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Seaside council asked to return pay

By KELLY NIX

THE SEASIDE City Council's decision to give itself a significant pay raise last year violated state law, according to an attorney, who recommended that councilmembers repeal the increase, reduce their pay by \$2,000 each per month, and repay from their own pockets the amount they were overpaid.

On May 1, 2025, the five-member city council passed an ordinance to increase its stipend from \$400 per month — an amount set in 1986 — to \$2,400 per month, arguing that the cost of living has increased more than 300%, the complexity of governance has grown “significantly,” and preparing for meetings is more involved now than it was then.

However, on Thursday night, at the behest of city manager Greg McDaniel, the council was set to consider an emergency ordinance to repeal last year's raise due to two major errors.

The city's first mistake was paying the council \$2,400 per month, which is more than allowed under California law. The city calculated council pay based on a formula set by Government Code Section 36516, which permits increases in monthly

compensation equal to 5% for each calendar year from the date of the last salary adjustment in effect when the ordinance is enacted.

But Seaside incorrectly compounded the annual increases, so each year — from 1986 through 2024 — was increased based on the prior year's amount. That action, the city said, violates a 2006 state Attorney General opinion.

“Only the currently received salary amount is to be part of the calculations,” according to the 2006 decision. “To make separate calculations for each intervening year since the date of the last salary increase would base the calculations on salaries that were not received by the city council members.”

Paying back

In June, a resident notified Seaside about the errors in the 2025 ordinance, which led the city to hire Carmel attorney Brian Pierik to review it and make recommendations.

The council was set Thursday to repeal the \$2,400 monthly pay and return compensation to the previous amount of \$400.

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PAY

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If councilmembers do that, they will also be asked to consider giving themselves a pay raise using the correct calculation, which the city said amounts to \$1,180 per month.

‘Made whole’

Seaside’s second mistake is that the council raise commenced in June 2025 but should not have started until after one or more members of the council begin a new term following the Nov. 3, election and are sworn into office — most likely in December. The council was also being asked Thursday to consider starting any pay increase only after the swearing-in process.

Councilmembers will be asked to repay the amount they were unlawfully paid during the 13-month period from June 2025 through June 2026, McDaniel told The Pine Cone Monday.

“The staff recommendation contemplates that the city will be made whole for the overpayment of compensation,” McDaniel said. “The purpose of retaining an independent certified public accountant or other qualified professional is to calculate the final repayment amounts, evaluate payroll and tax implications, determine any applicable interest calculations, and recommend an appropriate repayment process for council consideration.”

Righting wrongs

Asked who was responsible for the errors, McDaniel said, “The city is focused on correcting the issue rather than assigning blame.”

In a July 12 letter to the Seaside City Council, former Pacific Grove City Councilman Luke Coletti commended the city for admitting to the mistakes and taking steps to correct them. He was a proponent of a referendum that led to Measure C, which in June asked Pacific Grove voters to dramatically increase the city council’s pay. Taxpayers soundly defeated the measure.

Seaside’s experience, “much like Pacific Grove’s,” Coletti said, “demonstrates the inherent conflict of interest that arises when elected officials set their own compensation. That conflict can lead to legal missteps and a failed process. Requiring voter approval provides the public oversight and transparency needed to prevent this kind of legal embarrassment.”



SOPHIE GRUWELL

My Soulmate and Life Companion
2013 2026

On Christmas Eve, Dec. 24, 2020, my darling soulmate and companion came to live with me.

Our chance meeting was, I believe, written in the heavens. From the very beginning, I felt that my beloved mother, Lucy Gruwell, and my lifelong mentor and best friend, Jonna Ball, had conspired in heaven to bring my life companion and soulmate, Sophie, into my life.

One Saturday morning, while walking with my dear friend Bonnie Endsley Pieper, I noticed a beautiful little golden dog walking toward us. Coincidentally, just one week earlier, I had awakened saying out loud, “I’ve got to get a dog!” Exactly one week later, this predestined meeting took place.



As Sophie and her owner, Linda Downum, approached us on the sidewalk, I said, “Hello. I was watching you walk down the street and just told my friend, ‘Look, Bonnie, there’s the perfect dog—the perfect size, the perfect color. That’s exactly the kind of dog I want.’ What kind of dog is she?”

Linda replied, “She’s a dachshund-beagle mix, and her name is Sophie.”

We talked for a while, and I told her, “I’m looking for a dog right now, and I hope I can find one just like her.”

Then Linda surprised me by asking, “Do you want her?”

I replied, “Do I want your dog?”

Linda explained that she had adopted Sophie from the SPCA in Lodi when she was a 7-month-old puppy and had given her to her father so he would have a loving companion. He was in his mid-80s and adored Sophie. For seven years, he cared for and loved her until his passing.

Because Sophie had been her father’s dog, Linda wanted to find her a loving new home. The rest, as they say, is history.

Sophie came to live with me on Christmas Eve 2020, and my life was changed forever. I will always be grateful for everything she gave me and for every moment we shared together.

My darling Sophie gave me the happiest, most joy-filled five and a half years any man could hope for.

She and I shared a deeply loving, profound, and life-changing bond. She only had eyes for me, and she let me know it every moment of every day.

That is what I will miss the most.

My friend Jenefee sent me a beautiful quote about dogs by Erica Jong:

“DOGS COME INTO OUR LIVES TO TEACH US ABOUT LOVE AND LOYALTY. THEY DEPART TO TEACH US ABOUT LOSS. A NEW DOG NEVER REPLACES AN OLD DOG; IT MERELY EXPANDS THE HEART. IF YOU HAVE LOVED MANY DOGS, YOUR HEART IS VERY BIG.”

Sophie fulfilled that mission perfectly. She taught me life’s three greatest lessons:

LOVE. LOYALTY. LOSS.

My dear baby girl, Sophie, you taught me all three of these precious and golden keys to life.

I love you. I will miss you. I will forever hold you in my heart.

Please know that your Daddy loves you and will think of you every day until we meet again in heaven with Mom and Jonna.

A Celebration of Life honoring Sophie’s love and devotion will be announced at a later date.

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