

White Salmon considering cell tower lease option

■ **Jacob Bertram**
Columbia Gorge News

The City of White Salmon is considering leasing land to a U.S. Cellular subsidiary on a city-owned parcel on N.W. Strawberry Mountain Road. If approved, the lease would net the city \$900 per month in rent in the first year of the contract. The catch? It would open up the possibility for a cell tower to be installed on the lot.

Initially on the agenda for the Aug. 19 city council meeting was a motion for Mayor Marla Keethler to sign a proposed contract leasing parcel #03102427000500 to Oregon RSA#2, a subsidiary of U.S. Cellular, and granting an easement with fees paid by Oregon RSA #2 to the City of White Salmon. A term of 12 months with an option to renew, the contract would net the city \$900 in monthly rent and over \$1,000 in administrative fees. City councilors agreed unanimously to

table the discussion during the meeting, citing concerns of timing and fairness to concerned parties.

The proposal does not interfere with the city's future plans to construct a larger water reservoir on the site, according to an agenda memo.

Neighbors to the property being considered for the lease option wrote into public comment their concerns with the proposal. Chief among them is the concern for the process the proposal has undergone. Homeowners on N.W. Strawberry Mountain Road assert there had been no communication or notification about the proposal or the meeting that the discussion was to initially take place. They also claim a cell tower installed on the nearby lot would impact their health and lower property values.

City staff clarified in response to inaccurate information in the public comment section that the

lease would not automatically allow the lessee to install a cell tower on the parcel. A lessee would still have to go through the land use process, which would require a public hearing.

"It's not a lease, it's an option to lease. It gives the respective lessee an opportunity to secure entitlements, meaning they would have to go through the city's land use process, including before the planning commission, any of the requirements that the code imposes on this kind of land use still would have to happen," said City Attorney Ken Woodrich.

"All this does at this point is gives the cell tower provider an opportunity to explore whether this is beneficial, but it doesn't necessarily mean this will happen," Woodrich continued.

Woodrich also said he had concerns about a discussion occurring without an action. "If council is still potentially in the loop to be an appellate

body, it would be very potentially prejudicial to the applicant.

"We need to be careful about what the record would be if later there is an appeal," said Woodrich.

City staff asked that the agenda item be removed from the meeting due to confusion on part of city staff and concerned parties on when the discussion would occur. While Councilor Ashley Post initially argued in favor of keeping the discussion on the table, councilors still voted unanimously to take the agenda item off the table.

During the meeting, Keethler suggested that the city will review the land use code related to permitting cell towers.

"I think that there is an opportunity for the current council to review this ordinance as written and determine if this is the type of process and the way that we want this procedure to unfold. Currently it is being

followed by the standing code that we have," Keethler said.

By press time, a City Operations Committee meeting had been scheduled for Tuesday, Sept 1 with a discussion on land use related to cell towers on the agenda. A city council meeting agenda for Wednesday, Sept. 2 did not have an agenda item related to the topic.

Keethler told *Columbia Gorge News* that the purpose of the City Ops Committee meeting is to "evaluate, and consider if an alternative approach for such projects on public land should be considered. Specifically, if it is logical to have the lease option as the initial step before the latter steps that actually vet out viability and public sentiment of the project itself."

Keethler acknowledged that the process seemed misleading to residents who mistook the proposal as an ultimate decision to install

a cell tower. She said the process outlined in the White Salmon Municipal Code refers to actions taken on private property.

"What sets this one apart is the fact that it's city-owned, public property ... On private property the process as outlined makes more sense, to initiate evaluation by the city and community once the property owner has made their personal decision of considering an arrangement with an entity for a tower," Keethler said.

"Regardless of the code evaluation, it was clear that the city did not effectively communicate the process to the public, which has also been addressed," Keethler said.

Currently, the lease is on hold until the code review is complete, said Keethler.

Bingen and White Salmon rallies support Post Office and protest cuts

■ **By Joan Chantler**

Carrying homemade signs, a dozen or so peaceful demonstrators gathered at the White Salmon Post Office Aug. 25 to lend their support to the beleaguered institution and to protest recent changes that have slowed mail delivery. The rally then moved to the Bingen Post Office, where, with a single exception, the protesters were greeted with friendly honks and waves.

Bea Lackaff organized the rally and carried a "Support our Post Office, NOT for sale" sign. She explained, "You have to do something to stop the destruction of our democracy and our postal service. We've been racking our brains asking, 'What can we do? We happened to hear on the radio about this national day of action to save the post office. Here's our chance to get involved.'"

A sign board explained that 671 mail sorting machines have been removed since June. Those machines were each capable of sorting 30,000 pieces of mail an hour, adding up to millions a day. Hundreds of the familiar blue mail drop boxes have been removed and other changes add to the slowdown. Due to the pandemic many more people will be voting by mail and absentee ballot. The post

office sent notices of concern to the states that ballots may be delayed enough to not be counted.

Roger Gadway carried a "Support our Post Office, Protect our Vote-Urgent" sign and explained his reasons for being there: "Because we've got to save the post office. It is being destroyed and taken over. It takes our ballots in and delivers our ballots. It's kind of important," he concluded as an obvious understatement. When asked about the fact the Post Office is losing money he replied, "Yes, so is the Army."

"It's about service. It's not the United States postal business; it's the United States Postal Service," Chris Connolly explained. "They have a hard time because, unlike any other government agency or any business the Post Office has to fund their retirement system for 75 years in advance. That's crazy." She further stated "I think we need the post office more than anything. It is even mentioned in the constitution." (Article I, Section 8 states that "The Congress shall have the power to establish Post Offices and Post Roads.")

"Protect our vote," was Terry Anderson's message. She explained, "We all know they are getting rid of the machines that sort the mail

and they are trying to get rid of vote by mail which a lot of states have been doing successfully for many years now, including Washington and Oregon.

Monday the Postmaster General, Louis DeJoy, was called before Congress to explain his actions. Although DeJoy defends sorting machine removal as cost cutting and efficiency measures, many fear he may be attempting to sabotage the institution for political reasons and/or personal gain. DeJoy is a Trump appointee and major campaign donor. Trump said on Fox and Friends that with widespread vote by mail, "You'd never have a Republican elected in this country again."

Both states have had vote by mail for nearly 20 years and have elected numerous Republicans. According to USA Today, DeJoy and his wife reported between at least \$30 million to just over \$75 million in assets from competitors with the US Postal Service, and so may have an interest in seeing the post office privatized. In last week's Congressional hearing Post Master DeJoy agreed to stop further actions against the Post Office operations.

However, DeJoy refused to re-commission the already dismantled sorting machines.

We in Washington and Oregon are fortunate to already have a well-established vote by mail system in place. Unfortunately, most states don't. Let's hope with postal

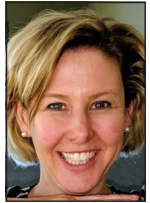
service cuts and slowdowns that they are able to continue to do a good job and get the ballots in on time.

Remember to vote early and drop your ballot in one

of the collection boxes if you can, and especially if you are near the deadline.

City of The Dalles hires interim planner

The City of The Dalles has hired Alice Cannon as interim community development director.



Alice Cannon

Cannon will be filling the vacancy made by the retirement of Steve Harris, who

has served as community development director of the city for four years. Her first day will be Aug. 24.

Cannon comes to the city with more than 25 years of planning and economic development experience in both public and private sectors. She has been a leader in Oregon local government for twenty years and holds a Master's degree in

Urban-Regional Planning from University of Colorado at Denver and a Bachelor of Science in Planning, Public Policy and Management from the University of Oregon.

Cannon is a Certified Planner through the American Institute of Certified Planners, and said she is excited to join the team and plans to be active in the community.

HRC forest enacts night closures

Due to extreme fire danger, Hood River County Forest, Forest Roads and Trails are temporarily closed to recreational use, including camping, between 9 p.m. and 5 a.m. The order was effective Aug. 27, and continues until further notice.

"This action will help protect our Forest Resources which are valuable for County Timber Revenue and Recreation," said

County Forest Manager Doug Thiesies in an email announcing the closure. According to the Thiesies, the primary reasons for the closure are:

- Extreme fire danger.
- Extended attack fire resources are not available.
- Above average recreation use in the County Forest, especially camping.

"Please be careful and responsible with your forest

use during this time of high fire danger," said Thiesies.

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