

Warrenton signature drive falls short

Residents will still try to make September ballot

By **DERRICK DePLEDGE**
The Daily Astorian

WARRENTON — Residents who want to restrict the Warrenton's ability to transfer assets such as Tansy Point have so far fallen short in their signature drive for the September ballot.

The proposed charter amendment would require double majority voter approval before the city transfers or disposes of assets worth \$100,000 or more.

The Warrenton Property Protection Committee filed 450 signatures of registered voters in February to qualify for the September ballot. But the Clatsop County Clerk has found that the committee failed to meet the threshold — 411 signatures — because 101 of the signatures are invalid.

Ken Yuill, who is leading the committee's effort, said the committee would attempt to gather the necessary signatures by the June deadline to make the September ballot.

"We are going to proceed until we get enough," said Yuill, a senior utility technician in Astoria who serves on the Warrenton Planning Commission.

Mayor Mark Kujala and others have opposed the charter amendment, arguing that the City Commission should have discretion over city assets.

While the ballot question grew out of a debate last year on Tansy Point, the charter amendment would also apply to city assets such as garbage trucks, fire trucks or equipment for water systems.

Double majority voter approval means that more than 50 percent of eligible voters would have to participate in the election and that a majority would have to vote in favor of the asset transfer — a steep hurdle.

Last year, the City Commission considered a land swap with Warrenton Fiber involving 43 acres the company leases from the city at Tansy Point. The company offered 20 acres off Dolphin Avenue and a promise to build the city a new Public Works facility.

Yuill and Gil Gramson, a former Warrenton mayor and city manager, were among several residents who objected to the land swap, contending that the land — donated by the Carruthers family in the 1970s to avoid condemnation by the Port of Astoria — is valuable and should remain in city hands.

The City Commission declined to move forward with the trade, but Kujala has said the city might be open to a proposal for Tansy Point in the future.

Crafard hired as new Clatsop County clerk

By **KYLE SPURR**
The Daily Astorian

Valerie Crafard, former clerk of the Clatsop County Board of Commissioners, was hired as Clatsop County clerk Monday.

Crafard replaces former Clatsop County Clerk Maeve Kennedy Grimes, who was fired in December after she was placed on paid administrative leave Oct. 20 following two errors on the general election ballot.

Crafard has served as interim county clerk since October.

"I have every confidence in Valerie's ability to lead and manage the County Clerk Department," County Manager Scott Somers said in a news release. "She has performed at a commendable level during her interim appointment as county clerk. The county is very fortunate to have attracted and retained someone of Valerie's caliber."

Crafard joined the county in June 2006 and has worked as clerk of the Board of Commissioners and as a human resources assistant. Previously, she worked in human re-



Valerie Crafard

sources management and administrative support positions with various private firms.

She has a bachelor's degree in management and organizational leadership from George Fox University.

Somers said last month 10 people applied for the position, and four were interviewed last week.

The county clerk is the record keeper for the county and administers public records, archives, legal recordings, passports and marriage licenses. The office also oversees elections and voter registration, and coordinates property tax appeals, according to the county.



An excavator prepares to drop felled trees and brush from the east side of U.S. Highway 101 into the back of a truck. The equipment belongs to Trails End Recovery, a Warrenton-based company.

ODOT fells up to 55 trees in Cannon Beach

Project intended to improve highway safety, neighbors upset

By **ERICK BENDEL**
EO Media Group

CANNON BEACH — The Oregon Department of Transportation cut down and hauled away about 55 trees from U.S. Highway 101, between Cannon Beach's north entrance and Sunset Boulevard, on Monday. Most of these trees had begun to lean perilously over the highway and, ODOT argued, may pose a threat to drivers.

Between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m., five ODOT employees and three contractors from Trails End Recovery, a Warrenton-based timber recycling company, removed about 30 trees, 8 or more inches in diameter. About two-thirds of those trees came from the highway's east side. Another 20 to 25 smaller "brush" trees were also cleared.

The stumps were "flush cut" to make them even with the ground and then covered with forest material to disguise them.

The roadway was "groomed clean," Public Works Director Dan Grassick wrote in an email. "If you didn't know the work was done today, you would be challenged to know any trees were actually removed."

Eventually, ODOT may plant new trees in that stretch of highway corridor, where about 5,000 trees currently stand, Bill Jablonski, manager of ODOT District 1, said previously.

'Hazard trees'

Because the trees were in a state right of way, ODOT could legally remove them without first obtaining a city permit, according to state law.

It was the first round of a tree-thinning project expected to take several years. However, ODOT will not return for further thinning until next year, according to Kevin Werst, the department's transportation maintenance man-

ager for the Warrenton Section of District 1.

A year ago, the department marked for removal approximately 200 dead and dying trees in danger of collapsing onto the highway. When ODOT identifies "hazard trees," "we're obligated to take care of it," Werst said.

"We have a responsibility to maintain the right of way," he said. "And some people don't want it maintained to the level that we would like to have it maintained."

Given that ODOT has little choice but to eliminate the worrisome trees — and could be held legally liable for accidents that occur by leaving them alone — Steidel said he hopes ODOT approaches the ongoing project as "an annual maintenance program" rather than an all-at-once endeavor.

Costs

Originally, the department planned to remove 70 trees this month, Jablonski, Werst said.

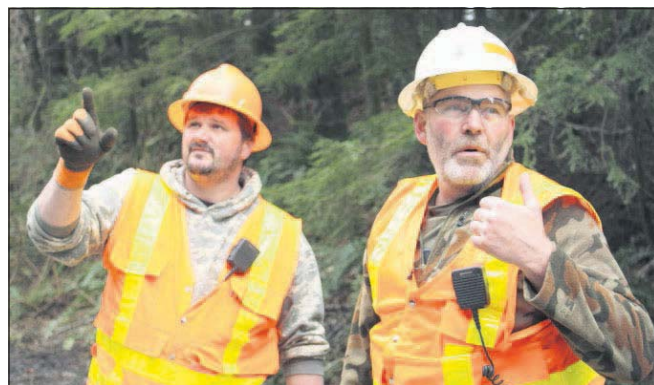
But with a maximum of \$10,000 to spend on stage No. 1 of the project, ODOT decided to reduce the number of trees removed this year, Grassick and Mayor Sam Steidel explained.

The entire project cost \$7,300, Werst said, adding that the combined crew cost about \$760 per hour.

Trails End Recovery will sell the 40 to 60 tons of felled timber for a profit, he said. The company will then give ODOT a \$400 to \$600 discount on the final bill.

Whether ODOT still intends to remove all 200 trees, even if it happens over a longer time frame than expected, Werst could not say.

Former Mayor Mike Morgan said he hopes ODOT is "willing to only take out the trees that are absolutely needed, and not work toward a goal of any sort."



ERICK BENDEL — EO Media Group

Kevin Werst, right, ODOT's transportation maintenance manager for the Warrenton Section of District No. 1, and Don Miller, left, transportation maintenance specialist with ODOT, eyeball how they're going to eliminate certain trees on the west side of U.S. Highway 101.

"We're trying to keep clean-up and damage to a minimum. We know that the folks around here are real sensitive to the project," Werst said. "I understand the sensitivity."

Jablonski could not be reached for comment.

'Wait a minute'

Watching the trees come down in front of his home, Ed Johnson, who lives on Elkland Court, said, "I'm not very happy about how this has played out."

Though the loss of more than 50 trees is preferable to losing 70, Johnson said he had expected Will Caplinger, the city's arborist, to weigh in on the issue before the thinning took place.

Last year, when ODOT informed Cannon Beach of its tree-thinning plan during a public meeting, the city said they would pay Caplinger to independently review the targeted trees. But when it appeared that ODOT would not follow through with the plan, the city chose to save its money and dropped the independent review idea.

Johnson said that, if ODOT wanted to spend its limited funds on a project that would benefit Cannon Beach, the department should have invested in seismically upgrading the woodpile bridge over Ecola Creek. Ideally, the bridge should

have taken precedence over tree thinning, he said.

And, as long as trees were getting cut, the raw timber, he argued, should have been placed in the creek as "woody debris" to help restore salmon habitat, rather than given to Trails End Recovery to sell on the timber market.

Above all, Johnson said he wished there had been more opportunities for public participation and citizen involvement.

"Yeah, this is (ODOT's) highway. (These are) their trees, in a sense. But this is a public issue that some people are very concerned about," he said. "Anytime you start cutting down trees in Cannon Beach, somebody should be saying, 'Hey, wait a minute — do we need to do that?'"

A 'real drag'

With some of their buffer now gone, Johnson's neighbors Kirsten Massebeau and her husband, Phillip Massebeau, said they are concerned about louder highway noise and stronger winds hitting the mature trees that surround their property. "Not to mention the road is not as pretty when you're coming down through Cannon Beach anymore," Phillip Massebeau said.

"We know there was nothing we could do about it, but it would have been nice to at least have some say," he added. "It's a real drag."

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On the record

Criminal mischief

• At 7:05 p.m. Sunday, Astoria Police arrested Katherine Ann Marzolo, 46, Los Angeles, for third-degree criminal mischief and second-degree criminal trespass at 1188 Harrison Ave.

DUII arrests

• At 7:25 p.m. Friday, Astoria Police arrested Leroy Peter Adolphson, 66, Astoria, for driving under the influence on the 300 block of Alameda Avenue.

• At 1:15 a.m. Sunday, Clatsop County Sheriff's Office arrested Mary Martha Foust, 46, for DUII at U.S. Highway 101 and East Pines Drive in Gearhart.

• At 11:24 p.m. Sunday, Clatsop County Sheriff's Office arrested Gregory Simon Cisneros, 37, for DUII at U.S. Highway 101 and Avenue S in Seaside.

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