

Sales tax might help fund convention center expansion

Hike in lodging taxes also proposed

By **NANCY MCCARTHY**
The Daily Astorian

SEASIDE — A local sales tax could be imposed on all businesses throughout Seaside to help pay for a proposed expansion of the Seaside Civic and Convention Center and a new parking structure.

The sales tax also would come with a bump in local lodging taxes, said Russ Vandenberg, general manager of the convention center. Vandenberg spoke to the Seaside Chamber of Commerce at its

weekly meeting Friday.

Vandenberg said the proposal will come before the Seaside City Council this year. The council would have the final say on the expansion and the financing scheme; it will not be subject to a public vote.

A proposed \$25 million convention center expansion has been in the works for at least six years and has undergone studies by three consulting firms. The tentative design, however, would eliminate 42 parking spaces, which could be restored by construction of a parking structure, adding \$6 million to the bill, Vandenberg said.

It would cost \$200,000 a month for 30 years to pay off

the debt, he said.

C.H. Johnson Consulting, which did the latest study, suggested three financing options. The first suggestion was to work with the cities of Cannon Beach and Astoria to increase their lodging taxes and contribute the proceeds to the convention center. But, Vandenberg said, "I feel, realistically, that's not going to happen."

The second option was to raise the city's 8 percent lodging tax by 6 percent. That would bring in \$2.6 million a year, about the amount needed annually. Another 1 percent in lodging taxes goes to the state.

In comparison, Vandenberg noted, Portland has a 13 percent lodging tax.

The third option was to create a 2.75 percent "business improvement district" tax that would be applied to all retail sales — including food stores and restaurants — throughout Seaside and combine it with an increased lodging tax that could reach to 5 percent. The actual figures have not been determined yet, Vandenberg said.

"We haven't come up with a formula," he added. "We have to look at all the options. But everything we do comes with a price tag."

Within 10 years the city could realize a 50 percent increase in economic development and event days, Vandenberg added. That would generate another \$20 million

to the \$44 million annual economic impact the city already experiences from the convention center.

The expansion would allow the convention center to bring groups of 500 to 600 to town. It currently is limited to conventions of 200 or fewer people. Within a 300-mile radius of Seaside there are "hundreds" of larger groups that have been unable to use the center, Vandenberg said.

When asked in a survey if they would come to Seaside, the "overwhelming response was yes," he said. "There's a very strong indication that groups would come to Seaside."

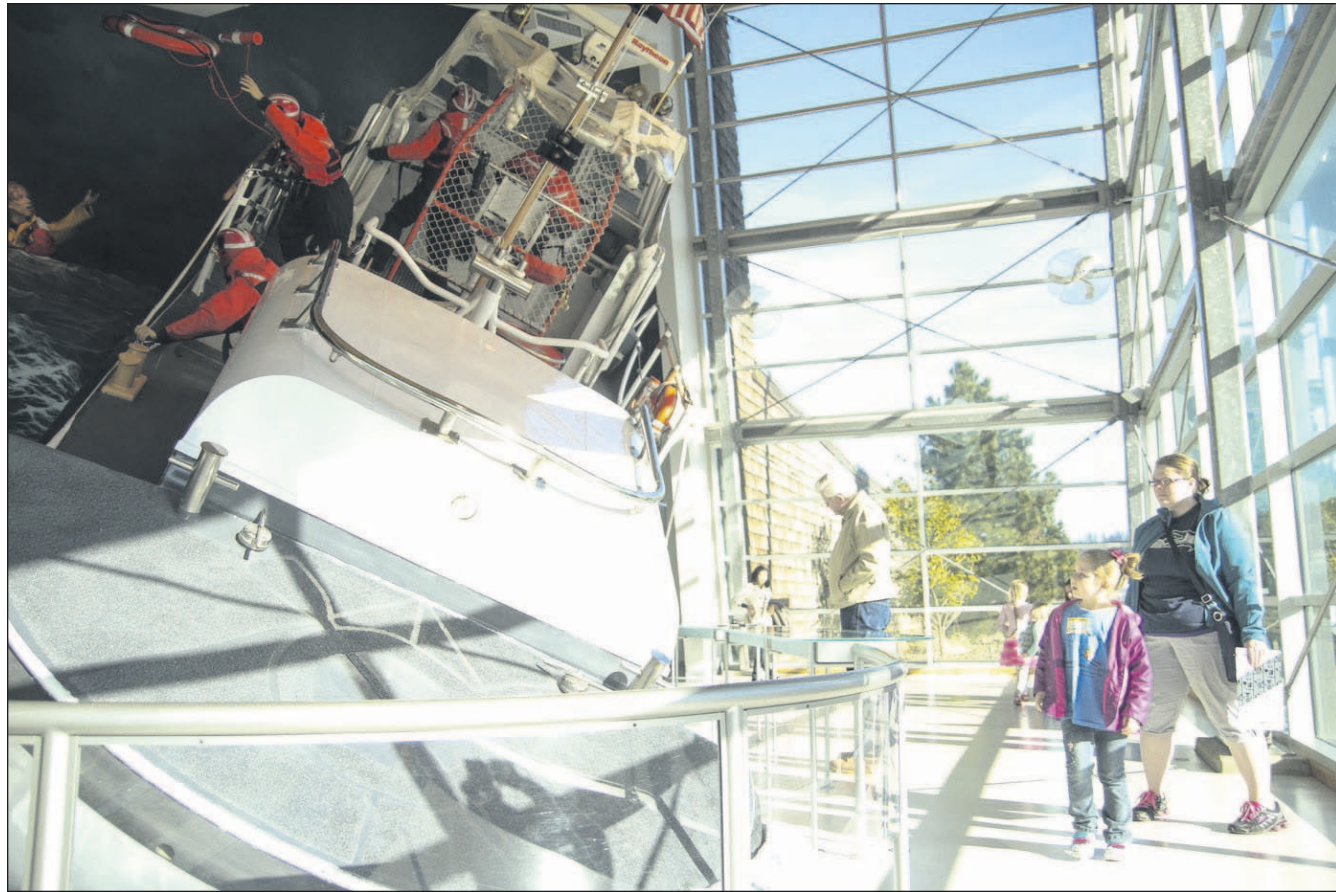
To accommodate the visitors, Seaside already has 600

"convention quality" rooms within walking distance, according to Vandenberg. Some hotels would have to undergo some upgrades if they wanted to compete, he added.

Questions to Vandenberg focused on what would prevent people from finding less costly lodging elsewhere or going to another town to shop if the sales tax was adopted.

"I think you might be shooting the goose that's laying the golden egg," one person told Vandenberg.

If the City Council approves the expansion and funding, the architectural designs would be finalized in 2016 and construction could begin in 2017, Vandenberg said.



JOSHUA BESSEX — The Daily Astorian

Brittany, right, and Zoey Thorne tour the Columbia River Maritime Museum during an Oregon Connections Academy-sponsored trip Friday.

Oregon Connections charter students visit Astoria museum

Field trip highlights National School Choice Week

By **EDWARD STRATTON**
The Daily Astorian

Elliana Fladstol, a 17-year-old high school junior, helped her mother, Teri, greet and register families on Field Trip Friday at the Columbia River Maritime Museum. The students and their families came from Astoria, the Portland metro area and, in the Fladstols' case, Tillamook.

Oregon Connections Academy, the state's largest public online charter school, organized a field trip that brought 18 students to Astoria on the tail end of National School Choice Week, which highlights public, charter, magnet, private and homeschooling options.

Connections Academy is associated with Scio School District in Linn County, and includes about 3,700 students statewide and 60 in Clatsop County. Parents at the academy's field trip had varying reasons for choosing it.

"I always wanted to be a stay-at-home mom," said Teri Fladstol, adding that she was certified by her local community college when the family lived in Washington. "Part of it was staying at home, being with the kids and educating them."

After hearing critiques about the limitations of public schooling from relatives who were teachers and aides, said Fladstol, she decided she could teach Elliana and her younger brother, a freshman. Elliana has been enrolled in Connections Academy since seventh grade.

Elliana said she logs on to Connections Academy in the morning to check for emails, assignments, lessons and grades. Then she completes her lessons for the day online. "It's all pretty simple from that standpoint," she said.

Although she isn't in a physical school, Elliana has



JOSHUA BESSEX — The Daily Astorian

Elinora Cannon, left, 2, and Elijah Cannon, right, 11, from Oregon Connections Academy listen in at the "Fishermen Tell Their Stories" exhibit during a visit to the Columbia River Maritime Museum Friday.

her own brand of physical education, often jogging on a treadmill at home. She socializes with peers through programs like 4-H and her church. "It's not like I'm at home all the time and separated from the world."

The Fladstols said they meet teachers at open houses and during field trips around the state. Her children are able to go through

entire textbooks in-depth with homeschooling, Teri Fladstol said, something she'd heard was uncommon in public school.

Elliana's father is a mechanical engineer from a family of mathematicians, Fladstol said, so math has never been an issue.

School issues

Brenda Teague said it

was issues with administrators at individual schools that led her to take son Josef Teague, 10, out of John Jacob Astor Elementary School as a first-grader, and later Lewis and Clark Elementary as a fifth-grader. Josef, who said he prefers a traditional school but is alright with Connections Academy, will leave homeschooling again next year to attend Astoria Middle School.

"After middle school age, the kids are treated less like they're the teachers' wards, and more like they're people," said Brenda Teague.

Josef said he socializes with neighborhood friends and those he's made at school. He works out with his brother, a student at Astoria High School, in the weight room.

"He's learning stuff that his older brother was learning in seventh grade," said Brenda Teague, adding that success in homeschooling depends on the child.

Suspicious pipe closes the Astoria Column

By **KYLE SPURR**
By The Daily Astorian

Astoria Police closed the Astoria Column Sunday morning to investigate a suspicious item, appearing to be a potential pipe bomb.

By noon, the Oregon State Police Explosives Unit removed the item and deemed it not likely explosive.

An Astoria Column caretaker reported the suspicious item to the police at 9:46 a.m. Sunday.

Police arrived and found a large diameter pipe that was at least partially filled with concrete.

As a precaution, Astoria Police Chief Brad Johnston said, the responding officers asked the few people at the column to leave and closed the park to the public.

The officers took pictures of the item and sent the pictures to the Oregon State Police Explo-

sives Unit for consultation. They also conferred with the Astoria Parks and Recreation Director Angela Cosby, who checked with her staff to see if they recognized the item.

Oregon State Police Explosives Unit determined the device was unlikely to be explosive in nature. The item was moved remotely then taken from the area.

The park was reopened to the public just before noon.

Johnston said his department appreciates the cooperation of those who were inconvenienced by the closure.

"These cases are frequently best addressed with an abundance of caution," Johnston said. "Getting it wrong in the more cautious direction has very little downside. Getting it wrong on the more optimistic direction has huge downsides."

American Cancer Society seeks volunteer drivers

An estimated 22,410 Oregon residents will learn that they have cancer this year. The American Cancer Society provides transportation to and from treatment facilities to help people with cancer get the critical care they need; however, getting to their scheduled treatment may be a challenge, the society reports.

"One cancer patient requiring radiation therapy could need anywhere from 20 to 30 trips to treatment in six weeks," states Lily Westlund, American Cancer Society mission delivery specialist. "A patient receiving chemotherapy might report for treatment weekly for up to a year. In many cases, a patient is driven to hospitals or clinics by relatives or friends, but even these patients must occasionally seek alternative transportation.

That's where the American Cancer Society Road To Recovery program comes in."

The free program provides patients rides to and from their medical treatment. To ensure that all patients have transportation when they need it, the society is looking for volunteer drivers and a road coordinator. Road To Recovery volunteer drivers arrange their own schedules, with some volunteering as little as one afternoon a month and others driving patients as often as twice a week. Those who have a car and some spare time can help someone keep an important appointment.

For information about and the Road To Recovery program and other ACS programs and services, or to volunteer, call 800-227-2345 or go to www.cancer.org

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PUBLIC NOTICE

CMH ENT/Cosmetic Surgery Clinic to close Feb. 20, 2015

After two years of dedicated service, Dr. Christopher Nyte will be leaving Astoria and the CMH ENT/Cosmetic Surgery Clinic will be closing.

Dr. Nyte will continue to keep scheduled appointments until Feb. 20, 2015, and will ensure that his patients have alternative options if they have been under his care. Any patients who have seen Dr. Nyte in the CMH ENT/Cosmetic Surgery Clinic in the past 2 years will be able to access their records through the CMH Medical Records department; the phone number is 503-338-7528.

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