

From Ehle’s perspective, enforcement is a critical tool in combatting gorse, but compliance is more important, because you want people to join the effort. Once GAG gained some momentum, it became a great team that began to accomplish things. Ehle was able to bring the Coquille Tribe, U.S. Fish & Wildlife, Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT), Shutter Creek Corrections inmate crew, Oregon State Parks, a local contractor, and others together to work in a planned, organized, cooperative four-day gorse removal project at Bullards.

Ehle would like to bring the same teamwork approach into Bandon, and that’s the essence of her proposal. When people are mobilized to work on gorse removal, the idea is for all of them to work in one area. Equipment will not be moved in and out. The cost per acre will be reduced astronomically. She explained that every time a contractor moves an excavator from one location to another, it takes four hours to wash it if it’s a small excavator and eight hours to wash a large one.

Now, ODOT has changed its contracting practices and is working in conjunction with the City of Bandon on rights of way. Coos-Curry Electric has made a commitment to maintain a gorse-free area around its power lines, and this could be a goal for Bandon Electric as well. Ehle observed that Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) is not doing such a good job.

Ehle thinks this is a good time for Bandon to deal with its gorse problem, as part of a statewide movement, in a concerted, focused effort. GAG has learned that the only way to deal with gorse is with a multi-year approach. Every property owner needs to choose and method and have a multi-year plan, and the City needs an enforcement person to check to make sure the plan is being followed.

Filling a void, Ehle has developed a districted gorse abatement plan for Bandon. It starts with education as a primary component. She has been active through OSU, ODA, the Landscape Contractors Board, and the Oregon State Contractors Board, teaching land managers—the people who do the work. She, or someone else in the same role, can teach the people who need the work done, how to be good customers; teach contractors how to do the work well; teach utility workers how to set a good example; and teach code enforcement officers how to enforce. All this can be done if there is a plan to follow. Her plan aims for a 50 percent reduction of gorse in Bandon within five years.

Ehle suggested the big tracts that have recently been worked on—Moore Mill and Coquille Point—will serve as great examples for people to see what can be done. At Coquille Point, a huge amount of acreage was cleared in the winter on difficult terrain with no erosion.
There are numerous overlapping types of land in Bandon: the Port of Bandon, the Coquille Tribe's culturally sensitive sites, Oregon State Parks—including most of the area's beaches, individually-owned city lots, City of Bandon rights of way and parks, and County land that overlaps the City's urban growth boundary. So, Ehle stressed, partnerships play a big role in the gorse removal process, and those who are already involved with GAG are looking for joint agreements to help get things done. But she contended that means Bandon needs to strengthen its noxious vegetation ordinance.

The need for workers to fill the demand for gorse removal is already here, Ehle said. She told the Commission two new companies specializing in gorse hand-clearing have sprung up in the past six months due to the amount of work that's available, each employing two or three workers. There is a person who has a tree service business who is interested in rappelling for gorse. Newer and better equipment is being purchased and employed, enabling more acres per hour to be cleared. Ehle said that means flat areas such as the Donut Hole can be done more rapidly and less expensively than five years ago.

Ehle asserted the City's previous attempt at enforcing gorse abatement met with friction from property owners and it lacked an education and outreach component. Her proposal is to break the gorse removal project into individual management plans for properties within several defined districts.

Ehle would like to see the City of Bandon set an example within its own public works. The City could employ a coordinator to contact those who have property and interests within a district, explain the gorse removal plan that is scheduled there, and request that they submit five-year individual vegetation management plans on a one-page form by a specified deadline. Those individuals, businesses, and organizations then become involved in the process and they receive resource materials and can attend neighborhood workshops, but they also become liable for results when the enforcement component takes place.

GAG has already been working with both Coos and Curry Counties, as well as at the State level regarding integrated pest management, with the prison system to arrange for work crews, with contractors to ready them for the anticipated workload when gorse removal increases, and with various agencies.

Ehle remarked that the City of Bandon is not unique in its need for a gorse abatement plan; ODOT also has to come up with one, for example. ODOT will be tackling the gorse growth between Bandon and the Coos County Solid Waste Disposal site at Beaver Hill. Part of the spread of gorse can be traced to when it has been removed and hauled to the dump. A mature gorse plant produces 18,000 seeds per year, and many seeds end up scattered along the road on the way to the dump. So, in the gorse removal process it is preferable not to move the gorse from where it has been growing. There is potential for a portable air curtain burner to be used, providing a clean incineration method for gorse disposal. GAG is also trying to obtain grant funding that may help with cost-sharing for contractors to provide grinding services. Both procedures help to keep gorse seeds from spreading.

Ehle envisions a coordinator position for the City of Bandon, which would not be part of either Public Works or Utilities. This would be an individual who would understand the scope of the gorse removal project, and be able to talk to the public, to partnering agencies, to GAG for education, and to City staff interdepartmentally.
Ehle referred to her map of proposed gorse abatement districts as the key to understanding her ordinance amendment proposal. She also stressed the importance of the outreach and education examples she presented for the proposed South Jetty and Old Town districts. Her document explains the reasoning for beginning with the South Jetty area. The risk of fire, fanned by strong north winds in the summer, the concentrated population of many residents who have limited mobility at Pacific View Senior Living, the sensitive Coquille Indian archaeological sites, the number of vacation rentals and absentee owners, and the difficult terrain with steep slopes—all contributed to Ehle's conclusion that this part of Bandon, with its significant challenges, should be prioritized as the starting point for the City's gorse removal effort.

The South Jetty area was depicted by Ehle as a place where a varied group of private and public property owners and government agencies can focus their resources and showcase the capabilities of local gorse abatement contractors at a highly visible location. When work is completed in this district, work will begin in the next district, with follow-up measures continuing in the South Jetty sector. This rotating process mimics a successful routine established by Coos-Curry Electric, which has made a $2 million-per-year vegetation management commitment, covering 1,200 linear miles of power lines by working on the length of one line per year in a five-year cycle.

The outreach and education process for South Jetty residents, as described by Ehle, would begin with advising them of the threat posed by a gorse fire due to only one road for ingress and egress, many vacationers who might be hard to contact in an emergency, and a large number of elders with limited mobility. Property owners would then receive information on making their individual plans and they would attend workshops in small groups with others in the same geographic area with similar gorse issues. Ehle believes the variety of individual abatement plans in this initial phase, and their success or failure, would contribute to a growing database of knowledge to improve future efforts.

Ehle foresees multiple contractors matching their specialized machinery to specific removal tasks in the South Jetty area, with enough work to go around. With a coordinated, structured approach, she imagines the Jetty district could be cleared in one week.

Ehle urged the Commissioners to visit GAG's demonstration project, which is at the end of year one of a two-year cycle. Located next to Highway 101 at the south end of Bandon, the project is spread over City of Bandon right of way, bordering private property, next to ODOT right of way, and near the airport, which itself is completely covered with gorse. The project features well-labeled plots, with each plot testing a different abatement methodology, and it is easy to take a driving tour of the project on a gravel lane that parallels the highway.

Ehle told the Commissioners she rewrote the City's ordinance in a way that strengthens it and puts the onus on the ODA for its A and B list species, allowing the City to tackle problems with other invasive vegetation, such as English ivy, Japanese knotweed, and Scotch broom, at the same time as gorse is being removed. These pests can be seen most frequently in riparian zones, waterways, roadways, and utilities rights of way. Ehle pointed out that in addition to the threat of fire, there is valuable developable, agricultural, and recreational land being lost due to the encroachment of noxious vegetation.

Bringing the Commissioners' attention back to the GAG website, Ehle touted the resources available there, many in a form that can be printed and distributed in packets. The website also hosts videos and PowerPoint presentations that serve as educational tools.
Ehle observed that unsubstantiated fears have contributed to some of the deficiencies in Bandon’s current noxious weed ordinance. She asserted that documentation on GAG’s website about successful gorse removal projects on steep terrain should allay concerns about erosion.

Ehle is hopeful that the City of Bandon will tap into the resources and knowledge available through GAG and set an example in partnership with Coos County. Curry County is currently ahead of Coos in the fight against gorse, with an aggressive attack on its growth in watersheds. Bandon has its share of overwhelmed watersheds, too.

Tiffany recounted that when her family moved to Bandon in the early 1960’s, as they drove into town there was an area that was still smoking from a gorse fire. That was in the same area where GAG’s demonstration project is currently being conducted. Ehle commented that fire is not an effective tool for eradicating gorse, because gorse loves a good fire.

Knowing that the City of Bandon is not financially wealthy, yet excited about the program and wanting to get onboard, Tiffany asked if grants might be available to help the City. Ehle responded that if there is a plan, there will be money. She emphasized the value of developing a plan and getting someone to manage it, because the State of Oregon is concerned about invasive weed species and is making money available for abatement projects. She also pointed out that the City rights of way are its responsibility, and it should have utilities funds available for line clearing but is currently spending less than other entities. The City also has potential partners within its electric grid, such as cranberry bog owners, who might be willing to work cooperatively at gorse abatement.

Ehle asserted that the City of Bandon, by not having a coordinated, planned program for noxious weed removal, has taken the least efficient, most expensive approach possible. She feels the City would need a coordinator with a vision to make sure any funds are spent wisely. In her proposal, Ehle recommends a .75 FTE (full time equivalent) coordinator position, with .25 funding coming from Public Works, .25 from Electric, and .25 from Parks and Recreation. Enforcement would be handled with .25 from the City’s Code Enforcement Officer. Altogether, this constitutes a full-time position in noxious weed management. The coordinator would organize and manage staff from the various departments to provide the necessary manpower and equipment to take on the City’s share of vegetation management.

According to Ehle, absentee owners, vacation rental operators, and third-party owners (such as trusts) will pose the greatest challenge in establishing management plans and following them. Because some property owners may have limited financial resources, Ehle suggested the City could establish a fund to help them, possibly from SDCs (System Development Charges) or TLT (Transient Lodging Tax) money, as has been done in Port Orford.

Lewis asked Ehle if the City’s goal is to abate or eradicate gorse. She replied that abatement is the goal at this point. Lewis stated his concern that her proposed ordinance revision, while eliminating numerous existing exceptions for noxious vegetation, still allows gorse to grow up to twelve inches. They discussed whether gorse can still produce seeds if it has been mowed back to that height, and they agreed that it could. Ehle pointed out language in her proposal that would require property owners to limit the spread of invasive species on ODA’s A and B lists. She added that mowing gorse regularly can reduce the amount of seeds it will produce.
Lewis contended that eradication should be the long-term objective.

Bailey interjected that one gorse flower equals five seeds. Seeley added that once the seeds are in the ground, they last 75 years. Ehle noted that disking is effective in forcing seeds to become active and disking three or four times helps to clear out a field of gorse.

Ehle stressed that Bandon will have the force of law behind a gorse removal program, because the State of Oregon mandates abatement of invasive species that are on the ODA A and B lists and the State has oversight over local efforts. New weeds and pathogens are constantly challenging agriculture in the State, including forestry and cranberry and blueberry production in Coos County.

**Ralph Martino, 87509 Oberman Lane, Bandon, OR 97411**

As a homeowner, Martino said he would feel uncomfortable having a mandate placed on him to deal with gorse on his property, considering the cost to hire a contractor. He owns about five acres, half of which is covered with gorse, which he has been tackling since moving there fourteen years ago.

Ehle suggested the GAG education program and its cost-sharing program might benefit Martino. Kimes told Martino he is exactly the target audience Ehle is talking about.

Mawson expressed appreciation to Bailey, Seeley, and Ehle for their contribution to the Commission’s discussion about gorse. He observed that the scope of the gorse removal effort has greatly ramped up over the last few years, and there are ways for the City to become involved in that campaign. It will require an investment from the City, but not at the level that GAG brings to the table. Bandon can be a partner and a part of something much bigger. Mawson said the Commission’s task is to look at the current ordinance and cut the gorse exceptions down or cut them out. Then, as it moves forward to address the gorse invasion, the City will benefit from the research and resources already available through GAG. He promoted the next GAG meeting, which will be held in the City Council Chambers on April 23 from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon.

Kimes, Mawson, and Lewis indicated that the gorse issue will be revisited at the next Planning Commission meeting. Lewis said there will be a specific draft of an ordinance amendment ready for discussion at that time, so the Commission will be able to make a recommendation to the Council.

Bremmer asked if the Commissioners would have a passive role, limited to reviewing the wording presented to them, or if they would also be contributing their own ideas and language. Mawson responded that this is not a quasi-judicial action, so the Commissioners can offer input at any time in the process.

Bremmer also wanted to know if money for the proposed coordinator position would be included in the City budget, and Mawson stated he was unable to say at this time. She also asked if money is budgeted for the City’s utilities to perform gorse removal, and Mawson affirmed that Bandon Electric has money in its annual budget for right of way clearing. Additionally, the City has been working cooperatively with ODOT in maintaining rights of way. Such partnerships help the City make its money go farther.

Although Bandon Electric does have some above-ground power lines to maintain as far south as Langlois, Mawson pointed out that within Bandon’s city limits the vast majority of electric lines are underground. So most right of way clearing is done by Public Works.
Bremmer observed that what is being proposed is a big project, and she expressed her concern that a great plan might be developed “based on a fantasy revenue stream” that the City doesn’t have at the moment. She acknowledged that addressing the gorse problem is necessary, it is almost at an emergency level, and it also will be expensive. She would like to have a ballpark estimate of potential costs for the project.

Mawson responded that an estimate could be developed. But the City is two weeks away from taking the budget to the budget committee, and because development of an ordinance amendment will take longer than that, nothing regarding a gorse removal coordinator or specific funds for gorse removal will be included in the budget. On the other hand, the budget can be revisited at any time during the year.

Ehle asked Mawson if urban renewal funds could be available for some parts of the City. Mawson thought they could be used only if they applied to an infrastructure improvement project—such as a sidewalk or a bike trail—where removing gorse was a necessary part of that project. Otherwise, gorse removal would be considered a maintenance activity, and not eligible for urban renewal money.

Kimes restated the Commission’s advisory role in amending the ordinance, and Lewis stated his expectation that he and Mawson would use the input from Bailey and Ehle to formulate a draft amended code section on noxious vegetation to bring before the Commission for further discussion, with the goal being to develop a comprehensive gorse removal plan.

Kimes recalled that there was once a shop across from Pacific High School that sold gorse starter plants. Otherwise, he declared it would be hard to find anyone who is a fan of gorse. Lewis remarked that it’s too bad there isn’t a useful purpose for gorse, such as smoking it.

Ehle segued from the mention of smoke to make note of the successful use of air curtain burners to cut down on the need to transport gorse from a site where it has been removed. From having worked in the Willamette Valley, Lewis shared his own awareness of how the grass seed industry experimented with use of mobile curtain burners to sterilize the soil in large tracts of land.

Ehle explained that the combination of curtain burners and grinding would lower the cost of gorse abatement, because the need to transport would be eliminated. Both grinding and leaving ash behind will be beneficial.

Jurkowski asked if there is any difference in fire risk between six-inch-tall and twelve-inch-tall plants. Ehle replied that although gorse is an evergreen legume, it does shed dry leaves that form a layer of duff below mature plants. If the duff is ignited, it can smolder and be difficult to extinguish, because fire will travel through the sprawling gorse root system. Shorter gorse plants can spread fire to neighboring dry grass, but Ehle said they don’t contribute the amount of fuel that taller plants can, and they aren’t able to hide fire in a layer of duff and roots.

According to Ehle, major gorse fires in Bandon’s past were primarily spread by wind-blown embers falling on fuel-rich stands of mature gorse. She advised that gorse abatement on the north end of Bandon is especially critical, because most of the town is downwind from there. The Donut Hole, with its ten-to-fifteen-foot-tall gorse poses a similar problem. Ehle described it as “a great incendiary feeder, right in the middle of town.”
7.0 COMMISSIONERS’ COMMENTS

Kimes asked the Commissioners for final comments, and Fisher responded that he liked the education and individual plan components of Ehle’s proposal. He spoke of meeting a couple that is building a house in Bandon, where gorse is growing down the bluff. They came to check on their new house and were confronted by an enforcement officer giving them ten days to get the gorse under control or be fined. These new Bandon residents hadn’t received any education about gorse and had no understanding about what needed to be done, but they were threatened with a fine. Fisher told Ehle she was right on target in calling for education and outreach first.

Jurkowski attended a GAG meeting in January and plans to attend the April meeting. She commended the organization and Ehle for doing work that is vital for the Bandon area.

Ehle urged the Commissioners to look at the amount of yellow that reflects flowering gorse on a map of the Bandon area, and consider how much of that land could be cleared of gorse and put back to work for workforce housing, recreational trails, cranberry farms, reforestation, or revegetation with new species that will shade gorse out. From a planning standpoint, she sees there is a lot of land that can be reclaimed and become useful. Gorse comes in where land is fallow, she observed.

Slothower asserted that hiring a coordinator would be essential to making this project work, someone who can pull everything together for the City and direct the effort. Ehle interjected that a strong ordinance will help that person.

Bremmer agreed with Fisher’s and Slothower’s observations, stating the enforcement approach of threatening to take people to court does not create an atmosphere that welcomes people to come to Bandon to live. She stressed the person who fills the coordinator position must have the skill set and the desire to make the program work. Ehle stated representatives from GAG, who have varied backgrounds and areas of expertise, would be happy to sit in on interviews with prospective candidates. She provided some suggested qualifications for a coordinator at the end of her written proposal.

Lewis concluded the comments with a recollection of his first appearance before the City Council during his previous time as Bandon’s Planning Director. He was there to address a land use action, but the mayor asked him what he was going to do about gorse. At the time, he had no idea what gorse was. Jokingly, Lewis guessed he must be the responsible party for the gorse problem, because he didn’t do anything about it then.

8.0 ADJOURN THE REGULAR MEETING

Kimes adjourned the meeting at 8:55 p.m.