

Signs: 'Astoria really is different'

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INTERSECTIONS

The city may install new signs and improve roadway striping at several intersections that some drivers find confusing. The first eight intersections on the list have signs that read "Stop," and, underneath, "Right Turn Permitted Without Stopping."

- Niagara Avenue/Seventh Street
- Niagara/Eighth Street
- Niagara/15th Street
- Jerome Avenue/14th Street
- Jerome/15th Street
- Irving Avenue/11th Street
- Harrison Avenue/33rd Street
- Highway 202/Seventh Street
- Jerome/16th Street
- Irving/Eighth Street

Engineers are proposing a new "Stop" sign that would direct downhill drivers on Eighth to brake. The city would also place a "Traffic From Right Does Not Stop" sign to make it even clearer for downhill drivers on Eighth, as well as advance warning signs for drivers coming from other directions.

The Eighth and Irving intersection is often cited as the worst example of traffic confusion, yet, according to crash data from the state Department of Transportation, there was just one crash there between 2009 and 2014.

Staying with traffic flow

Drivers have had more trouble navigating the dual signs up the hill at Eighth and Niagara Avenue and Seventh Street and Niagara, where there were nine crashes over five years, a collision frequency still considered normal. The city would swap in the new "Except Right Turn" signs under the stop signs and add striping on Niagara between Eighth and Seventh to help drivers stay with traffic flow.

Other options, such as simply ditching the dual signs and making drivers stop, would cause traffic delays or potential problems on steep hills in icy conditions.

"We thought this was the best combo of all the options," said Chris Maciejewski of DKS Associates, a Portland transportation consultant for the city.

Some on the Traffic Safety Advisory Committee — which is made up of the Planning Commission — wondered why changes are necessary, given that the crash data suggests most drivers are not confused by the intersections.

"Astoria really is dif-

ferent," Commissioner Jan Mitchell said. "I used to be a planner and I would love to take the traffic engineer I worked with around Astoria.

"But it works. It works for the bulk of us."

Greater enforcement

The committee voted 6-1 to recommend the improvements to the City Council. Commissioner Sean Fitzpatrick voted against the recommendations, explaining that he would prefer existing traffic rules be enforced.

Fitzpatrick disagreed with the sentiment on the City Council that traffic fines have a disproportionate impact on low-income residents. In May, the council rejected an idea by the Astoria Police Department to raise money for police training by having Municipal Court impose new fees on traffic violations and misdemeanor crimes.

"I would like to see more officers and more traffic enforcement and more tickets written," Fitzpatrick said. "And there has been discussion from certain city councilmembers that that would be unfair to people of lower income."

A car turns right at the intersection of Eighth Street and Niagara Avenue, where a sign permits drivers to turn right without stopping. Some drivers have reported the dual signs are confusing.

Joshua Bessex
The Daily Astorian



Joshua Bessex/The Daily Astorian

A view of one of the storefronts in the M&N Building. See more photos of the building online at www.dailyastorian.com

Properties: 'Whoever sinks money into this building is going to be sinking a lot of money into this building.'

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"I've racked my brain to figure out who in town would come take it, who would come use it. It's just going to require so much money to do that," Bensel said, admiring the old-growth 2-by-16 crossbeam structures holding the ground floor up, but taking issue with a foundational post he said has probably sunk about a foot. Bensel said, considering the cost of fixing the building up, it would probably take corporate money to get the job done.

Buyer beware

The condition of the building, and the lack of a willing seller in the Flavel family, have long kept interested buyers at bay.

During a walk-through in 2002, Goodenberger said the building would need new steel I-beams, pilings with a wider footing to buttress the sinking foundation and work to reattach the cracked brick facade. He estimated back then at least \$75,000 was needed to make the fixes.

"Everything goes up in price," Goodenberger said Tuesday of the ever-increasing costs of renovation, not hazarding a guess.

The building is listed historic, making it eligible for tax credits and a freeze in the assessed value for up to 10 years. As a historic land-



Joshua Bessex/The Daily Astorian

An upstairs room in the former hardware store in the M&N Building.

mark, the building can also avoid some modern building standards.

This isn't the first time one of the Flavel buildings has been auctioned off.

Local logger, trucker and property magnate Jim Neikes bought both of the downtown Flavel properties at auction in 2004 with a winning bid of \$50,000. But siblings Mary Louise and Harry Flavel exercised their buyback rights in the eleventh hour, paying off Neikes and back-due property taxes and taking the

buildings back.

Harry Flavel has sinned, and Goodenberger said Mary Louise Flavel supports selling the building so she can invest in her building across the street.

Goodenberger said the M&N Building is in a great location and could work well as a workspace, with more

artists being priced out of urban centers like Portland and moving to Astoria.

But whatever it becomes, he said, it would need to be mixed-use and create enough revenue to justify any renovation. "Whoever sinks money into this building is going to be sinking a lot of money into this building."

Pot: Warrenton voters approved drug in November

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Developments, a proposed medical marijuana dispensary, a license to operate a business out of an old house on the west side.

"They're grandfathered in at this point because they're a legal entity," City Manager Kurt Fritsch said.

However, CBDB — which hasn't yet moved into its location — cannot convert its operation into a marijuana retail outlet; a city ordinance passed last summer prohibits dispensaries from selling retail product in the same storefront.

Warrenton voters approved the recreational sale of the drug in November 2014, and the City Commission is working to respect the will of the people and "doing our best to deal with an activity that we don't support," Commissioner Rick Newton said.

On Nov. 10, the commission will hold the second and final reading of the new ordinance, which would go into effect 30 days later.

Under state law, dispensaries became legally allowed to sell recreational marijuana Oct. 1. The Oregon Liquor Control Commission will start accepting applications for growers, wholesalers, processors and retail outlets in January.

'Gateway' drug

Paul Mitchell, a planning commissioner who helped brainstorm the ordinance, chided the City Commission for not passing it sooner,



Henry Balensifer



Tom Dyer



Kurt Fritsch



Paul Mitchell



Rick Newton

thereby giving CBDB a five-month window — after the city's one-year moratorium on dispensaries expired in May — to get permitted west of the highway.

"In that time frame, a business was allowed to come forward and sort of fit itself into an area that really is a gateway for our community," said Mitchell, who said he supports the ordinance.

Fritsch acknowledged that the earliest discussions of siting marijuana businesses east of the highway occurred before CBDB applied for a business license. However, the owner had inquired for some time about setting up a dispensary and "wasn't someone who snuck in and tried to beat the ordinance," he said.

"I'd like to apologize that we didn't catch this sooner," Commissioner Tom Dyer said, adding that he, too, doesn't like the idea of a west-side dispensary. "I think we kind of dropped the ball on it."

Commissioner Henry Balensifer said some of his constituents are concerned that future marijuana busi-

nesses will erect extravagant signage along the highway, broadcasting the drug's presence in the community.

"I think we're kind of hamstrung, because they do have the right to do their advertising," Dyer responded. But such businesses, he added, will have an incentive to blend into the city's environment to maintain goodwill among consumers: "They're going to get less criticism if they don't have it right in your face, but you can't make them not do it."

"I think most of them just want to make money," he continued, "and they're going to make money no matter where it's sold because that's just the nature of that particular business."

Balensifer floated the idea of expanding marijuana businesses' setbacks from the highway. Mayor Mark Kujala, however, was leery of adding more regulations.

"We've tried to designate a certain area in town for these type of businesses. I think we've done that," Kujala said. "I don't know how far I want to go trying to limit that even further."

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