

Down Town: Community Survey
By Hugh McIsaac, Mayor and Chair,
Community Involvement Committee

Thirteen years ago on a rainy day similar to those we experienced this January, we made a trip down the Oregon Coast to find "...the best community on the Oregon Coast".

We began in Astoria and ended in Depoe Bay. Along the way we stopped at Gearhart, Cannon Beach, Oceanside, and Pacific City and all the towns in between.

The astounding view from Neahkahnie Head was our first introduction to Manzanita.

What cemented our decision about Manzanita as the best community on the Oregon North Coast was the Manzanita News and Espresso and finding on sale the Foreign Affairs Quarterly, along with a number of other interesting journals. We knew then Manzanita had to be a very different, special kind of place. Not only was it a community surrounded by natural beauty, but it was also a community consisting of interesting and thoughtful citizens who cared about the community as well as the world.

The fact the library had been built by volunteers and had such an unique design added to this first impression.

We appreciated two grocery stores, the Manzanita Deli and Fresh Foods, were located in the small, central core of this picturesque, quiet town where we could walk to buy groceries and other amenities.

The town did not have a hyper developed central core and seemed to serve the needs of the community with a quiet, eclectic ambience: No fast food outlets, no chain stores, just community owned and operated businesses mixed with residential housing.

The results of the Community Survey regarding our downtown supports our impressions of Manzanita. Here are some representative perceptions from the 327 responses received regarding our downtown.

"Capitalize on the good job some merchants have done: Coast Cabins, Syzygy, Overboard, and the Bank of Astoria with off street parking in the back" Some wanted "...more family style restaurants."

They liked the "...laid back family friendly atmosphere" and the "...entrepreneurial spirit balanced with civic responsibility" reflected by the street.

There was a general consensus the services provided should be those needed by those who live and visit the community and that the growth should be limited.

The respondents also liked the mix of businesses but many expressed a need for more year around professional services, such as a dentist, optometrist, and other services.

While most liked the upgrading of Laneda, a few did not like the bump-outs or the rolled curbs.

Several wanted more community events year around - more lectures, music festivals, plays and arts and book sales, community meetings around regional issues.

The fact Laneda ran perpendicular to Highway 101 and was short, ending at the beach was appreciated by many, who also appreciated 101 did not run through the town.

"Maintain the village atmosphere" was a consistent theme.

The Manzanita Library was appreciated by many as a place to convene and read. However, some felt the hours needed to be expanded.

“Parking was a non-issue for some, others wanted more off-street parking and better signage. One suggested a three story parking garage to solve it.””

There was a recognition of the importance of commercial activity to ensure basic services year round

A suggestion was to create a public plaza(s) or town square, with fountains, grass, maybe food kiosks; make more small simple green spaces (e.g. next to Pine Grove) dedicate a lot or two in town; provide benches & public art; people can read, discuss, commune, listen to music

need: organize and train summer workers for fully staffed amenities

provide more walkways and bicycle parking areas in central district; quote: want it “healthy and safe for families to promote walking and bicycling”; also want public transportation

the “downtown feel”: some liked the feeling now, not touristy or cutesy; some thought it was “stagnant”

merchants who build buildings that fit in with Manzanita’s character should be rewarded; those who remodel old structures keeping the historical details are to be commended.

need: add trash receptacles and bathroom facilities at West end of Laneda, near the beach, and on Nehalem Rd.

want to plant trees, add flower boxes, decorate the concrete “bumpouts”

setup a capital improvement fund for future community development; City purchase property for public use.

some concerns were expressed about restaurants closing, decline cart sales of food or novelties in the future

Several expressed a need to control growth and one stated “...revert to the unpretentious little community it was.”

Several expressed a need to develop the Hoffman Center and co-ordinate this development with the Library and to preserve the native flora.

A need for Design Review to prevent incompatible development on Laneda and to provide transparency was mentioned by some respondents. "building permits should include a 'charm' factor"

One consistent theme was the downtown served more than just Manzanita. It served the larger community and was valued by those residents who live outside the City.

Parking was an issue for some and for others a non-issue. Those who lived on the side streets were concerned about parking during peak period like The Fourth of July.

One person described the Fourth of July parade as “Norman Rockwell comes to Manzanita”. This community event was the single, most appreciated one.

Parking was a non-issue for some, others wanted more off-street parking and better signage. One suggested a three story parking garage to solve it. Other comments were:

want: no “national chains”

recognize the importance of commercial activity to ensure basic services year round
want a public plaza(s) or town square, with fountains, grass, maybe food kiosks
make more small simple green spaces (e.g. next to Pine Grove)
dedicate a lot or two in town; provide benches & public art; people can read, discuss, commune, listen to music

provide more walkways and bicycle parking areas in central district; quote: want it

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In summary, our “downtown” is more than a commercial core. It is the soul of the city. It determines the character of our town.

For those who wish to preserve the small village atmosphere in Manzanita that attracted us to this community, it is essential we become vigilant and involved.

A complete summary of the survey is available on the web through the link listed below:

<http://spindrift-inn.com/ManzSurvey.pdf>