

Library: There is a political ingredient in the preservation debate

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Mayor Arline LaMear, a retired librarian who has made library renovation her priority, said the city could start fresh at Heritage Square.

"Let's just move. Let's go. Let's do something," she told the City Council during a work session on the library that set the stage for the vote. "It's just been going on for so long and it seems like, you know, nothing has happened."

The city has long wanted to transform Heritage Square, which has been undergoing a makeover with the Garden of Surging Waves and the environmental cleanup underneath the former Safeway property. The square also includes a parking lot and the American Legion building.

The Sellwood-Moreland

Library and the Hollywood Library in Portland are possible models for pairing public libraries with mixed-use development.

New directions

The City Council had agreed last year to proceed with the library renovation plan into the Waldorf. But the composition of the council changed after the November elections, and public pressure to save the Waldorf grew, so councilors opted to take another look.

LaMear said she and city staff met privately with Ted Osborn, the president of the Lower Columbia Preservation Society, and John Goodenberger, a historic buildings consultant, as well as with associates of Suenn Ho, the Portland urban designer who



Daily Astorian file

The Astoria City Council has directed staff to look at relocating the Astoria Public Library to Heritage Square from its current location at 10th and Exchange streets.

worked on the Garden of Surging Waves, about expanding the library into the Waldorf without demolishing the hotel.

Those options, which could have included hous-

ing and other development, would not have provided adequate space for an expanded library, the mayor said.

Expanding the library at its existing location, meanwhile,

would disappoint the preservationists who want to protect the architecture of the building, she said.

While the debate has been about preservation, there is a political ingredient. Larry Taylor, the Intel technology manager who lost to LaMear in November, has been involved in both the campaign to save the Waldorf and the more recent appeal on behalf of the existing library.

"If we are to go the route of having to fight them, we're going to be running into years and years of appeals," LaMear said after the work session. "And I'm not sure that it wouldn't end up costing us just as much to try to do that as it would be to build a brand-new facility that we can build the way we want to."

LaMear and some on the

City Council worry if a new library is built at Heritage Square, both the Waldorf and the old library will sit vacant for years as blights on a block shared with City Hall. The mayor said, however, the hotel and the library might be more attractive to buyers if packaged together for redevelopment.

City Councilor Drew Herzig said the hotel, which is privately owned by Groat Brothers Inc., a transportation and demolition firm in Washington state, is not the city's responsibility.

"We do not own that building," he told the council. "If people want to save the Merwyn, they can form a nonprofit, they can get partners, they can do it."

"We should not have that albatross around our neck."



Daily Astorian file

The inside of the Astoria Column as seen in this 2002 photo.

Column: 'It's the symbol of our city'

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Astoria Column, a non-profit that has gathered more than \$3 million to preserve the column since forming in 1988.

Jordan Schnitzer, a Portland real estate magnate and philanthropist and the president of Friends of the Astoria Column, said \$500,000 has been raised so far for the restoration plan. Schnitzer said he and his mother, Arlene, have donated \$250,000.

"What greater joy do you have in life than giving back," Schnitzer said of the

column's benefactors. "And giving back to something that is so substantial and touches so many people's lives."

Marie Laibinis, of MCL Conservation LLC, a Portland firm, will serve as project director and conservator. Laibinis also worked on the column restoration project 20 years ago.

John Goodenberger, a historic buildings consultant, will serve as site manager.

"It's the symbol of our city," Mayor Arline LaMear said of the column. "It's an amazing place. I think we all feel that way."



Daily Astorian file

North Coast residents and visitors crowd the Astoria Column atop Coxcomb Hill in 2011.



ALEX PAJUNAS — The Daily Astorian

James Egler, a student in Clatsop Community College's Historic Preservation and Restoration program, hammers away at nails inside a 1920's-era cupola Saturday as bracing is added to strengthen and stabilize the structure.

Cupola: Reconstructing the octagon base will make up a large part of their work

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Cangelosi said the Recreation District removed the cupola as part of a reroofing project.

"We had to take it down anyway," Cangelosi said. "It became dilapidated from being out in the elements for the better part of 90 years."

Cangelosi said an adjunct professor from Clatsop Community College, Anthony Stoppello, connected the Recreation District with the historic preservation students.

Scovel's Towing in Nehalem moved the cupola to Astoria.

Lucien Swerdloff, the historic preservation class instructor, said the cupola is one of the more unique structures his class has worked to restore.

The octagon-shaped cupola, made of fir and cedar, was designed by famed Portland architect A.E. Doyle. At one time, the cupola was functional and would allow moisture to leave when students hung their wet jackets in the school building. It has since fallen into disrepair.

"They had this cupola sitting there and they asked us if we would be willing to take it on," Swerdloff said. "They didn't just take it off and throw it out. It was in pretty bad shape, but I think they realized the historic value."

Swerdloff's students have already begun preliminary work on the cupola. The students spent all day Saturday and Sunday continuing their restoration work inside a building at 667 Duane St. across from the Clatsop County Jail.

A large part of the work is reconstructing the octagon base. Three of the eight panels have to be replaced and the other five panels are repairable, Swerdloff said.

"The idea with most preservation projects is to try to save as much of the original as possible," Swerdloff said.

Once the students finish the restoration work, the plan is to bring the cupola back down to Nehalem and use a crane to place it back on the Recreation District building, where it has been for nearly a century.



Photos by ALEX PAJUNAS — The Daily Astorian

Joseph Cain uses a Japanese pull saw to create a new sill for the North Coast Recreation District building's cupola Saturday. The structure, used to provide ventilation and commonly found atop barns, had deteriorated over the years and needed to be restored if it was to remain a part of the Nehalem building.



Lucien Swerdloff, the historic preservation instructor at Clatsop Community College, hauls away a louver to be painted with primer before being reinstalled on the cupola the class was working to restore Saturday.

Port: Browne, Herman each seek more than \$2.5 million on claims

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- Individual immunity. "The only proper defendant to plaintiff's claims is defendant Port, pursuant to ORS 30.265(1). Therefore, defendant Michael J. Weston II should be dismissed;"

- Tort Claims Act, limiting claims for damages by Browne and Herman to caps set forth in the Oregon Tort Claims Act, as to all state law claims;

- Preclusion of punitive damages. "Pursuant to the Oregon Tort claims Act, plaintiff cannot recover punitive damages from a public entity;"

- ORS 659A.885 (civil action), placing additional limitations on the damages Browne and Herman can recover;

- Reservation to assert additional defenses, allowing the Port and Weston to assert additional claims as discovery in the case unfolds; and

- The ability to recover attorney fees and other costs if the Port and/or Weston prevail.

Allegations

Browne and Herman each seek more than \$2.5 million on claims of whistleblower retaliation, aiding and abetting retaliation, unauthorized disclosure of a whistleblower's identity, breach of employment contract, defamation of character and post-employment retaliation against the Port and/or Weston.

Their allegations paint a grim picture of their time under Weston:

- They include that Weston

abandoned or mismanaged continuing projects in his existing position and deflected blame onto subordinates;

- Attempted to give union staff and himself a more favorable vacation accrual provision, which, if approved, would have cost the Port up to \$156,800 in annual personnel costs;

- Gave lease discounts to certain businesses connected to individual Port commissioners, which cost the Port \$51,000 annually, in support of his bid to be permanent director;

- Hired several employees without authority, against a Port Commission-mandated hiring freeze and without the funds necessary to pay their salary and benefits, a potential loss to the Port of \$350,000.

Once his actions were discovered, the complaints add, Weston threatened to use layoffs and furloughs to balance the budget;

- Waived the new employees' probationary status to protect them from the Port's layoff policy;

- Gave himself and his new "executive team" additional/accelerated accrual of vacation time, full medical coverage and fully employer-covered retirement contributions; guaranteed himself the improved benefits, in case he didn't become permanent director; and asked his executive team to keep the contracts secret from the Port Commission and International Longshore and Warehouse Union;

- Intentionally gave the Port Commission inaccurate

or incomplete financial information to falsely imply the Port's financial condition was improving under his stewardship;

- Compromised the Port Commission's governance by failing to fully disclose his successful and attempted self-interested transactions and by asking staff to stay quiet;

- Abused his authority by threatening the job status of any employee who opposed or reported his actions to the Port Commission; and

- Violated the Port's personnel policy by keeping secret notes critical of certain employees without their knowledge or an opportunity to respond.

The Daily Astorian has a pending public records re-

quest for a third-party report performed last summer by Local Government Personnel Institute into complaints filed against Weston, at the time the interim executive director.

In early August, Port Commission Chairman John Raichl said that the Port had received the complaints July 17, and that the investigation started July 28. The complaints were likely by Browne and Herman.

At the time, Port attorney Ronald Guerra said because the report involved the head of a public agency, it would eventually become public. But the Port denied a public records request by The Daily Astorian, triggering a review of the validity of the denial by District Attorney Josh Marquis.