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In a dark time the eye begins to see.
- Theodore Roethke



JAMES GRASHOW, "CITY DRAGON" (1976)

ELECTION MEGAPLEXION

BY ANNIE OLIVER

In the late '60s when I was in college and activism was "in", my main concerns were my grade point average and when the next Creedence Clearwater album would be out. When I graduated into the real world I moved on to bigger issues such as my batting average and why my women's softball league was going to be moved to an unlighted field. I lived in an unattractive rapidly growing city, and if the city government made decisions I didn't like, what difference did it really make? I just waited for each winter's twelve inches of rain to green the tree-barren hillsides for a few months before the 100-degree weather kicked in. Life seemed okay.

Then I discovered Astoria, one of the prettiest places around. Astoria has a beautiful river, majestic forests and wonderful old houses; all of my favorite things. I settled right in and waited for life to delight me. And then I woke up. The city had a proposal to clearcut sixty-five acres of forest bordering Irving Avenue. They were talking about my forest that I had hiked through, walked my dogs through and loved to just look at. Suddenly my activism, which had long been dormant, sprouted and grew. A Trident nuclear submarine docked here, then a Shilo Inn wanted to build on the waterfront, the city council wanted to raise the height limit for structures on the waterfront... Hey, wait a minute! What's going on here?

Astoria really has my attention now.

Do we really want 48-foot tall structures along our river? Would many 28-foot structures be any better. Should we leave some open viewing spaces near the Maritime Museum. What, indeed, is to be done with our waterfront? Do we even want to develop it? We've paid \$25,000 for Murase architects' plans for the waterfront, and right where Murase's plan calls for low-density people-oriented improvements, the city government entertains the possibility of allowing a Shilo tower to be built.

And of course we must think about Tongue Point. Shall we court the Navy in hopes of having a "homeport" for its frigates and mine-sweepers? How will that change our community? Don't forget that Clatsop County has voted to be a "nuclear free zone." The Navy ships could potentially include nuclear weapons. We are already preparing Tongue Point to become an imported car depot, which could provide many needed jobs for Astorians, as would the possible Navy port. The two new facilities would also bring new faces to Astoria. Where will they all live? Astoria already has a housing shortage. The city would, of course, have to provide more low income housing. How will that change the character of our city? Where should we put the new housing? Should we cut more of our forest to build apartments or add more housing at Emerald Heights?

There is also the rather prickly issue of historic preservation. Astoria is the oldest United States settlement west of the Rockies. The city is endowed with many wonderful historic houses. Do we, as residents of the city, have the right to tell owners of old houses that they can no longer "remuddle" their homes? Do we, as old home owners, have a responsibility to maintain the architectural integrity of our historic homes? Will the city give us educational or financial help to maintain these houses in their originality? And how will the city "police" the home owner who continues to modernize his/her historic home?

We cannot ignore the property tax issue. We can hope that the state will come up with a satisfactory solution. Meanwhile our property taxes are making our affordable homes unaffordable. Should we put our city's forests into timber production to help alleviate our taxes and help us maintain city services? How much would the harvest of the city forest help since we will only realize money from that timber once in our lifetime? And what will be the final

price we will pay for our lost forests? How would it affect our tourist trade? How would it change the appearance and liveability of our city? Do we want our city government to be shortsighted or plan long-range?

The bypass of Highway 30 around Astoria seems inevitable. Will it be only a truck bypass or will it be a way for tourists to by pass us? Should we support a bypass in hopes of saving our crumbling downtown streets and of ridding us of noisy log trucks? Will this bypass harm the downtown merchants? Is it safe to have log trucks and more traffic driving by the high school on West Marine Drive? If not, will we need to build a new bridge across Young's Bay?

At a time when these important issues are keeping me awake at night, along comes election time. Are any candidates addressing these issues? Will there be any candidates who think as I do? Can I finally sleep at night? If these timely issues do not wake up sleeping activists, what will happen to this beautiful city that I love? Now is the time to quit grumbling to yourself and expecting other aroused activists to take care of it for you. I know you're out there. Join a special interest group, complain to your city government, write letters to the editor. Get involved, back a candidate you believe in, and most assuredly vote. Of course, this all means hard work and using your free time differently. But I can tell you, packing up and moving to a another beautiful community won't be easy either.

Annie Oliver lives in Astoria, if you had not already guessed.