

## Smithart: City, Port have other recourses

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Smithart, who still runs the Arc Arcade in downtown Astoria, owes the city more than \$100,000, which he said he still intends to pay back. He owes more than \$300,000 to the Port, which he says didn't allow him to pay the debt back through a lease transfer. Multiple parties had approached Smithart about buying him out of the hotel and paying some or all of his debts.

The Port Commission voted in June to allow Smithart to transfer his lease to the Param Hotel Group. The Portland budget hotel company had been trying to buy him out of the hotel for more than a year. But the transfer never happened, and the Port instead terminated Smithart's lease in July and kept him on as an interim operator while finding a short-term alternative. In September, the Port Commission voted to install Astoria Hospitality Ventures, headed by Chester Trabucco and William Orr, while it creates a request for proposals for a long-term operator.

Smithart signed an agreement with Hospitality Ventures that provided him \$20,000 for a smooth transition. The agreement also stipulates that if Hospitality Ventures gets a lease of at least seven years on the hotel, it will pay the city up to \$100,000. Trabucco said last month the deal still stands.

### A litigious atmosphere

Marquis said the city and Port have other recourses, such as taking Smithart to civil court.

But it's unclear whether the Port or city could recover

any losses from Smithart, who has said he has little invested in the arcade and has taken a second job to make ends meet. Smithart has said he is also contemplating litigation, contending he walked away from his investment in the hotel and ultimately suffered bigger losses than the Port.

City Attorney Blair Henningsgaard could not immediately be reached for comment.

Port Commissioner Stephen Fulton offhandedly mentioned during a November budget meeting the Port's intent to sue Smithart. Executive Director Jim Knight said he didn't know where Fulton got that notion. Knight said the Port is exploring the timeline and costs associated with suing Smithart.

"I'm hesitant to move forward with that until we get some resolution about the current operator of the Riverwalk Inn," Knight said, adding Param's recent lawsuit against the Port, himself, Orr and Trabucco also throws a wrench into any potential action against Smithart.

Param alleges the Port broke the agreement to transfer the lease without any explanation and showed bias toward Hospitality Ventures and Orr, who is Fulton's brother-in-law.

Neither the Port, Orr nor Trabucco have responded to Param's lawsuit, filed in November. On Dec. 21, the company's lawyer, Colin Hunter, filed a notice of intent to apply for an order of default against the Port and Knight if they did not respond to the suit within 10 days of being served. An order of default means a defendant loses a case by not participating.

## West End: Home to several businesses

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"I also thought perhaps this is the time we should be looking at the Chinook Building," Executive Director Jim Knight said at the meeting, cautioning Port commissioners to take a more comprehensive look at the properties around the marina. "It's kind of the twin to the restaurant."

### Motley crew

The Port in 2009 spent \$28,000 on a quick facelift for the Chinook Building, which had emptied out because of myriad infrastructural issues. Once the building was complete, it attracted a motley collection of offices for tax consultants, real estate brokers and fishing charter companies.

Since moving in six years ago, Northwest Wild Products has been a star attraction of the Chinook Building. The seafood market slings fresh, frozen, smoked and fried seafood, along with exotic imported meats, out of a tight corridor facing the docks of the West End Mooring Basin.

Amanda Cordero, a co-owner of the shop with Ron Neva, said they like the ample parking and the view, sentiments shared by other first-floor office tenants just hoping their status in the building doesn't change.

"In general, we like the Port as landlords," she said, adding there have been issues with the billing.

When the agency was particularly short-staffed before the arrival of Knight, tenants complained of being billed late or for the wrong amount. One longtime tenant, Tiki Charters run by Richard Olson, left in part because of the issues. But Cordero said the billing has since started coming out on time and accurately.



Photos by Joshua Bessex/The Daily Astorian

The former Seafare Restaurant building is vacant but has drawn interest from several unnamed parties.



In 2012, the Astoria Yacht Club moved into the upper floor of the Chinook Building.

Cordero and Neva said business has been brisk, despite customers often having trouble trying to find the store, overlooking the marina but hidden from the street. They said a sign facing the street or on the highway could double their business.

"I think a restaurant would be great," Cordero said of the Port's efforts to resurrect the Seafare. She and Neva have approached the Port Commission about building a covered

crab-cooking area next to the Chinook Building, available to the public.

"We'd like to have a restaurant here," Cordero said. "We get a ton of calls from people thinking we're a restaurant. We're the only place in Astoria where you can get a crab dinner."

### Yacht Club

In 2012, the Astoria Yacht Club relocated from the city of

Astoria's former Yacht Club Building to the upstairs of the Chinook Building. The club has another 1 1/2 years left, with an option for five more.

Tom Brownson, a representative for the yacht club at the last Port meeting, said the members put a lot of time into fixing up their formerly dilapidated suite in the upstairs. Next meeting, he added, the club would present a plan to work with the Port to fix the building's broken elevator, which Knight has estimated will cost at least \$17,000.

"I'm all for it being fixed, but as a tenant, I'm not interested in investing my time if the building is on the chopping block," Brownson said.

Port Commissioner James Campbell cautioned the Port's intention is not to displace any tenants from the Chinook Building. When the Red Lion Hotel operated a meeting space in the upstairs of the Chinook Building, he said, the hotel left the downstairs alone except for a corner office.

## Kumars: 'In old days in India, you don't decide what you're going to do'

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money. If you want to do the business, it's hard to borrow money."

The couple both came from modest Hindu families in small farming villages in northern India. Both attended government schools and said they based much of their direction in life on the lead of their families.

"In old days in India, you don't decide what you're going to do," Lovekesh said. "You follow what other people are doing. I wanted to be a businessman all the time, but my cousin was a teacher. Rakesh Kumar, he was my idol, so I followed him."

Lovekesh earned diplomas in business administration and international business, along with a bachelor's and master's in mathematics, and a teaching certificate. He left for Australia in 1997 to study business administration, falling one semester short of his second master's degree.

"After that, I never stayed (in India) more than six months," he said.

On a visit to India for his sister's wedding, Lovekesh met Alpana for the first time, the night before their arranged marriage.

"I stayed 10 days," he said, adding he would come back to India every five or six months to visit his family.

Lovekesh moved to America in 2001 to work at convenience stores around Tillamook owned by family friends. Alpana stayed with his parents in India, eventually earning bachelor's degrees in chemistry and education, and master's in chemistry before teaching middle school science for seven years.

The marriage wilted under the long distances, and the two divorced in 2005. Lovekesh remarried in 2006 in the U.S., from which he has a 10-year-old daughter, Samantha, who lives with the family in Warrenton.

In 2007, Lovekesh gained custody of Kevin, who moved at age 5 to the U.S. to live with his father. In 2009, they moved to Cloverdale as Lovekesh opened his first convenience store.

By 2010, Lovekesh had gotten divorced from his second wife. In 2011, he and Alpana remarried, by choice. Shortly thereafter, she moved to Cloverdale.

"It's been good," she said.

"I like it here, especially living with my family."

### Making life in Warrenton

Lovekesh said he had been looking at the location in Warrenton, the former site of Mather Martial Arts Academy, since before his store in Cloverdale opened. The Kumars made the move north last spring to run the new store, and for the additional opportunities afforded their children. Kevin attends Astoria Middle School and said he enjoys the Astoria Aquatic Center and going to the local movie theater. Samantha attends school in Warrenton.

"I like beach," added Kamakshi, who will start preschool next year.

Alpana has helped run the convenience store and came close to studying at Clatsop Community College, wanting to be a radiology technician. But Lovekesh contracted Fuch's corneal dystrophy and eventual-

ly had to have one of his corneas transplanted. On top of the surgery, he developed anemia.

"I was resting, and she was taking care of the kids and working at the store," he said, adding a friend who works at Uptown Cafe in Warrenton helped drop off and pick up Kevin from school while he was incapacitated. "It was bad for four or five months."

The couple say they are now just enjoying the relative stability, looking at restarting Alpana's studies and focusing on building their business in Warrenton. Lovekesh's parents are preparing to immigrate to live nearby. Alpana said her parents will eventually make a visit as well.

"In the beginning, it took some time to build trust," Lovekesh said about the family integrating and opening businesses in small communities like Cloverdale and Warrenton. "We make the trust. The customer comes to you if they have trust in you."

## Square: Soil removal in January will affect traffic on Duane Street

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The piles of soil have contributed to the unsightly mess at the site, which has sat vacant for more than a decade as the city weighs redevelopment.

The City Council is reviewing a potential mixed-use project with a new public library and housing at Heritage Square, but there is no consensus on how to move forward.

The city received a \$400,000 brownfields grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for the cleanup of Heritage Square,

and when city matching funds and other expenses are factored, the price tag will exceed \$500,000.

"The city is very happy to be approaching the final leg of this project to get this material removed," said Jeff Harrington, the city engineer. "And very appreciative of the EPA grant to pay for it."

Symbolically, the removal of the contaminated soil will represent progress toward revitalizing the Duane Street corridor downtown.

The city is advising drivers that one lane of traffic will be closed on the south

side of Duane Street between 11th and 12th streets during the soil removal in January. Parking spaces on Duane Street will also be closed.

"The summer of 2016 may be the first summer in 13 years that the central block in downtown Astoria isn't occupied by a makeshift plaza of mostly dead trees in hideous planters or a big trashy hole," City Councilor Cindy Price said in an email. "Removing the dirt is the first visible step in many years toward turning the larger part of Heritage Square into a worthy inheritance. I dig it."

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