

# Gearhart: Tax could bring city more than \$176,000 per year

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The city is budgeted to receive about \$200,000 in lodging taxes from hotels and condominiums, based on a 7 percent per night lodging tax.

Of the city's 1,200 homes with water connections, more than 80 are used for short-term rentals. Thirty-five of those allow occupancy of 10 or more, he said, adding that those may be the same homes listed on different online sites. "We're probably looking at about 82 homes," Sweet said.

Some companies charge a fee or collect a percentage of rental income.

The number of visitors in each home varies. In some cases, homes with four bedrooms house 17 people. "Some homes in Gearhart were designed that way," Sweet said.

Sweet estimated an average short-term rental occupancy rate of 25 percent during the summer season, or one night out of four, totaling about 7,200 nights overall. At an average daily rate of between \$300 and \$350 a night, potential yearly estimated revenue coming



R.J. Marx/The Daily Astorian

Susan Lorain, Daniel Jesse, Kerry Smith, Dianne Widdop and Paulina Cockrum discuss a potential vacation rental ordinance in Gearhart.

in to Gearhart and the homeowners of Gearhart is \$2.5 million.

The city does not regulate or tax short-term rentals, Sweet said.

If Gearhart adopted a tax

on short-term rentals at the prevailing lodging rate of 7 percent, city revenue could exceed \$176,000 per year.

"I was conservative on all those numbers," Sweet said. "Just to hedge our bets."

## Polling the public

The city manager provided options from "do nothing" to "full restrictions" if regulation should be considered.

Councilors agreed to a data-gathering phase either

conducted through an insert in water bills or a separate postcard.

City Councilor Paulina Cockrum agreed establishing goals was the first step. "We don't want to go off in

the wrong direction," she said. "I'm totally open to the end point, but we need a data-gathering phase to lay out what this is."

She proposed a work phase, voter referendum, implementation phase, monitoring and accountability. "There are a lot of steps we'll have to work through, no matter what," Cockrum said.

Councilors established a timeline to develop a questionnaire on short-term rentals, with a prototype to be delivered to Sweet and presented at the next City Council meeting Nov. 4. The survey would be sent to homeowners either as an insert in water bills, as a postcard or online.

After the survey results are tallied, Sweet said, "You can make a decision — or not — at that point to move on."

"The longer we wait to do anything, the harder it will be to enact something," Jesse said.

Widdop said Gearhart is changing. "And in some ways it's better, and in some ways it's worse," she said.

"We need to keep this a wonderful place to live. There is no doubt: we need regulations."

## Todd: She will celebrate five years of sobriety in March

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But after years of working the floor and tending the bar, the 55-year-old mother of Meat Bingo prefers to let her four staff members run the show.

"At this stage of the game, my job is to be the owner," said Todd, who lives in an apartment above the bar that began as a workers' cafe in 1924. "I used to have to be in charge of everything. Now I'm just in charge of myself."

Though she and her late husband, Richard Todd, lost the lease in the mid-1990s, she bought it back a couple of years later and worked many an 18-hour day to restore its reputation. In her final feat of labor as a one-woman show, Mary Todd was down on the men's room floor, scrubbing the linoleum tiles with Comet, while crying and wondering why she "owned this f---r again."

"Nobody's worked that bar as hard as I have," she said. "Never."

## In too deep

Todd is a familiar face in the local drug-and-alcohol rehabilitation community. On March 6, she will celebrate five years of hard-earned sobriety.

A functioning alcoholic since her teens, Todd became depressed and, in her words, "got weak when I empty-nested" roughly seven years ago. "That's when I couldn't function anymore."

"I've basically been a pretty strong person all my life," she said. "And then I got in so deep that I couldn't help myself."

"I woke up one day. It was sh---y out. Cold. Typical Astoria winter weather. And I said, 'I think I'm going to get drunk today,'" she recalled. "And I drank that first year. Every day, functioned — and said, 'I think I have a problem.'"

That was year one. Year two, she said, "almost killed me."

Her kids tried to get her into dozens of treatment centers. But, though she desperately wanted help, she didn't have the right insurance and thousands of dollars for treatment.

In the last three months of her two-year bender, Todd found herself falling down the stairs, shaking, drinking to settle down, vomiting, then drinking again. Finally, her father gave her the money to detox at Astoria Pointe and undergo rehab at The Rosebriar.

"I was heading for my grave," she said. "I couldn't have continued to live like

that for two more weeks. Nobody could."

## Recovery

While Todd received treatment, her close friends kept the bar running.

"The two years that I drank, I ran off a lot of people. But they're all back now," she said. "I wouldn't make it without my regulars. God bless my regulars. Good folk."

Now she attends Alcoholics Anonymous meetings almost every day — sometimes three meetings a day — throughout Astoria and Warrenton.

"AA kind of wants to stay out of the spotlight, but, boy, it sure saved my life," she said. "It works if you want it to work."

If recovering addicts stick together, their chances of overcoming their addiction greatly increase, she said.

"I'm big into helping other alcoholics, and if I can do it, they can do it," she said.

Before her recovery, there were two words Todd never used: grateful and serenity. Now those words are a big part of her vocabulary.

For her upcoming Christmas gift to her four children — all of whom are college graduates, and most have families of their own — she hopes to finally quit smoking. On the day of this interview, Todd, who had smoked for 42 years, had gone 34 straight days without a cigarette.

"Truly, I did not think I'd be able to do it," she said, showing off the low-dose nicotine patch on her arm. "I haven't killed anybody. I've only gained about seven pounds."

## 'I'm still here'

A lifelong Astoria resident whose mother hails from Hawaii, Todd may own a successful business, but, the way she tells it, "I'm a terrible businesswoman. I run it with my heart. Always have. But, ya know, I'm still here for some reason."

Mary Todd's Workers Bar & Grill regularly raises thousands of dollars for the Toys for Tots Foundation and offers free dinners on Thanksgiving and Christmas. Word of the bar — which staged a 25th anniversary luau in the beer garden during Labor Day weekend — has spread to many outlying areas. People from Portland pass through and want to get their picture taken with the humble owner.

"I'm proud of it after all these years," she said. "I've been so pissed off and hated owning it. But, at this point, I'm proud of it."

— Erick Bengel

## Johnson: State senator wants to make sure agencies are sticking to budgets approved by the Legislature

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the project was on track, and Sen. Brian Boquist, R-Dallas, in January asked a state official to testify under oath on the exchange.

Johnson wants the committee to check whether agencies are sticking to budgets approved by the Legislature and spending money for the purposes it was appropriated.

"I don't think that we do nearly as rigorous a job as we should in tracking where those dollars go and how they're spent," Johnson said.

## Follow up on state audits

The committee could also follow up when agencies fail to implement suggestions by state auditors. For example, employees at the Department of Administrative Services, which houses the state data center, failed to fix security problems at the data center despite repeated

warnings by auditors dating back to 2006.

"This committee on accountability would be in demanding agencies' conformance to management letters, if there were letters of improvement that were issued with an audit that called out deficiencies at an agency," Johnson said.

One aspect of the proposal that could generate opposition is Johnson's preference to split membership 50-50 between Democrats and Republicans.

Another sticking point could be the cost. Although Johnson has not proposed a specific budget for the committee, she said, "I would give them access to lawyers, I would give them access to an audit function."

## Fiscal office short-staffed

The Legislature already has nonpartisan staff lawyers, budget staff and economists to forecast revenue and

other impacts of legislation and policy.

The Legislative Fiscal Office, which works on budgets, is already short-staffed, Johnson said.

"The fact of the matter is that I think there are too few people in legislative fiscal for the work that they're doing, and the amount of complexity that now is out there in agency land," Johnson said. "And by complexity, I mean information technology projects."

In addition, Johnson would hand the committee decision-making authority over what state programs to audit, which would mean taking control away from the secretary of state.

"I would let them, rather than a partisan secretary of state, make the decision about where and how audits would occur," Johnson said.

Molly Woon, a spokeswoman for the Secretary of State's Office, declined to comment.

Johnson said her proposal was not intended as a criticism of the secretary of state's audits staff, whom she described as "very capable professionals."

"But somebody is making a policy decision about where those audits ought to dig into," Johnson said, and she believes lawmakers ought to make that call.

Although legislative leaders could create an accountability committee without legislation, it would last only as long as lawmakers supported it.

"I would like (the accountability committee) embedded in statute so it cannot be revoked at the whim of a presiding officer," Johnson said.

If the bill lacks momentum in the short session next year, Johnson said she will reintroduce it in 2017.

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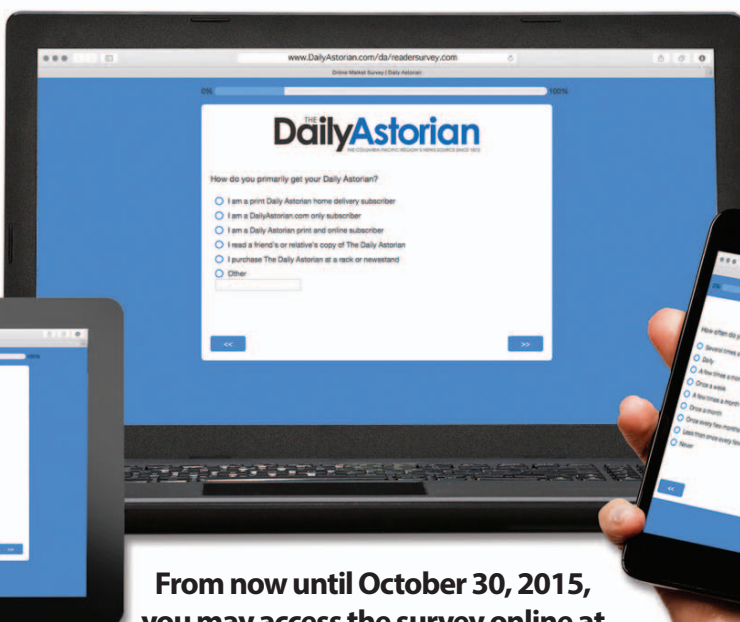
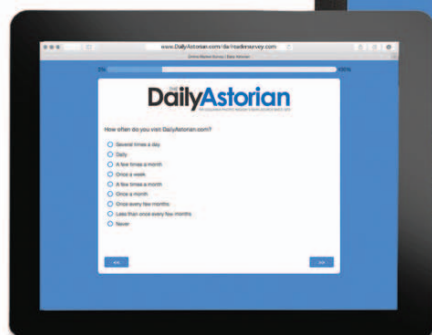


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