

CHIEFS: Clatsop County police departments participate in talk

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“Cops and Community: A Local Perspective,” a discussion Thursday night at the Judge Guy Boyington Building in Astoria, featured a panel of local police chiefs: Cannon Beach’s Jason Schermerhorn, Seaside’s Dave Ham, Warrenton’s Matt Workman and Astoria’s Brad Johnston.

Astoria City Councilor Drew Herzig moderated the discussion, asking the chiefs to talk about “community policing” and what programs or policies they’ve implemented to improve interactions with the community. He asked them to describe the challenges they face in their distinct communities.

Though Clatsop County police departments have not recently been involved in any racially-charged cases like the high-profile ones seen elsewhere in the nation, this summer, a Clatskanie police officer filed a complaint against Clatskanie police chief Marvin Hoover after Hoover allegedly made racist statements while being debriefed on the arrest of woman who had said she was being discriminated against. According to the officer, Hoover — who has since retired — compared black people to monkeys, sang “Dixie” and made monkey noises.

This incident and other more distant events reverberated in the questions members of the audience asked Thursday night.

Diversity

Astoria residents Andrew Marshall and Gladys Klingerman, the only two people of color present at the talk, asked about the level of diversity at the various police departments. The chiefs admitted that none of their departments are particularly diverse. In all the departments combined, there are only a handful of women, Hispanic or Latino officers employed and no black officers.

Marshall, who has lived in the area since the late 1970s, pointed out that the county’s demographics are changing rapidly. He and Klingerman asked about ongoing diversity training at the departments.

The chiefs said diversity in their departments remains a challenge. In small, rural departments where there are few chances for promotion, it can be hard to attract a wide range of good candidates, they said.

As the definition of what



Katie Wilson/The Daily Astorian

Audience members including Andrew Marshall, left, Gladys Klingerman, center, and David Klingerman, right, listen during the beginning of the Lower Columbia Diversity Project’s “Cops and Community: A Local Perspective” discussion.

makes for good police work evolves, however, they have changed how they interview potential officer candidates, Ham said. His department, as well as the other departments, now try to zero in on a candidate’s core, asking how a candidate makes ethical decisions and examples of when the candidate has made such decisions.

The answers, Ham said, are deeply revealing.

In some cases, based on these answers, they haven’t hired someone who, otherwise, earned high scores on the other tests the departments use to single out strong candidates, tests the departments used to rely on heavily.

And though diversity training is important, Johnston and Workman pointed out that, as social concerns go, the question of how to best deal with mental health issues tops the list here, not racism. There are next to no beds available for people who are experiencing a mental health crisis and need a safe place to go, the chiefs said. There are few local resources that officers can easily tap when they have questions or concerns while out policing or when emergency situations arise.

Community policing

Community policing is not a new concept on the coast, said Schermerhorn. It is something all the departments currently do, and have done for some time, to varying extents. This work goes beyond simply keeping the peace. It can look like funding a school resource officer who spends his or her time working with students; it can look like holding community picnics, giving neighborhood residents a chance to voice concerns in an informal setting. It often looks like

getting out into the neighborhoods, getting to know people, being a trusted member of the community.

Many times it is about forging partnerships with other groups or agencies that are better equipped to deal with the underlying issues like mental illness, substance abuse and family strife, the chiefs said. While local police might be the ones who respond first to a domestic violence call, strong partnerships with The Harbor, an organization that helps victims of domestic violence and sexual abuse, mean advocates trained to get victims the legal help and personal counseling they need are often present, too.

“In small cities like these, you really have to rely on one another and we currently do every day of the week,” Schermerhorn said.

Clatsop County law enforcement is in a good place in many ways, the chiefs said.

“We do have these — decades-long in some places — connections with our community,” Johnston said.

But challenges remain. All the police departments are small and many struggle for adequate funding. In recent years, most have had to drop the school resource officer position, losing out on those face-to-face opportunities with kids in the schools.

Also, officers often show up in the middle of what has likely been a long-term problem. By forging strong relationships with community partners, police can be instrumental in solving some of these long-term problems, but ultimately, the chiefs said, this is the community’s work.

These days, Johnston said, police have to be everything to all people. But often, he added, “We’re just Band-Aids.”

WIND: ‘Project located directly in prime shrimp and rockfish areas’

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“It doesn’t sound like there’s room for discussion at this point,” Chambers said. “That may change. But at this point, it sounds like we have to find a way to pay for this.”

Located in prime shrimp and rockfish areas

In written testimony on the bill to fund WindFloat Pacific earlier this year, the Southern Oregon Ocean Resource Coalition said Principle Power initially worked with the fishing industry to identify a location for the wind project. After the company received federal preliminary approval for a larger footprint, Principle Power moved the project site north within that area.

“The project is now located directly in prime shrimp and rockfish fishing areas utilized by several small businesses in Charleston,” the coalition wrote. “This action displaces traditional fishermen.” The project could also take over some of the area used by a fishing fleet whose members are based in Newport, Astoria and Seattle.

The pilot project was originally supposed to generate 30 megawatts of power, enough to serve 7,000 to 8,000 homes, according to news reports. However, Principle Power decided over the summer to downscale the project to at most 24 megawatts.

Under the terms of a \$46.7 million grant from the U.S. Department of Energy, Principle Power was supposed to have long-term agreements from Oregon utilities to purchase power from the project by July, company vice president Kevin Banister said during a legislative hearing in April. However, Banister said federal energy officials recognized the timeline was ag-

gressive and would allow the company to retain the grant if it could demonstrate in some other way that Oregon is willing to pay for the project. Principle Power is working on the Oregon project with Deepwater Wind, the company building the first offshore wind project in the nation off the coast of Rhode Island.

‘Thinking of the fishing fleets’

State Rep. David Gomberg, D-Otis, attended part of the committee meeting at the Oregon Department of Transportation building in Salem.

“As we explore these new opportunities, we need to make sure we’re doing what we can to explore existing industries and minimizing potential conflicts there,” Gomberg said. “I’m thinking of the fishing fleets.”

Gomberg said the committee did not discuss the impact to fishermen while he was at the meeting.

The chairwoman of the governor’s committee, Rep. Caddy McKeown, D-Coos Bay, did not respond to a request for comment. Banister, the Principle Power executive who is also a member of the committee, also did not respond to a request for comment.

Sen. Betsy Johnson, D-Scappoose, is a member of the committee and said basic questions remained unanswered at the first meeting.

“If there’s a power purchase agreement, the question still remains: at what cost, to whom?”

Could tap Port of Astoria

Chambers said when

House Bill 2216, sponsored by Sen. Arnie Roblan, D-Coos Bay, and Rep. Caddy McKeown, D-Coos Bay, was in the Legislature earlier this year, Chambers heard the tariff to subsidize the WindFloat project might have added as little as 35 cents a month to a residential ratepayer’s monthly bill. The

cost would be more of an issue for businesses that use large amounts of power.

One way Principle Power could try to sweeten the deal in Johnson’s district would be to handle part of the assembly for the project in her district, at the Port of Astoria.

Mike Weston, director of business development and operations at the Port, said Principle Power approached the port four or five months ago to discuss possibly completing final assembly of the wind turbine structures in Astoria. The structures would be too tall to assemble in Coos Bay, because of the bridge that crosses the bay. “There’s no guarantee it’s going to happen,” Weston said. “For us, it’s kind of hypothetical at this point. It seems like a great concept, though.”

It is unclear when the committee will hold its next meeting. Although Brown’s office initially planned to keep the committee meetings private, the first meeting was packed, with some people even sitting on the floor. Spokesman Chris Pair said last week that future meetings will be open to the public.

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Betsy Johnson

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