



JOSHUA BESSEX — The Daily Astorian

Leroy Dunn, left, talks with Astoria City Councilor Cindy Price, right, during a meeting at the Ocean View Cemetery. Dunn, who has family in the cemetery, is not happy with the current state.

Cemetery: Councilors ask whether property can be sold

Continued from Page 1A

But the City Council did not appear enthusiastic about restoring Ocean View to the manicured splendor of decades past, when interest from the irreducible fund provided healthy returns that could be used for upkeep.

Interest from the fund — which now has about \$828,000 to tend to the cemetery for eternity — has only produced marginal returns during the past few years. Even if fees are increased and the returns eventually improve, the money will likely not be enough to make Ocean View the cemetery old-timers remember.

“I don’t see making this a golf course,” said LaMear, who has a plot at the cemetery. “I really don’t.”

The city projects that the 100-acre cemetery, which dates to 1897 and has more than 16,000 plots, could reach its current development capacity in about three years and would need to expand into its remaining 50 acres.

City Councilor Drew Herzig asked city staff to research



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Jonah Dart-McLean, maintenance supervisor with Astoria Parks and Recreation, pauses at headstones during the City Council tour through the Ocean View Cemetery. The headstones were uncovered by volunteer Carl Hagnas.

whether the cemetery could be sold to a private owner.

Councilor Zetty Nemlowill suggested that the city could sell the undeveloped 50 acres to a private developer and use the revenue to help maintain the existing plots. She, like

LaMear, would also prefer that the city not have to subsidize cemetery operations.

Nemlowill believes many in Astoria are probably unaware the city owns a cemetery in Warrenton.

“I want to get back to

the idea, though, of whether or not we should be in the business of cemeteries,” she said. “And I know that we’ve made promises and we have contracts for the existing plots, but what about the future?”

Harvest: Public was not given chance to comment on the project before the motion was approved

Continued from Page 1A

Logging crews have finished about 24 acres, and Public Works Director Neal Wallace told the council there would be costs associated with not moving forward. The city invested about \$12,000 in seedlings to replant in the clearcut areas, and the logging crew also expects a certain volume of trees as part of its payment.

“If we put this on hold for right now, this job is pretty much done,” Wallace said. The logging company, Berlog, of Clatskanie, and forester Mark Dreyer, owner of Lone Cedar Consulting and the city’s consulting forester since 2006, would not wait a month while a discussion occurred, Wallace said.

Project concerns

At the council’s meeting Feb. 9, the Necanicum Watershed Council also asked the City Council to reconsider approving the project. Melyssa Graeper, coordinator for the council, read a letter from the organization.

Noting that the watershed council has contributed over \$2 million in conservation funds to the community to address environmental and other issues, the letter expressed concern that the city, “a designated ‘Tree City, USA,’ is quickly moving ahead on a timber harvest in the watershed with little public process, including allowing the watershed council to provide the input it was asked for.”

The project was listed on the agenda for the Dec. 8 City Council meeting under new business and solely as a presentation by Wallace. After a roughly 10-minute presentation, which included comments

from Dreyer, the board voted unanimously to approve taking the project to bid. The project was not taken to bid, however. Administrative Assistant Kim Jordan said the motion was misstated, and the City Council “knew at that meeting there was not going to be a bid.”

Rather, Jordan said, the council meant to only approve the project. Councilor Don Johnson, who made the motion, agreed that the council “intended” to authorize city staff to proceed with the project.

If the project had gone to bid, it would have been proposed by resolution, which would have required a public comment period.

When asked why the project did not have to go to bid, Wallace responded, “When we hired the forest manager we turned over the operation to him.

“He reviews the logger’s information and makes the decision/recommendation on behalf of the city,” Wallace said. “The council approved the forester’s recommendation.”

There is no record of the council approving the recommendation to hire Berlog; only Dreyer’s initial description of the project is on the record.

In addition, the public was not given an opportunity at the December meeting to comment on the project before the motion was approved.

The North Coast Land Conservancy was not offered the opportunity either, Executive Director Voelke said.

“When we heard of the plan, we approached the city to offer our services,” she said, adding that she learned of the project from a January newspaper article.

“Watershed-based land acquisition is the charitable service

that we provide as a land trust,” Voelke said. If the city creates a stewardship plan, it’s possible to receive grants to purchase more land, she added.

Graeper said the situation has raised some questions about the public process regarding city projects and where there is room in the system for feedback.

“Moving forward I want to understand the city’s process and be a part of it,” she said.

Protecting the watershed

The watershed council also asked the City Council to revisit its forest management plan. At the December City Council meeting, when Councilor Don Johnson asked if the timber harvest fits within the forest management plan, Wallace said the plan was “very loosely put together” and only existed to manage the watershed and water quality and production.

Wallace said later he was referring to the water conservation and management plan because he and several other city staff members were not aware a forest, or rather timber, management plan existed until Wallace searched the archives recently. The city’s timber management plan has not been updated since 1983.

The watershed council’s letter admonished the city for its lack of attention to the management plan. It should not be a “one-time thought,” but a living plan with specific short-term activities leading to well thought out, long-term goals, the letter said.

“To know that decisions are being made based on an old and loosely put together plan is disheartening to say the least,” the letter added.

Boatyard: ‘It almost feels like we’re rushing into it’

Continued from Page 1A

boatyard. In an Aug. 8 letter, it notified the Port that it was under more stringent Tier II monitoring requirements, following two years of testing that revealed high hits of copper coming out of drains near piers 1 and 3.

In the letter, the DEQ mandated that by Dec. 30, the Port work with a certified engineer to devise a plan to reduce stormwater pollution and submit it. But it wasn’t until mid-December that the agency contracted with Ada Banasik, an engineer with Maul Foster Alongi, to specifically work on the Tier II response plan.

The Port submitted a plan to DEQ to reroute stormwater to a biofiltration system on Pier 3. The DEQ has given the Port until June 30, 2016, to implement the plan. If sampling after that is above benchmarks, said the DEQ’s letter, the Port would need to submit a Tier II Benchmark Exceedance report evaluating whether the measures were properly installed, maintained and implemented.

There was no mention in the letter of fines or shutting down Port operations.

Lack of specifics

The Port hasn’t proved conclusively that the boatyard is the primary source, and there’s been no talk of shutting down log operations to help stem pollution.

“If I recollect correctly, before the boatyard was there, there were issues with copper in the stormwater,” said Greg Morrill, president of Bergerson Construction, which stores materials near the boatyard. He encouraged the Port to look at the history of pollution from Pier 3.

Andrew Bornstein, co-owner of Bornstein Seafoods, questioned whether brake pads from all the truck traffic, could be a source of contaminants, and whether closing the boatyard is a false give to DEQ while surrendering a community asset.

All the Port’s activities and traffic, said Knight, contribute to stormwater pollution. The Port has challenged the source of copper and whether testing for it was appropriate after a long dry spell during which copper could have accumulated before dumping into the system.

“If you’ve ever looked at the boatyard to see how owners are actually prepping the sites and containing the work that they’re doing, I think you come to the same conclusion that I come to, that DEQ has certainly come to, that it

was lacking controls and it was lacking the energy and effort of all parties,” said Knight. “Boat owners, Port staff — all of us to some extent, are participants in this issue, in that we together have not defined the sources.”

Rushing in

“It almost feels like we’re rushing into it, and once it’s closed, it’s hard to reopen it,” said Jeremy Davis, chief financial officer for Englund Marine and Industrial Supply, before querying Knight: Why April 1?

Knight responded that it’s an arbitrary date the Port’s shooting for, in order to build momentum and show some actions to DEQ, again invoking the Port’s responsibility to the environment.

Kurt Englund, president of Englund Marine, mentioned the Chinook Observer article in which Mike Weston, the Port’s director of business development and operations, said the Port made \$75,000 to \$100,000 gross profit a year on the boatyard. He asked Knight to clarify whether the boatyard makes or loses money.

Knight, who mentioned the boatyard Thursday as a losing operation that hasn’t charged enough in fees, said he doesn’t know where Weston got the number he reported to the newspaper. Jim Grey, the Port’s new finance director, added that he didn’t either.

Bornstein asked how much it would cost the Port to come into compliance with the new stormwater requirements. The Port’s permit and project manager, Robert Evert, guessed it was “north of \$3 million.” Knight has estimated about \$5 million to build a new, modernized boatyard.

“I think this is bogus, frankly, Jim; I just can’t buy it,” said Dave Densmore, a commercial fisherman based in Astoria. “I helped design that whole regional master plan; I don’t know if you’ve seen it. But it was a good plan that would have paid for updates, if it would have been carried through. Instead, it’s been killed off and starved down to where we don’t have a damn thing there now, hardly.”

“And I put that right back at the commission, because the Port commissioners, they sold that boatyard out as far as I’m concerned.”

Coming Tuesday: What the Port’s master plans envisioned for Pier 3; how logs came but the marine industrial cluster petered out; and how ports like Toledo are benefiting from boatyards while the Port looks to close its.

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