

Port: ‘We’ve got to get an operator into this hotel’

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the suitors. He told Port commissioners he would want to be considered the front-runner for a long-term project if he enters a short-term agreement.

Port commissioners held a lengthy executive session after the presentations to discuss their options but made no public announcement Tuesday night.

In an understatement, Jim Knight, the Port’s executive director, had earlier described the Port’s search for a new operator for the Riverwalk Inn as “quite a wild experience.”

“We’ve got to get an operator into this hotel — somebody that the Port can trust — as fast as we can,” Knight told Port commissioners.

Shotgun approach

While his lease has been terminated, and the Port is desperate to evict him, Smithart and his staff are still operating the hotel. Kruparao Kancharla, whose family had agreed to take over management, backed out after seeing the finances. Among the uncertainties, according to Knight, are an unknown amount of pre-paid coupons for hotel stays that could extend into the six figures.

Rather than entertain competing proposals at public hearings over a period of weeks or months, the Port is left to make a decision by the eviction hearing Friday, a shotgun approach that leaves little time to fully vet the suitors.

Without an operator, the Port could have to run or shut down the hotel, exposing the Port to unforeseen financial and legal liabilities.

Budget hotel

Sonpatki, of Param Hotel Group in Portland, and his attorney told Port commissioners that the simplest — and fairest — option would be to turn the hotel over to him on Friday.

Sonpatki had a contract with Smithart to take over the hotel and the Port Commission had agreed in June to assign him the remainder of Smithart’s lease with the understanding he would retire Smithart’s debts. But the terms of the agreement were not finalized and Smithart’s lease has since been terminated.

Sonpatki has assured the Port he is ready to pay off \$400,000 worth of debts and operate the hotel immediately. He has said he would operate the inn as a budget hotel.

“I think, just to get down to brass tacks, that there is one operator in the room who checks all the boxes you need,” said Colin Hunter, a Portland attorney for Sonpatki.

Marina village

Orr, who emerged as a suitor for the Riverwalk Inn last week, and his partners are ready to commit at least \$350,000 to satisfy Smithart’s debts and over time invest \$2 million toward renovation.

Astoria Hospitality Ventures, which includes Chester Trabucco, the developer behind the Hotel Elliott, is also interested in a former restaurant, coffee shop and lounge as part of a broader marina village redevelopment project in Uniontown.

Orr’s wife, Sara Fulton Orr, is the sister of Port Commissioner Stephen Fulton, who recused himself from the special session Tuesday night because of a potential conflict of interest.

Orr explained that the partnership made a lease and investment proposal to the Port after it became clear that Smithart’s lease was terminated and the hotel was essentially up for grabs.

“We’re ready, willing and able to come in on Friday as well and continue to operate the facility,” Orr told Port commissioners.

Marriott

Hollander, who had spoken privately with the Port and Smithart and emerged publicly as a suitor over the past few days, said he has been interested in bringing a Marriott to Astoria and has looked at several potential locations.

He had been in talks with Trabucco about a property closer to downtown but, when he learned Trabucco was looking at the Riverwalk Inn for a project, he opted to make a pitch.

Hollander said he has the ability to drop a management team in as soon as Friday, but said the issue is more about whether there is any legal liability to his company or the Port.

He told Port commissioners he could invest anywhere from \$1.5 million to \$6 million in the Riverwalk Inn property. His interest, though, also extends to developing the 6 acres the Port owns in Uniontown.

“A big part of my interest is to really make sure that what’s done there is done right,” Hollander said. “And I have a track record of being able to do it right.”



Shelby Rasmussen, 12, works with her goat, Penelope, in the arena Tuesday. See more photos from the fair online at www.dailystorian.com.

Fair: Talent show starts today at 6:30 p.m.

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Her 247-pound breeder, Tweedledum, made it to the final round in her class Tuesday, receiving a blue ribbon.

“My pigs were going to have exotic names,” Klemp said, but they would have been difficult for pigs to understand. So she named her market pig Tweedledee. She has a third pig she won’t show at the fair.

Klemp’s mother, Melodi Klemp, has had other children participate in 4-H at the fair.

“She’s basically born into here,” Melodi Klemp said. “It’s really good for kids because they learn the circle of life.”

Community booths

The Clatsop County Sheriff’s Office was among many groups that came to the fair, such as the National Guard, the Reptile Man and the Clatsop County Firefighters Association. The sheriff’s office had many attractions for fairgoers, including raffles, stickers and a patrol car with lights flashing on display.

“It’s important to us that we be approachable to the community,” said Ryan Humphrey, a detective with the sheriff’s office. Humphrey said the fair provided a positive environment for them to engage with the community rather than a crisis situation.

Siscilee Gouge, a patrol officer, helped coordinate the booth’s presentation. She regularly carries items like stickers to give out while she’s on duty, taking time to demonstrate that she’s approachable.

Part of their booth involved education, including boat safety and children’s cyber safety. They provided a quiz with different app icons for parents to identify.

“We want parents to understand what kids are doing these days,” Humphrey said.

Deal days

Today is Seniors Day, so those 61 and older can get in for a dollar, according to the fair schedule. Today also features the Clatsop County Talent Show starting at 6:30 p.m.



From left, Kylie McMinn, Alex Thornton, Clarisse Coventry, and Lizzy Barnes ride the Go Gator mini roller coaster at the Clatsop County Fair’s carnival.



Ali Clark, 11, pets her lamb, Simon. Clark has raised Simon, a Suffolk Cross, for the past six months.



Ricky Moseley, from the BMX Freestyle Team, catches air during a performance.

on the main stage. Thursday is Buddy Day, so admission is free for the second person when the first pays

‘It’s really good for kids because they learn the circle of life.’

— Melodi Klemp
mother of 4-H participant,
speaking of the organization

full admission. On Thursday, fairgoers can buy an all-day carnival ride bracelet and get another for half price. The Tom Petty tribute band Petty Fever will play at 7:30 p.m. on the main stage.

Friday is Lum’s Appreciation Day. Teachers, police officers, firemen, military and their families get in for a dollar each.

Saturday features the 4-H fashion show on the main stage at noon as well as Journey tribute band Touch’n, Love’n, Squeeze’n at 7:30 p.m., also on the main stage.

Regular admission is \$6 for adults, \$3 for seniors (62 and older) and children (6 to 12 years old) and children younger than 6 get in free.

For the full fair schedule and more, visit the fair’s website at www.clatsopfairgrounds.com

Warrenton: ‘(Let’s) give the pantry some assistance’

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Ultimately, the city chose to fund the North Coast Christian School because the fence serves a nonreligious purpose. Meanwhile, the Warrenton Christian Church withdrew its request for funding after learning the money would come from the city.

For the food pantry, however, City Attorney Harold Snow suggested that going

through a religiously neutral organization would remove the tinge of improper spending.

Fritsch said that using Clatsop Community Action as a go-between is a “comfortable way for everybody to move forward with this and still get the pantry some help.”



Kurt Fritsch

Because Clatsop Community Action supports North Coast food pantries and acts as a kind of administrator for them, “it’s the logical place to put (the grant money),” Commissioner Henry Balensifer said. He added that the organization can hold the

Warrenton Food Bank Pantry accountable for how it spends the money.

In addition, Mayor Mark Kujala said that Clatsop Community Action is willing to connect the pantry with state programs, like Oregon Food Bank, that can help provide extra funds.

“I think this is going to be a great resource,” Kujala said. “(Let’s) give the pantry some assistance.”

he said, adding that Crater was helpful as his company pursued various permits, but that things hit a bump, seemingly with the mayor, when Shurleff applied for a bed and breakfast permit, Shurleff continued.

hearing stories and gossip that’s going in the community,” Shurleff said, “and I just want to know, from the mayor, if he’s got an issue with us.”

Cassinelli shook his head as Shurleff continued.

“I’m not trying to point any fingers at anybody, you know,”

with us, or you’re targeting us, I’d really like to get it over with and done, sir, because we want to be in business here in Ilwaco. But nobody in Ilwaco seems to want us here. We spent a lot of money here and I just want it over and I want a ‘Welcome, thank you for com-

ing to Ilwaco, thank you for spending a bunch of money here and we really want you to be successful and have a long business here.’ ... We just want to be legal, we want to be in business and we want to have a good time here and we can’t do it if we keep on being ha-

arrassed and I think we’re being harassed right now.”

Outside of the meeting, the other business owners agreed with the spirit of Shurleff’s statements, saying they felt Ilwaco’s leadership was not open to development and change.



Joshua Bessex/The Daily Astorian
The Astoria Riverwalk Inn as seen from the West End Mooring Basin.

Ilwaco: ‘... Nobody in Ilwaco seems to want us here’

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building on Howerton built and remodeled, and to launch the various businesses that exist there now.

“I think we’re pretty good where we’re at right now except for one thing: I just keep