

Cityscope



Ocean Shores Mayor
Crystal Dingler

Q&A

Sandstorm

Having weathered the recession, Ocean Shores Mayor Crystal Dingler is girding her community for another maelstrom: rising seas stealing the coastal city's namesake strand.

INTERVIEW BY KIRSTEN DOBROTH

What brought you to Ocean Shores?

My husband was in the service, so we traveled a lot for at least 20 years and then settled in Kenmore. When we retired, we put all of our things in storage and drove around in our RV for two years, ending up here in Ocean Shores. We just thought it would be a wonderful place to live, and we moved here 14 years ago.

What prompted you to start a post-retirement career in local government?

I got involved with the library around the time the recession

hit—they were going to close it, and we fought really hard to keep it open. And when there was an opening on the city council, I applied and was named to it.... I felt like I could do a good job as mayor, so I ran for office in 2011.

But your first term was not easy.

No; 2011 was the depths of the recession for us: we were down to our last \$100,000 in the general fund, we had enormous debt, and we had to lay off a lot of people. It was a really tough time, but we weathered the storm, and we're going strong now.

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Speaking of storms: Ocean Shores has had its fair share of shoreline troubles. What role has weather played in that?

We had significant El Niño winter storms causing erosion in the late '90s, and the city put in geotubes: big cloth bladders filled with sand that are placed against the coastline to hold things together. The Army Corps of Engineers had also come in and done some work on our North Jetty, and that seemed to solve the problem.

But not for long ...

In 2010 we had our first significant erosion again, and we experienced our first really deep erosion during the winter of 2015-16. We were having low-pressure storms, which means that the ocean is higher, so it wasn't unusual to have 25 feet of water coming in—the force of that much water crashing in was a really big deal.

You declared a state of emergency in response to that winter storm cycle.

Yes, the bottom geotube split, and then the one above it broke as well. These tremendous storms were just sucking out sand. Our highest point is only at 30 feet above sea level, so we were very concerned that a breach would allow seawater to come into town.

How do you fix something like that?

We tried to resolve the issue using sand and then geotubes, but eventually the [US Army] Corps of Engineers came and put in rock—it was really the last resort. You don't want to armor the shoreline if you can do something else, but we really didn't have any other



Mayor Dingler and an anti-erosion rock wall flanked by geotubes in Ocean Shores

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choice, and that made a huge difference. The Corps's action really saved us.

Despite those challenges, development continues at a blistering pace.

We are still growing really fast—we had 150 housing starts last year—but people who are moving here understand the risks, from both tsunamis and rising sea levels. Some scientific studies have shown that we will not have as much sea level rise here in the central coast as in other places, but this year we applied to FEMA for a vertical evacuation tower (intended for tsunamis, but effective for flooding as well), which would be built near the elementary school. Right

now, we're in the process of hiring a second city planner, so we think that will make a difference in disaster management planning as well.

How else is the city preparing itself?

Educating ourselves is key: learning from those who understand the dynamics of our shorelines. We have worked closely with the Port of Grays Harbor, US Representative Derek Kilmer's office, the Corps, the state's Emergency Management Division and Department of Ecology, and regional academic and government experts. Personally, I also joined the Surfrider Foundation's Leadership Academy and was appoint-

ed by the governor to the Washington Coastal Marine Advisory Council. The contacts and learning points are invaluable as we navigate the future.

Where do you look for inspiration as a local leader preparing for climate change?

We live very close to Quinalt Nation, and we have strong ties to them. One of the things I've admired about the Quinalt over the years is that they are looking a hundred years or more ahead. I think that's really the sort of planning we need to undertake in order to understand the long-term effects of the things we do and don't do.

BY THE NUMBERS

Ocean Shores

Cityvision looks at how Ocean Shores manages the vagaries of life along the coast.

POPULATION

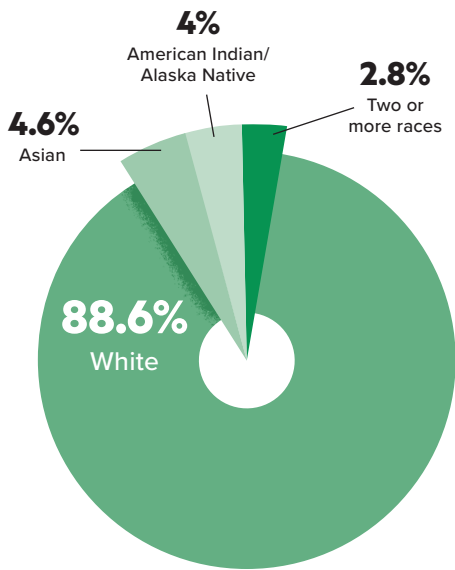
POPULATION DATA FROM THE 2010 US CENSUS, UNLESS OTHERWISE INDICATED



2018 SOURCE: WA OFM

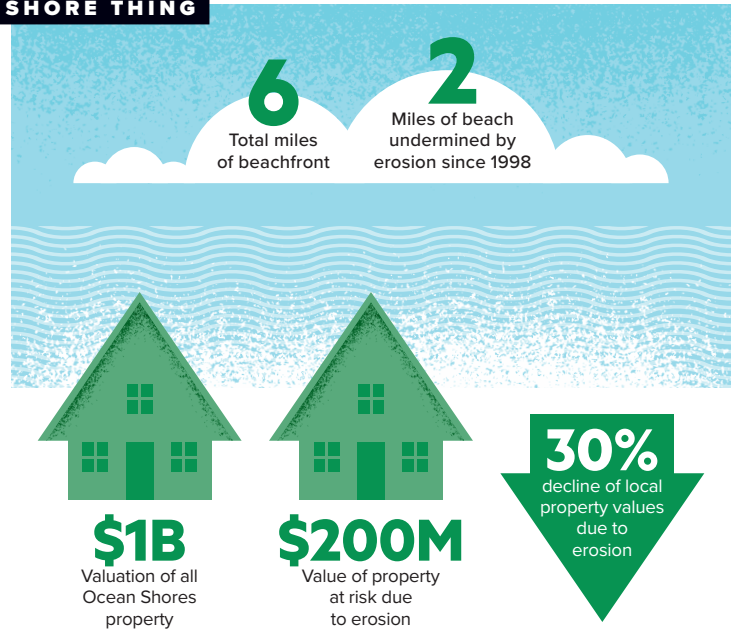


DEMOGRAPHICS



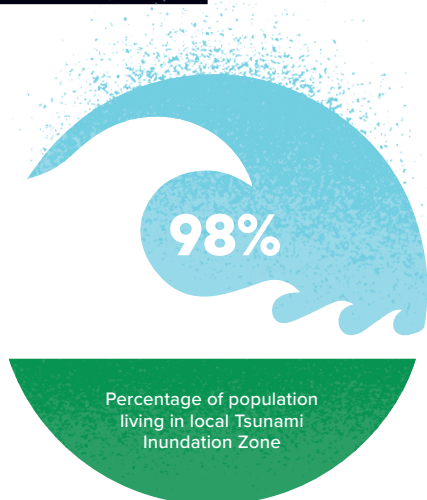
SOURCE: US CENSUS BUREAU

SHORE THING



SOURCE: GRAYS HARBOR RESILIENCE COALITION

WAVE DYNAMICS



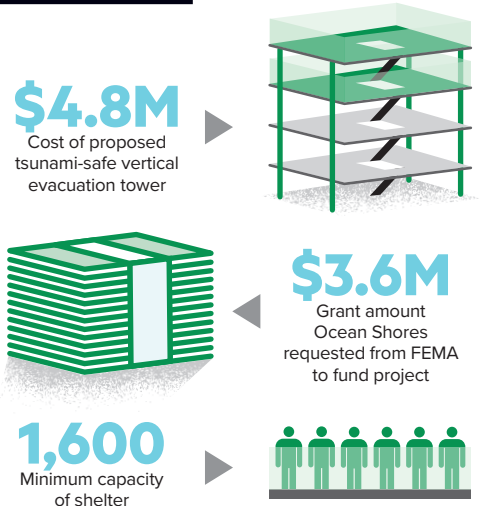
7.5 Square miles of developed land within that zone

300 Number of years since last tsunami-generating earthquake

140-1,000 Historical frequency those earthquakes occur, in years

SOURCE: WASHINGTON MILITARY DEPARTMENT EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT DIVISION

GREAT ESCAPE



SOURCE: CITY OF OCEAN SHORES