

Great Ocean: Many of Chen's proposals focus on tourism

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"I've been involved since Oct. 1 with no financial gain," Gerttula said, adding Chen's vision impressed him, and he hopes Clatsop County supports the project.

In coming weeks, he will send options to the Port for his company's acquisition of North Tongue Point, the terms and how the Port might be compensated for getting out of its lease, which runs through 2019 and costs the Port more than \$300,000 a year.

North Tongue Point

The centerpiece of Chen's vision is a multi-functional, privately owned international shipping port at North Tongue Point. The website describes the terminal as a cold-chain distribution center with seafood and fruit storage and packing, receiving produce by barge from upstream and shipping it out around the Pacific Rim.

"I think the whole investment is about \$220 million," Chen said. He added the project could create between 1,500 and 2,000 direct, year-round jobs.

The EB-5 program stipulates that at least \$500,000 be invested and 10 full-time jobs created for each immigrant investor's admission to the United States as a Conditional Permanent Resident.

Chen said his jobs are year-round, which led to the quick acceptance of his project by USCIS. When produce is out of season in the Pacific Northwest, he said, it would be shipped here from as far south



Screenshot from www.goastoria.us

On www.goastoria.us, Great Ocean Investment describes an Astoria Regional Airport expanded into an international facility capable of taking planes as large as Boeing 747s.

as San Antonio, Chile, to be packed in Astoria and loaded onto ships bound for Asia.

A big sticking point, Knight said, is how to include the longshore labor, adding he hopes there are opportunities for everyone. The union has jurisdiction over moving most cargo on the West Coast.

"We're going to have some very challenging discussions on land use, transportation issues, community infrastructure and then the privatization of the shipping port," Knight said, noting the recent issues shippers and ports have been having with longshore labor.

Chen said a private port will speed its development by avoiding the public bidding process. Permitting such

a project could take years, but he estimated it would take about 18 months to build out North Tongue Point. Chen said he's open to anyone's involvement, including longshore labor.

Tourism

Many of Chen's proposals center on building Astoria's identity as a tourism destination.

Although sparse on details, the website describes an expansion of the Port-owned Astoria Regional Airport in Warrenton to take planes as large as Boeing 747s jetliners. The runways at the airport, Chen and Knight said, have to be extended to at least 9,500 feet to handle such large jetliners, as well as being strengthened and elevated.

"After the project (is) complete, the new Astoria airport can not only bring a good number of tourists, but also accommodate international air transportation and express services," says the website. "Cherries, king crabs and other high value commodities can be delivered to the world as far as possible."

The Astoria region annually serves as a stopover for between 10 and 20 cruise ships on their way north or south. But Chen envisions Astoria as a homeport for cruise ships.

"Berth capacity will reach 5,000 passengers per time, which will support larger and more cruise lines," his website reads. "The project is expected to bring 60,000



EDWARD STRATTON — The Daily Astorian

Chief Executive Director Capt. Huy Ying Chen, right, visited with wife and Managing Director Ping Wang to share their vision for the Port of Astoria through their federally approved EB-5 immigrant investor group, Great Ocean Capital Holding LLC.

tourists per year, create \$180 million and 2,200 working opportunities to local market."

The website describes the Astoria Tourism Center, a 30-acre project, which Chen compared to San Francisco's Fisherman's Wharf.

Immigrant investors

Since the EB-5 program started in 1990, more than 600 regional centers have been approved across the U.S., including 10 in Oregon. Williams/Dame & Associates broke ground in Portland last month on the Hyatt House hotel, partially funded by EB-5 investors. Williams/Dame has also worked with EB-5 investors to build a Residence Inn in the Pearl District.

Chen said that as of yesterday, he's gathered between 56 and 58 investors so far for the project, worth \$26 to \$29 million. In addition, he said, he has about \$20 million from private investors not seeking visas. Ultimately, he said, the plan is to gather 196 EB-5 immigrant investors, equating about \$98 million, and use private investment to finance the rest of the project at North Tongue Point.

"We're American, and we want to contribute to the country," Chen said. He is from Taiwan, but has been an American citizen for more than 30 years. He hopes to have a fair hearing in the county on his proposal. Knight of the Port said he's committed to having a fully public debate of the project.

Head Start: Many staff members are parents of former students

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is now an education specialist for the Neighborhood House public housing community in Seattle. Pat Eterno, the Seaside center director, moved to Santa Rosa, Calif., to be an associate Head Start director.

Replacing them are new directors who are all versed in childcare and Head Start.

Lizz Bias, the director in Warrenton, is a 2013 college graduate, moving north from California State University in Chico, where she interned at Early Head Start, working in preschools and doing home visits. She moved to Warrenton to be a teacher, before becoming a center director.

Grace Robinson, the center director in Astoria, didn't come up through Head Start, but she's worked in early childhood education since 1992, most recently at Coryell's Crossing before it closed.

"I think both have the same overall goal of preparing our ... children for success in school," said Robinson. "We just go about it differently. With Head Start, there's more emphasis on the family, as well."

Coryell's, which closed late last year, is under renovation



Lizz Bias



Grace Robinson



Raedetta Castle

to be a short- and long-term respite center for people experiencing mental health emergencies.

Raedetta Castle, the director in Seaside, was once a Head Start student herself. She's worked in the program for 15 years now, most recently transferring to Seaside from her directorship in Neah-Kah-Nie.

Hiring from within isn't something new. Out of 108 staff members in Head Start, 45 are parents of former students. Head Start provides on-site training for parents, Castle said, to see if they're interested in the field and able to work with the age group.

Challenges

Director of Child and Family Development Programs Joyce Ervin, which operates Head Start in Clatsop, Columbia and Tillamook counties, said the agency had to cut

transportation to balance the budget because it cost more than \$20,000 annually for the Astoria center alone.

"We have had to drop a couple of kids because of transportation," Visser said. "It's been a pretty low number, and parents have just done their best to make it work."

The effects are especially felt in Warrenton, the largest Head Start center in the county with 72 children, at least two-thirds of them traveling from Astoria. It takes more than an hour to get from Emerald Heights, a low-income housing complex in Astoria, to the Warrenton center, family advocate Jereen Laferriere said.

Transportation has had a small effect on enrollment, but Head Start is also seeing decreased waiting lists for its services among the region's low-income families. The program limits the eligible income



JOSHUA BESSEX — The Daily Astorian

Students in the Head Start class at the Robert Gray School move wood chips under a playground during outdoor time Monday.

for varying family sizes to no more than \$23,850 for a family of four to \$15,730 for a household of two.

"I feel like we have a lot of 2-year-olds turning 3, so I think — I'm hoping — our wait list will look different next year," Visser said.

A bigger issue than transportation or demographics, Laferriere said, is the housing costs parents eligible for Head Start face.

"It seems like apartment

costs are comparable to the Portland area, but the job market isn't," said Laferriere, adding that she's seen families with young children moving away to find better jobs elsewhere. The Warrenton center has a whole classroom with fewer people on the wait list than it did last year.

Week of the Young Child

Astoria's 2nd Saturday Artwalk falls one day before the

start of the national Week of the Young Child celebration. Head Start is planning a second-annual exhibition of student artwork.

"Our ultimate goal during the Week of the Young Child is that we have multiple galleries that would sponsor early childhood providers in the area," Visser said. "So maybe Peace Learning Center, Lil' Sprouts. Everyone would be sponsored and have their art featured."

Seaside: \$31 million convention center would cost \$220,000 a month for 30 years

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The survey was conducted following two presentations Vandenberg made to the Seaside Chamber of Commerce and the Seaside Downtown Development Association. In those presentations, he outlined the three options for financing the convention center expansion as well as a \$6 million, multi-level parking structure. The monthly payment required to retire the \$31 million debt would be \$220,000 a month for 30 years.

The survey also included a comment section, and Vandenberg said they received numerous comments. The biggest takeaway from the comments, which were not available yet, Vandenberg

said, was that "this town doesn't want any sales tax."

"They thought it would harm their business, or people would travel outside (the city) to shop," he said.

Other comments suggested the town does not have the infrastructure, such as parking and roads, to handle a significant increase in visitors in the downtown area. According to the survey, the expansion would allow the convention center to bring groups of 500 to 600 to town.

Some people indicated they simply like Seaside's small-town feel and believe the expansion might harm that, Vandenberg said.

The construction alone would take about a year, and some of the chamber and association members expressed

fear about how that might negatively impact their businesses.

"They like things the way they are," Vandenberg said.

The Seaside Downtown Development Association Board has already voted to oppose a sales tax, according to Tita Montero, SDDA executive director.

A link to the survey results was sent to both the chamber and association. The expansion committee will discuss the results before bringing recommendations to the Seaside Civic and Convention Center Commission. Sometime in the next few months, the commission will bring a final recommendation before Seaside City Council to consider.

A proposed \$25 million expansion of the Seaside Civic and Convention Center could be paid for by a local sales tax and an increase in lodging taxes.

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