

# Port seals short-term deal on inn

Former Astorians emerge in latest twist in Riverwalk Inn negotiations

By EDWARD STRATTON  
*The Daily Astorian*

The Port of Astoria Commission voted Tuesday night to have Astoria Hospitality Ventures, represented by William Orr and Chester Trabucco, take over short-term operation of the Astoria Riverwalk Inn.

Orr is a Seattle businessman and lawyer from Astoria.

Trabucco bought and fixed up the Hotel Elliott, before selling it amid foreclosure to a business partner. He also owns Nos. 1 and 10 Sixth St., where a large commercial waterfront building of his burned down several years ago.

It is unclear what short-term means in the hotel's operation. While Astoria Hospitality Ventures steps in, Port staff will develop an open

bidding process for the long-term operation.

It is also unclear how the Port plans to recover the debts owed by Brad Smithart, operator of the Riverwalk Inn through his company Hospitality Masters since March 2012. Orr had set aside \$350,000 in escrow account to satisfy the debts, but later withdrew the funds when it appeared the Port would go with another operator.

The Port estimates Smithart owes the Port upward of \$400,000 in rent and rev-

enue-sharing, along with approximately \$100,000 owed to the city and \$16,000 in delinquent water bills. The Port's lawyer, Robert Koury, said the state is also seeking \$120,000 from Smithart for failure to pay worker's compensation. Smithart also has tax liens.

Smithart, at the meeting Tuesday, said he paid the water bills and brought his bill with the city down to \$98,000.



Joshua Bessex/The Daily Astorian

See PORT, Page 12A Chester Trabucco speaks during an August Port meeting.



Cheryl Hoeffer/The Eagle

The sun is nearly blocked and the covered wagon east of Prairie City silhouetted as dark smoke from the Canyon Creek Complex fire across the valley fills the late afternoon sky on Aug. 26. Prairie City went under attack itself over the weekend.

## 'You could feel the heat of the fire and smell the smoke'

By SEAN ELLIS and  
NANCY McCARTHY  
*Blue Mountain Eagle*

**P**RAIRIE CITY — After watching a raging wildfire consume their neighbors' properties to the south and west of them for two weeks, Prairie City residents experienced their own trial by fire last weekend.

It took only a switch in wind direction for the fire to turn onto the ridge just above the town, the flames so brilliant against the night sky that the buildings below glowed in the fiery light.

Streets filled with smoke. Sirens scared residents out of bed. Half the town received orders to evacuate immediately; the other half was told to prepare for evacuation any minute.

In the smoky haze, headlights appeared as a convoy of trucks and cars, filled with prized possessions and random household goods quickly thrown into trunks, began moving west, down the highway. Meanwhile, hundreds of fire-



Sean Ellis/The Eagle

An information board was set up to update residents and the media during the evacuation in Prairie City Saturday.

fighters headed east toward the fire. The fight to save Prairie City was on. Here is that story, hour by hour:

**Friday, Aug. 28**  
5:30 p.m.: During a community

briefing in Prairie City, fire officials alert residents about the incoming high winds and the potential for the fire to change direction.

**Saturday, Aug. 29**  
2:30 a.m.: Winds begin to pick

up, fanning the Canyon Creek Complex fire.

Prairie City Fire Chief Marvin Rynearson is in bed when he hears the wind.

"The hair stood up on the back of my neck," he said.

He spends the next few hours on his porch, watching. Concerned residents and firefighters on the front line update him on the fire's movement.

**4:42 a.m.:** The operations section chief of the Great Basin Incident Management Team is notified by the night operations division supervisor that fire activity has increased significantly due to the high winds. The message goes up the chain of command quickly.

Resources are reassigned from other parts of the fire and begin shifting toward Prairie City.

That includes 11 dozers, two skidgers, multiple water tenders, supervisors and medics. Three hotshot crews and six hand crews from adjacent divisions are shifted

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## Judge accepts ruling on LNG

Magistrate had found in favor of Army Corps

By DERRICK DePLEDGE  
*The Daily Astorian*

A federal judge in Portland has accepted a magistrate's findings that Oregon LNG waited too long to contest an Army Corps of Engineers easement on land in Warrenton where the energy company hopes to build an export terminal.

U.S. District Judge Anna Brown on Monday adopted Magistrate Judge John Acosta's findings and granted the Army Corps' motion to dismiss Oregon LNG's legal challenge.

Oregon LNG could choose to appeal.

Jonathan Radmacher, a Portland attorney for the energy company, said the company has filed a motion to amend the complaint against the Army Corps but does not otherwise comment on litigation matters.

### Ammunition for opponents

Opponents of the \$6 billion terminal and pipeline will use the federal court's ruling to strengthen their arguments at a hearing Wednesday evening in Warrenton on development permits for the project.

The city's planning staff will recommend approval of the project with public works- and traffic-related conditions, but opponents will argue, among other points, that Oregon LNG does not have full access to the proposed terminal site on the Skipanon Peninsula because of the Army Corps easement.

"The city should deny the Oregon LNG project because Oregon LNG simply doesn't have authorization from the Corps to use the area for an LNG terminal," Dan Serres, the conservation director of Columbia Riverkeeper, a Hood River-based environmental group, said in an email. "The Corps holds a significant property right — a dredge disposal easement — on the east Skipanon Peninsula, and a federal judge threw out Oregon LNG's attempt to void the Corps' valid property right."

"According to Warrenton's code, Oregon LNG shouldn't even be able to make this land use application without authorization from the Corps."

"It's like proposing a home in the middle of a city street," Serres said. "It just doesn't make sense, particularly when a federal judge just issued an order dismissing Oregon LNG's case."

### Contested claims

Oregon LNG wants to build the terminal and an 87-mile pipeline to a natural gas line in Washington state.

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## In an emergency, look for the yellow signs

Goal is quicker emergency responses

By DANI PALMER  
*EO Media Group*

**CANNON BEACH** — A new, bright yellow sign stands in front of homes on Chapman Beach. The sign is part of an Oregon Parks and Recreation Department beach safety project, meant to speed emergency response. The signs are new to Sgt. Matt Phillips, Search and Rescue coordinator for the Clatsop County Sheriff's Office.

But he's no stranger to the guessing game.

"I do know from experience that people, especially from out of the area, have a hard time relaying information to responders," Phillips said.

The state's Park and Recreation



Courtesy of Oregon State Parks

Oregon State Parks is installing numbered signs along the length of the Oregon Coast to help beach visitors tell emergency responders where to send help.

Department began installing the signs at state, federal and county beach access points from the Columbia River jetty to Crissey Field at the California border in 2008. The first was placed in Lincoln City and Devil's Lake. The signs are designed to

be easily seen by beachgoers in emergencies, so they can relay the number to 911 dispatchers who will have the GPS coordinates needed to direct first responders.

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