

Management: Reducing tensions

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At the time, Somers asked the Board of Commissioners to consider a “360 degree” evaluation that would include input from staff, department heads and other stakeholders instead of the board’s annual performance review.

Evolved into countywide focus

Over time, the evaluation evolved into a countywide focus. Commissioners are still deciding whether a performance review for Somers is necessary this year.

Somers’ performance was brought up in the independent review, which concluded the county manager is perceived as doing an effective job. The majority of people who work closely with Somers said he is supportive and empowering, not a micromanager. Another said he “goes above and beyond the call of duty.”

However, a small group of those interviewed for the review said Somers is not effective, pointing to the departure of several department directors since the county manager arrived three years ago.

Last year, Somers was the focus of complaints in anonymous letters sent to the Board of Commissioners and The Daily Astorian that questioned his management style.

He has acknowledged a large amount of changes have occurred in his time as manager.

Since March 2013, at least seven department heads have left the county.

County Clerk Maeve Kennedy Grimes was fired in December after errors were discovered on the general election ballot. Kennedy Grimes has since sued the county for \$1 million.

In addition, half the county staff were moved to higher deductible health plans and the Juvenile Detention Center closed.

“A number of people said they weren’t clear why certain changes were made. This caused unnecessary gossip, speculation, ‘water cooler’ talk and tension that could have been avoided if the changes had been better explained,” Kennedy wrote in the review.

Not a fact-finding report

Somers hopes the review’s overall findings will put such concerns to bed. The review was not meant to be a fact-finding report, he said, but rather a look at common themes and perceptions in the organization. Ultimately, Somers said, he is pleased with the results.

“It is what it is. I know I have some blind spots, but I feel pretty confident with some of the strengths,” Somers said. “That’s why I asked for a review. This is pretty much what I expected. I never expected to find a smoking gun.”

STRENGTHS/WEAKNESSES

From the 55 interviews conducted for the Clatsop County Management Review, the following are the strengths and weaknesses that were mentioned repeatedly in describing County Manager Scott Somers’ leadership and management style and capabilities:

Strengths/What he does well

- Hard working
- Good at information sharing with the community
- Open, collaborative, supportive, approachable
- Smart, professional and competent
- Great managerial skills, very organized
- Very direct and decisive
- Exceptional in leading economic development efforts/initiatives

- Makes decisions based on facts and the best interests of the county, not personalities
- Presents options and alternatives
- Good at delegation
- Good listener, empathetic
- Tries to correct his mistakes

Weaknesses/Areas for improvement

- Pushes too hard for the outcome he wants
- Inflexible after he has formed an opinion and sometimes stops listening when he disagrees
- Too quick to take action/make decisions at times — needs to involve others and think through all the possible conclusions and the alternative courses suggested by others
- Needs to build greater skill at flexing his style to accommodate different personalities
- Too thin-skinned when receiving criticism
- Needs more discipline at staying “out of the weeds” when working on internal issues

Scott Lee, the chairman of the Board of Commissioners, said he is satisfied with the findings related to the county manager, and that it rose above a performance review by the board.

The independent review also focused on the Board of Commissioners. The evaluation noted the county has been successful with recent strategic priorities, mainly a community visioning process called Clatsop Vision 2030. The county now needs to clarify, communicate and make progress on a long-term strategic direction, according to the review.

“The board is going to digest the material and probably have a work session on it,” Lee said. “Overall, it was a fairly positive analysis of staff and management.”

Reduce the tensions

When asked why the board decided to pursue the independent review, Lee said it was largely an attempt to reduce the tensions caused by Commissioner Dirk Rohne, who last year questioned the many terminations and resignations under Somers, among other personnel issues.

“If you look back, Commissioner Rohne had some concerns and he gave credence to anonymous letters,” Lee said. “I don’t take credence in any of those letters.”

The commissioners and Somers accused Rohne of discussing his concerns with labor attorney Akin Blitz, which possibly violated board rules and state laws by acting on behalf of the board. In addition, the commission was upset with Rohne for comments he made in an article in the Dec. 12 issue of The Daily Astorian without first speaking with Somers or Lee.

Soon after, Lee sent Rohne a

letter that warned Rohne he may be personally liable for violating public meetings laws and could be held personally liable for costs incurred.

“I tried to bring issues forward, and they tried to destroy me,” Rohne said.

In January, when Somers proposed finding a third-party firm for a “360 degree” evaluation, Rohne suggested the board appoint an ad hoc personnel committee to find a firm, rather than Somers hand-picking firms to evaluate him.

No other commissioner seconded Rohne’s motion and the proposal died. “I’m willing to move forward and do the best job I can for the people I was elected to represent,” Rohne said. “I still have my concerns and I think my concerns have been validated by the way I was treated.”

Rohne found it odd that the board placed him on a steering committee with Somers and Commissioner Sarah Nebeker to assist Kennedy Consulting with the review, especially since Rohne wanted a neutral process that did not involve himself or Somers.

The steering committee offered opinions and suggestions to Kennedy, while she conducted the review. The consultant held 55 one-on-one interviews with county employees, elected officials, community stakeholders and former Clatsop County employees.

In conclusion, Kennedy strongly recommended the county manager develop a report for the board in a year to document the steps taken to implement her recommendations.

“I hope everyone takes it to heart. I think it was a very thorough, objective review,” Somers said. “The recommendations should be taken seriously, if the county wants to move forward.”

Easement: Must prove jurisdiction

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Under the sovereign immunity principle, plaintiffs cannot sue the federal government unless the law explicitly allows it.

The six-year statute of limitations in which Oregon LNG or another party could appeal the federal government’s claim to the land has also passed, Assistant U.S. Attorney Stephen Odell wrote in a court document. The Corps asked a federal judge to dismiss the lawsuit based in part on those arguments.

Must prove jurisdiction

In U.S. District Court in

Portland Wednesday, Magistrate Judge John V. Acosta said Oregon LNG must prove the court has jurisdiction to rule on the case.

“Much of your response deals with the merits of your client’s claim, and not the procedural issue,” Acosta said to Jonathan Radmacher, an attorney for Oregon LNG.

Odell said in court Wednesday that Oregon LNG must prove the state was unaware the Army Corps had an interest in the submerged land, even as the federal agency continued to dump dredging spoils on the easement.

“The burden here is on the plaintiff to show really

the state didn’t know and should not have known” about the federal interest, Odell said.

Radmacher disagreed. “That act of dumping from ’63 to ’92 isn’t enough to say, ‘We have a right to do what we’re doing,’” Radmacher said of the federal government’s argument. “It doesn’t acquire the state’s property by doing that.”

Acosta said he would take the motion to dismiss under consideration but did not give a time frame when he might rule on the request.

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Resort: A challenge for developers

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Jinings added that the small resorts were also supposed “to serve as an example of how something smaller and environmentally and ecology-friendly could work.”

“In real simple terms, the Legislature gave them a coupon and said, ‘You can redeem this coupon for a small-scale recreation development in other counties that meet these qualifications,’” Jinings said.

There were two qualifying destination resort properties: the Metolian with plans for more than 600 units of tourist lodging and single-family homes, and a 2,500-unit development proposed by the Ponderosa Land and Cattle Co.

Prior to the extension, those property owners had until June 29 of this year to apply to develop “small-scale recreation” communities elsewhere in the state.

‘Potential conflict of interest’

Johnson’s family owns a retreat near the headwaters of the Metolius River and she initially pushed for legislation to stop

resorts in the basin, before stepping back to leave that work to other lawmakers. Johnson was excused from a July 3 Senate floor vote on HB 3431, but she did vote with other lawmakers July 1 to pass the bill out of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means.

“Out of an abundance of caution, I declare a potential conflict of interest in that I own land in the Metolius Basin,” Johnson said ahead of the committee vote.

However, Johnson did not raise any objections to the bill, which had been amended to specifically allow the Metolius-area property owners to develop small resorts in Clatsop, Morrow, Sherman, Umatilla and Wheeler counties, or any county with a June 29, 2009, unemployment rate that was more than 110 percent of the state average.

Sen. Ginny Burdick, whose family owns a cabin in the Metolius River Basin on land leased from the U.S. Forest Service, also declared a potential conflict of interest before she also voted to move the bill out of committee.

Johnson said a majority of

lawmakers supported the bill and it was not controversial. When asked whether the bill is good or bad for Clatsop County, Johnson said, “I think it’s neutral.”

In explaining her support for the bill, Johnson said it would still be challenging for developers to meet the deadline, even with the three-year extension. She was skeptical the property owner who planned to build the Metolian, Shane Lundgren, could find a suitable site in Clatsop County.

“And assuming a site opened up, it would still have to go through the local process,” Johnson said.

Johnson said she did not meet with Lundgren, and said that Rep. Brian Clem, D-Salem, added Clatsop County to the list of counties where property owners could build small resorts. Clem also pushed for the 2009 ban on destination resorts in the basin, telling other lawmakers the river’s headwaters “are a treasure created by God.”

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Trolley: Turned rides into experiences

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ment the relationships among the dozens of volunteers, who usually interact with only three other crew members at a time, Frank Kemp, the trolley’s maintenance coordinator, said.

It was a bittersweet evening, however; the men of honor, all of whom are in their 80s, admitted that their health and age make it tough to climb aboard the trolley.

“I’d just as soon be back driving,” Lockett said. “It’s just been a good ride.”

City icon

Abraham learned more about Astoria’s history by becoming a trolley conductor than he ever imagined he would, he said.

Occasionally, he found himself conducting a trolley with only two or three people in transit. Instead of reciting facts into the microphone from the rear of the trolley, he would sit down with the passengers and point out things he found interesting about the city.

“And I hope it was interesting to the people I was

talking to,” he said. In fact, it is talking with the passengers that Abraham will miss most, he said.

Not for Zafiratos, who preferred motorman work. “I’d rather drive than talk, even though I was a lawyer,” he said, chuckling.

The trolley, which sweeps by the remnants of old-time Astoria, has, during its 16 years in the city, become an icon of 21st century Astoria, Hauke said.

“I think this trolley is the best thing that ever happened to this town,” Abraham said.

Loggers still racking up hits, scoring lots of runs

By GARY HENLEY
The Daily Astorian

SEASIDE — Since winning a state title last spring, the Knappa baseball team hasn’t missed a beat, as the Loggers are still scoring runs and winning games in the Junior State summer season.

The Loggers racked up a combined 23 hits and 29 runs Thursday night, in a 16-5, 13-5 sweep over Seaside at Broadway Field.

Sophomore-to-be Dale Takalo pitched a complete game in the opener, scattering eight hits with six strikeouts and two walks. Knappa scored 13 runs over the first three innings of the second game, and kept the Gulls scoreless over the last five for the twinbill sweep.

Knappa built big leads early in both games, scoring a combined 23 runs over the first three innings.

Reuben Cruz — the early odds-on favorite for Northwest League Player of the Year next season — set the tone for the day with a run-scoring double in the first inning of the first game.

Cruz had seven RBIs and five hits on the day, including two doubles and an inside-the-park home run in the first game.

Logan Boettcher had a pair of hits and drove in four runs in the first game, while Mason Hoover had a leadoff single and later added a triple.

Carson Schulte had a double and a triple for the Gulls, in addition to driving in three runs.

Two Seaside pitchers walked 10 batters and gave up 11 hits.

In the second game, Seaside’s first four batters had base hits in the bottom of the first inning, which included a run-scoring single by Jacob Bassett and an RBI double by Dawson Blanchard to give the Gulls an early 4-2 lead.

Knappa answered with eight runs in the top of the

second inning, highlighted by run-scoring singles from Andrew Bryant, Ryker Coffey and Jason Miller, followed by a two-run double from Cruz.

Takalo and Michal Goodman both added RBI singles.

The only runs over the last five innings came on a three-run, inside-the-park homer by Miller, who finished with two hits and four RBIs.

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SCHEDULE

SPORTS SCHEDULE	
SATURDAY	
Baseball — Gresham Legion at Astoria Ford (2), Noon.	

SCOREBOARD

BASEBALL		
JUNIOR STATE		
Game 1		
Knappa 16, Seaside 5		
Knappa 307 24—16 11 0	Seaside 203 00—5 8 3	
D.Takalo and Cruz; Bassett, Schulte (5) and Landwehr. W: D. Takalo. L: Bassett. RBI: Kna, Cruz 4, Boettcher 4, Hunt 2, Bryant 2, Hoover; Sea, Schulte 3, Blanchard. 2B: Kna, Cruz, Miller; Sea, Schulte, Blanchard. 3B: Kna, Hoover. HR: Kna, Cruz. HBP: Sea, Bassett. LOB: Knappa 4, Seaside 5.		
Game 2		
Knappa 13, Seaside 5		

Knappa 283 000 0—13 12 2	Seaside 410 000 0—5 7 2	fey, M.Goodman; Sea, Bassett, Blanchard, Boyd, McFadden, Plampin. 2B: Kna, Cruz, Hoover; Sea, Blanchard. HR: Kna, Miller. HBP: Kna, E. Takalo, Green. LOB: Knappa 5, Seaside 6. DP: Knappa; Seaside.
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