

KMUN show discusses Port petition

By EDWARD STRATTON
The Daily Astorian

The Committee to Restore, Revitalize and Reorganize the Port of Astoria, which became official with the Oregon Secretary of State's Office in early December, has starting collecting signatures.

The committee held its first media event today, with former Port Commissioners Ric Gerttula, Jack Bland and Jim Bergeron appearing on KMUN Coast Community Radio on the "Fridays with Jim" program to talk with host Jim Wilkins about the measure.

"Unfortunately, for many years the expectation has been that bringing on a new executive director will somehow reform a dysfunctional Board of Commissioners," read a question-and-answer document written by members of the committee. "Obviously this has not worked. This is not the role of an executive director and has resulted in several departures due to conflicts which develop each time a manager tries to redirect the commission to follow good governance practices and strategic plans.

"Only by changing who has oversight of the commission can we expect to change this culture of micro- and self-serving management."

The initiative petition on the Secretary of State's campaign finance website ORESTAR asks: "Shall the Port of Astoria restore, revitalize and reorganize into a locally coordinated, governor appointed Board of Commissioners?"

The committee's identification number on ORESTAR is 17199. It must gather signatures equal to 15 percent the number of Clatsop County voters who voted for governor in 2010, about 2,200. The committee must submit its signatures for verification at least 90 days prior to the May 19 election, giving them until around Feb. 19.

If there's a ballot measure

A "yes" vote, says the ballot measure summary, changes the name of the Port of Astoria to the Port of Clatsop County, and changes the selection of the Port's commissioners from election by Clatsop County voters to appointment by the governor. A "no" vote retains the present form of elected government.

If the initiative petition becomes a ballot measure in May or in subsequent elections and is passed by voters, the five Port commissioners would be selected by the governor from a list of names submitted by each of the city councils in Astoria, Warrenton, Gearhart, Seaside, Cannon Beach, along with the Clatsop County Board of Commissioners. Other qualified candidates could submit their names directly to the governor's office.

In its question-and-answer sheet, the committee said that the nonpartisan process of evaluating the most qualified candidates would be performed by no less than 30 locally elected officials. The committee contends that the current electoral process is a popularity contest based on name recognition and the ability to

raise money, and that personal interests often trump the needs of the entire taxpayer district of Clatsop County.

The governor would appoint five candidates from the list of recommended names — a maximum of two from each city council and from the county commission — to serve four-year terms, the terms initially being staggered. Existing Port commissioners would serve out the remainder of their terms and could apply for reappointment. The governor would also have the power to remove a Port commissioner for malfeasance.

All other Port district authority, including existing bonding authority, would remain the same.

Arguments for, against

Former Port commissioners and South County mayors have voiced their displeasure with the Port's management in letters to the editor, while existing Port commissioners and attendees at Port meetings have criticized the committee's efforts to make representatives appointed by the governor rather than elected by voters. The ports of Portland and Coos Bay are the other two state-appointed commissions in Oregon.

The Clatsop County Democrats overwhelmingly passed their own two resolutions in November, one opposing the idea of making Port commissioners appointed, and another to change the five commissioner positions from county-wide to match county commissioner districts.

Price: Renovation of library is another sensitive policy issue

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standard of service that we can provide in a specific area within our budgetary and, I guess, geographical constraints?"

For a new councilor who has made transparency a priority, the drunken-driving issue may present some thorns.

While, legally, Price does not have a conflict of interest on the DUI issue, a few critics have implied she faces at least the perception of a conflict because of her husband's advocacy, a notion Price dismisses.

Price said she has had a longtime interest in public safety and justice. She and Marquis first met on an AOL message board talking about the mix of race, justice and politics surrounding former football star O.J. Simpson's murder trial.

"I just don't think of it as a conflict," she said. "It's not a potential conflict. It's not any kind of conflict at all.

"Conflict only comes in if there's any financial interest. There's zilch."

Library location

Another sensitive policy issue before the City Council is the renovation of the library. LaMear, a former librarian, has supported an expansion of the library into the vacant, pri-



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Cindy Price has served several roles at KMUN including on the board of directors and interim general manager in 2001. Price now volunteers as a radio host about once a month hosting Wednesday Afternoon Music.

vately owned Waldorf Hotel, also known as the Merwyn.

Price said she has told the mayor that she needs more detail about the plan. "My basic position is: not enough information," she said. "I really do just need more information."

Specifically, she wants to hear more about the structural stability of the Waldorf Hotel, see architectural renderings of the library expansion, and view an analysis of potentially increasing the library's budget.

Price said she might entertain other ideas, such as the one-time talk of a land swap with the American Legion to relocate the

library to Heritage Square.

"I don't want another hole in the ground," Price said, referring to the brownfield cleanup at the former Safeway site at Heritage Square. "So if the Merwyn is going to be demolished or torn down at any point, I would really prefer that not be done until rebuilding (of the library) is going to start immediately."

Making appointments

Price, like Councilor Drew Herzig, believes mayoral appointments to the city's boards and commissions should be subject to the advice and con-

sent of the City Council.

LaMear has said that the council could discuss the matter as part of a conversation on developing council rules. A work session on new council rules has been scheduled after the council meeting Tuesday.

Price sees some urgency. "The thing is, there are a lot of appointments available right now," she said. "And if it's the intention to fill all those things right now, with three-to-four year terms, it's kind of equivalent to stacking the Supreme Court.

"So I trust that she will listen to us, take our suggestions, and work it that way."

A 'salonical'?

Doug Thompson, a former councilor who used to represent Ward 3, appreciated that Price was holding the "salonicals" to get public feedback.

"She's a smart person," he said. "And I think she's going about it in a very deliberate fashion. And that's all you can expect. She's a volunteer."

So exactly what is a "salonical"?

"It just means political salon," Price said. "And I liked the idea more than 'meet and greet,' which always sounds to me more like, I don't know, meat and potatoes or something."

Field: Bleachers will stay standing

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accidentally left out of the original transfer. The school board also needed to transfer the bus barn property adjacent to the field.

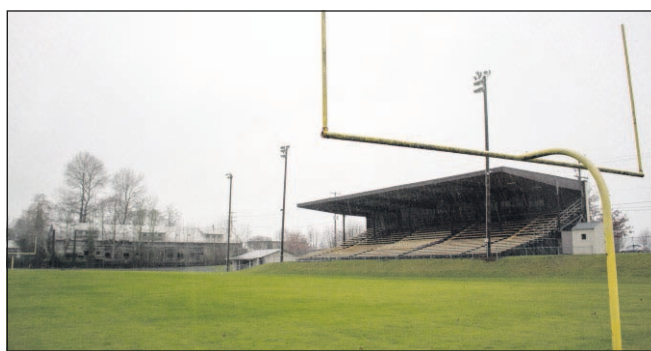
The bill of sale documents that the property now belongs to CMH. Hoppes said the district, which has already handed over the keys, has to clear all its remaining belongings by Feb. 13 or March 2 — mostly clothes, whiteboards, tires and other odds and ends — and still has to hand over construc-

tion drawings for the site.

Bleachers stay up

CMH will initially use the practice field behind the former John Warren Field for parking, construction beginning in the spring.

The bleachers of John Warren Field, said Hoppes, will also stay standing, for when they have events such as concerts. John Warren Field was eyed in 2011 as a possible location of the Reba McEntire concert for Astoria's bicentennial celebration — with a turnout of around 6,000, it was one of the largest concerts in



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The Astoria School Board voted Wednesday night to finalize a bill of sale to Columbia Memorial Hospital on the John Warren Field and adjacent bus barn and practice field.

county history. The idea was dropped because the school

board forbade alcohol sales on school property.

Mater: There is a precedent for the removal of commission members

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Mater leads an engineering firm in Corvallis. Her nomination by Kitzhaber to the commission, which oversees the Oregon Department of Transportation, was confirmed by the Oregon Senate in May.

Although commission members serve specific terms, there is precedent for their removal. When Neil Goldschmidt became governor in 1987, he requested all five commission members to resign — which they did — and named five replacements who were confirmed by the Senate.

Mater testified Thursday that the same factors that led to her opposition last summer remain today.

"There is no ambiguity in the Berth 2 project being connected to coal," said Mater, who was the last of more than 40 who testified at a two-hour hearing. "Anybody who says this project is not a coal project ... is not correct."

Mater said when she voted against state funding for the project last summer, neither Ambre Energy nor the port provided documentation to back a stated commitment of \$3 million.

"They simply did not in-

dicating they had the financial wherewithal," she said.

She also said the proposed renovation was not ready for construction, as the Connect Oregon guidelines require. She said the Department of State Lands informed the port that a renewed lease would be required for Berth 2, "because the current lease did not accommodate transloading options."

Ambre Energy ran into a road block when the Department of State Lands, in a separate matter, rejected a permit for a coal-loading dock Ambre Energy seeks at the Port of Morrow in Boardman. The dock would

enable coal mined in the Powder River Basin in Wyoming and Montana and taken via rail to Boardman to be loaded onto barges headed for Clatskanie.

Ambre Energy is appealing that decision, which will come before an administrative law judge on Dec. 7.

During much of the hearing, the commission also heard mostly familiar arguments for and against the Port of St. Helens project.

A few say that renovation of the 70-year-old dock would enable the port to handle oceangoing cargoes of all types and create jobs and economic activity.

Schools: Crafting the budget is like playing Whac-A-Mole

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Attendees included board members and superintendents from Astoria, Knappa, Warrenton and Clatsop Community College; representatives from the Northwest Regional Education Service District (NWRES); Head Start and other youth programs; and parents.

"We have a desire to dream big," said Superintendent Mark Jeffery of the Warrenton-Hammond School District, adding that \$7.875 billion over the 2015-17 biennium for education is the benchmark to help schools in Oregon expand and invest.

The 2013-15 biennium included \$6.65 billion for the state school fund, 39.7 percent of the state budget and a 14.6 percent increase from the previous biennium. However, it was a far cry from the 2003-05 biennium, when the state school fund equaled 44.8 percent of the budget.

"We would like to see that upward trend continue," said Jeffery about last biennium's increase in educational funding, pointing out some stark realities about Oregon's priorities: It spends 88 percent of the national average per pupil on K-12 education, ranks 46th in state expenditures on K-12 as a percentage of state taxable resources and is 49th in student-to-teacher ratio, with six more students per teacher than the national average.

Increases felt, needed

Astoria School Board Chairman Martin Dursse said that from 2008 to 2012, his district cut \$2 million from the budget. The additional money the last two years helped decrease class sizes, add instructional days for students and purchase new technology, he added. But to make future investments, such as aligning its curriculum with the new Common Core State Standards and promoting career and technical education, it needs money to invest.

Jeff Leo, who serves as superintendent and principal of the middle and high schools in Knappa, said his district cut more than \$743,000 over the same period in a much smaller district, including the equivalent of 10 full-time employees. To keep its class offerings, it has had to blend multiple grades together and freeze staff benefits and pay for several years.

To update its curricu-

lum, it has had to ask for \$30,000 a year from the Knappa Schools Foundation for materials. "But we can only do that for so long."

Leo and Jeffery both said that \$7.5 billion for the 2015-17 biennium would help. But that doesn't take into consideration the deferred maintenance districts have put off to save money over the years, said Jeffery.

"Really, none of us are operating on sustainable budgets," he said. "You look five years out, and things get frightening."

Competing needs

The governor's proposed 2015-17 budget, released last month, included \$6.914 billion for education, including \$240 million for the statewide introduction of full-day kindergarten and a focus on early learning and helping kids read proficiently by third grade. School leaders have said that amount could lead to budget, staff and program cuts.

The budget from the chairmen of the Oregon House and Senate, released earlier this week, upped the ante to \$7.24 billion including full-day kindergarten — an improvement, said Jeffery, but still not enough.

"This is going to be a very difficult session," said Sen. Johnson, later echoed by Rep. Boone. "We are zero sum in terms of revenue."

Crafting the budget is like playing Whac-A-Mole, added Johnson, with competing needs for money constantly popping up and any benefit for one group taking away from another. The governor's budget, she added, focuses on pre-kindergarten to third grade to the relative exclusion of other groups, up to community colleges.

"It is the May revenue forecast that is the north star against which the final budget is put together," said Johnson, adding that the legislators will almost certainly be done by July.

The legislators told the audience to keep engaged through interest groups such as the Confederation of School Administrators, Oregon Community Colleges Association and the NWRES.

The Oregon Legislative Information System, they said, provides a way to keep up-to-date on legislative developments. OLIS can be found at <http://bit.ly/15d7jee>



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Rep. Deborah Boone, left, and Sen. Betsy Johnson listen to community concerns during the legislative forum at the Capt. Robert Gray School Thursday.