

# RV park: Residents notice antipathy toward the park

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Resources Northwest, which uses a third-party septic company to gather the statistics being reported to the state, appealed the most recent fine and held an informal hearing last week with the Department of Environmental Quality.

Kevin Luby, the attorney for Resources Northwest, said the park has several issues, including tenants using more than the park anticipated.

"We've made efforts to shut down the laundry facilities at the park," Luby said, adding the park is installing meters to track usage.

## A county thorn

While the state is trying to lower the sewage flow, the park faces a continuing lawsuit with Clatsop County, which would like to remove Hick as owner and replace him with a receiver, a person appointed to hold in trust and administer property under litigation.

According to county staff, Hick's ownership of the park has been marred by issues of overcrowding, sewage overflows, gray water leaking into Sunset Lake, a lack of emergency vehicle access, run-ins with police and illegal utility hookups.

"The neighbors have been dealing with this for years ... and they're pretty cynical over the ability of the government to help out there," said interim County Manager Rich Mays.

A petition by about 60 neighbors of the park prompted the county to begin enforcement action, resulting in a 2011



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**Tommy Kelley, who has lived at the Sunset Lake Resort & RV Park since 2009, said the park offers people with no other place to go a safe, inexpensive living option.**

compliance order to lower the number of permanent units at the park from 60 to 43, including 18 mobile homes and 25 RVs, along with 38 spots for visitors. Nearly three years ago, the county sued Hick in an effort to enforce the lingering code violations. The case is scheduled for trial in June.

Bart Catching, a code compliance specialist with the county, said the park was still four or five RVs over the per-

manent resident limit as of February, but is having residents move between RVs within a 30-day time limit to appear temporary.

"I have nothing against the park's right to exist," Catching said. "It just needs to meet (codes)."

Luby said that after one more eviction, the park will be down to the proper amount of units. "I'm not aware of any situation where we have peo-



Edward Stratton/The Daily Astorian

**Shannon Hopkins and partner Mitch Wilson (not pictured) said the Sunset Lake Resort & RV Park provided them an inexpensive place to live when they faced homelessness.**

ple moving from unit to unit," he said.

Luby said while many people at the county have been good to work with, some staffers higher in the agency have been slow to act in good faith while the park tries to make improvements.

## Residents react

Anthony Smith, who with fiancée Whitney Millagé, moved into the park in October

and faces eviction March 9, has been protesting at the corner of Sunset Lane and Lewis Road over what he says is a retaliation for reporting unsafe and unsanitary conditions.

Smith has been posting pictures on Facebook of what he says are trailers at the park with holes in the floors and ceilings from rain getting in, sewage leaking out of pipes and unsafe utility hookups. After posting the photos on Facebook and

protesting out front, he said, he and Millagé have faced retaliation from management.

Park manager Susan Hart and other residents have cast Smith and Millagé as troublemakers, saying the park has provided a safe and necessary source of low-income housing for people with disabilities, veterans and others with nowhere else to go.

Shannon Watkins said she and partner Mitch Wilson moved in almost a year ago after coming back from Michigan and finding themselves homeless. Hart took them in, Watkins said, starting them out in a tent before getting them into a trailer.

"I'm on disability," said Tommy Kelley, who has lived at the park since 2009. "This is what I could afford. Everybody that is here are here because they have to" be.

Without the park, Kelley said, he and many of the other residents would be homeless. "I feel like we're Israel, just surrounded by everybody who hates us," he said of the antipathy toward the park by neighbors.

Hart, who had managed the park from 2006 to 2011 and returned in November 2013, said she came back at the request of the owners to an overcrowded park with a lot of issues.

"We cleaned this place up," she said, noting she has evicted 30 to 50 people since coming back, including families with children. Instead of nearby neighbors and others complaining about the park, she said, they should donate and help make it a better place.

# Energy bills: Senate Bill 1547 has more momentum

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differences between the bills including caps on how much the utilities can raise rates each year to cover their costs, including a profit on new renewable energy facilities. The first bill, House Bill 4036, calls for the Oregon Public Utility Commission to adopt regulations that encourage competitive bidding and diverse ownership of renewable energy facilities, something not required under the second bill, Senate Bill 1547. That second bill also includes incentives to boost wood-burning power plants.

Senate Bill 1547 has more momentum, thanks to support from environmental groups and the two investor-owned utilities. Brad Reed, a spokesman for the politically active nonprofit Renew Oregon, speaking of Senate Bill 1547

**'... this bill enjoys support from clear majorities in both the House and Senate.'**

**Brad Reed**

spokesman for the politically active nonprofit Renew Oregon, speaking of Senate Bill 1547

which represents environmental and renewable energy groups, said Senate Bill 1547 appears to have the clearest path forward. "And this bill enjoys support from clear majorities in both the House and Senate," Reed wrote in an email Monday afternoon.

Utility representatives have also said they dislike the 3 percent annual cap on renewable energy rate increases in the first bill, and they would prefer the 4 percent cap on renewable rate increases in the second bill. The utilities can request the renewable energy rate increases on top of broader periodic rate increases.

House lawmakers already voted 39-20 to pass House Bill 4036, in mid-February. After news reports that Gov. Kate Brown's administration had told public utility commissioners not to go public with their concerns about the bill, a Senate committee added language to the bill to protect consumers and ensure utilities use competitive bidding to acquire cost-efficient new sources of renewable energy.

Next, Republicans in the Senate, who oppose the bill, brought it to a standstill by requesting that lawyers draft a minority report. There is no deadline to produce the report, so the move threatened to prevent the measure from coming to a vote before the end of the session.

Supporters of the bill, including Democrats in both chambers and Rep. Mark Johnson, R-Hood River, responded with a plan on Thursday to insert a new version of the renewable energy mandate legislation into a different bill, Senate Bill 1547, that had already passed in the Senate. Lawmakers negotiated that legislation in closed-door meetings with representatives of the utilities, environmental and renewable energy groups.

Although two representatives of the Public Utility Commission attended the negotiations, none of the public utility commissioners were involved nor did they testify last week when a House committee voted to insert the negotiated lan-

guage into Senate Bill 1547. Members of the Public Utility Commission have said an earlier version of the legislation would be costly for consumers but do little to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from coal plants.

Many House Republicans also oppose the bill and they decided to try the same delay tactic as their Senate colleagues by requesting a minority report. However, it did not buy much time because of different rules in the House. The minority report would make several changes to Senate Bill 1547, including making it easier for cities to start new municipal utilities by giving them three years to meet the renewable energy mandate, according to House Republican Office communications director Preston Mann.

By Monday, Senate Republicans had decided to withdraw their minority report, allowing House Bill 4036 to be scheduled for a vote Wednesday.

Caitie Butler, communications director for the Oregon Senate Republicans, wrote in an email Monday that Republicans withdrew the request "because (House lawmakers) stripped most of the ratepayer protections out of the stuffed Senate bill..." Butler wrote that Senate Republicans still do not support either bill. Senate Bill 1547 is scheduled for a House floor vote on Tuesday, which means it could also go to the Senate for a final up or down vote Wednesday. House Bill 4036 would have to go back to the House for a final up or down vote.

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# Recall: Neuwirth hopes recall election won't be needed

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The directors have not yet announced their intentions, and released a statement Friday defending their actions in dismissing the former chief.

"Mike was let go when the majority of the directors, elected by district voters, became concerned about his ability to perform the administrative skills required of the head of a public agency," the directors wrote.

## Not political, 'til now

Neuwirth said she had never been "a political person" before. "In fact, I even registered to vote in order to file this petition," she said.

"I didn't know Mike or the people involved," Neu-wirth said. "I talked to people who had been affected by it. The unanimous opinion was the board does not treat volunteers with any respect and they never treated the chief with any respect."

Neuwirth attended a November fire district meeting in which members of the community faced the board. "They told them how angry they were at the board for treating someone of Mike's caliber in such a despicable manner," she said.

Neuwirth launched the recall petition drive in January. "I realized we could sit around

and be appalled, or we could exercise our right," she said.

In seeking to gather the minimum 125 signatures required in Clatsop County to force a recall election, Neu-wirth said she "never forced, and never coerced" residents to sign the petition. Neuwirth said firefighters and residents alike appreciated Balzer's contributions to the community. "The firefighters told me they'd rather be in the field with Mike than anyone they've ever been with," Neuwirth said.

Neuwirth said she is "staying away" from a separate lawsuit filed by Balzer seeking his job back and damages.

Balzer filed a civil suit in Clatsop County Court against the fire district, claiming the firing was motivated by "personal animus and did not constitute the good faith sufficient cause under the employment agreement." He seeks more than \$677,000 in damages and relief.

"I stayed away from the lawsuit because they're separate issues," Neuwirth said. "Mike has every right to do what he needs to do, but as far

as I'm concerned, this is for the community, I'm doing it for the firefighters. They thank me daily."

## Time to step up?

Their decision could create an immediate vacancy or vacancies to fill. If Beck-Sweeney, Smith or Clyde fight the recall, they will face an election challenge.

Will Neuwirth run for the office?

"I would hope other people would step up, but if I needed to I would gladly step up," she said. "It is one of the most important boards in this town."

She said she hopes a recall election won't be needed.

"If they resign, they will save the district a lot of money, and if Mike is reinstated, the portion that would affect the district, as far as the lawsuit, would go away," Neuwirth said. "This is not about the money."

If the directors do not resign by Wednesday night, the Clerk's Office anticipates a recall election on April 5 for voters within the fire district.

# Dispatchers: There are seven

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recognize the dispatchers for their service with donations of "something special" — a night at a restaurant, gift card, hotel room or relaxation package — to show their appreciation.

There are seven dispatchers, Brown said at a Seaside Chamber of Commerce breakfast Friday.

"On Feb. 5, I'm thankful two of our more senior dispatchers were on duty," she said. "They were very professional and able to handle it. But on the other hand, they knew Jason well. I'm impressed at their composure and how they got through and did the job they were hired to do and waited till later to break down. It's just impressive the level of professionalism and

what they had to endure. And they did it."

Along with grief for a co-worker, they also lost a friend, Brown said.

"Seaside Police Department is close-knit," she said. "Even dispatch. It's like one large family you work with. It was devastating for everyone."

"I'm not picky, but I think they deserve something special," Brown added about donations.

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