

Cemetery: 'People are angry'

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are angry and are increasingly rejecting the city's explanations about budget constraints as unacceptable.

"It's appalling. It's a disgrace. And it's embarrassing," said Cathie Courtwright, a retired waitress and housekeeper in Warrenton who has family buried at Ocean View and who visited on Mother's Day.

Courtwright said there is an expectation among people who purchased plots from the city that the cemetery would be taken care of forever. "It's a lie," she said. "You lied to all these people."

Angela Cosby, the city's parks director, said maintenance crews are mowing at Ocean View and should have the grass cut and weeds removed by this weekend.

But in a candid email to the Parks and Recreation Board and other city leaders, Cosby warned that complaints about the cemetery and other parks will likely continue without additional staff and resources.

The city's maintenance priority at parks is public safety, Cosby explained, such as making sure equipment and facilities do not pose dangers to residents. After public safety, she said, decisions on where to deploy crews are based on usage.

Mowing the overgrown grass at baseball and softball fields with higher usage has been identified as a priority over Ocean View on the maintenance list.

The city has also been unable to fill seasonal maintenance jobs, which pay \$10 to \$10.75 an hour, because of market competition given the low unemployment rate. The city now has 1 1/2 seasonal maintenance workers on the job, according to Cosby, compared to six workers at this time last year.

"Ultimately, a change needs to be made. We know it's not working," Cosby said of the maintenance challenge at Ocean View. "And we rely on our policymakers to make those changes and to give us those directions."

Cosby empathizes with families who have complained about the condition of the cemetery, but has no easy answer.

"I'm upset about it, too," she said. "Really am. I hate overseeing facilities that we can't take proper care of."

Spending priorities

Budget cuts over the years stripped Ocean View of dedicated staff. Burial and cremation fees, along with interest from a fund to provide perpetual care, do not cover expenses, forcing the city to subsidize the cemetery.

The Astoria City Council elevated improvements at Ocean View to a city goal and included about \$70,000 for weed eradication and reseeding in this year's budget. The council has also raised fees.

But the City Council decided not to release the extra money for improvements because of doubts about whether parks staff

had the ability to maintain the cemetery.

The city's budget committee has recommended using hotel-room tax money next fiscal year to pay for the private mowing and maintenance on the Astoria Riverwalk, the Smith Point roundabout and several other small parks and triangles downtown.

The hope is that parks staff will have more time to maintain traditional parks and, possibly, Ocean View.

Perpetual care

The cemetery — established in 1897, and home to more than 16,000 plots — was not ranked by the public as a high priority in a new parks master plan. Yet, unlike other city parks, the city has a contractual obligation to plot owners to provide perpetual care.

City Councilor Russ Warr, like Cosby, has been hearing from families who are frustrated. "It's not a matter of money. It's a matter of priority," said Warr, who owns Astoria Granite Works, which makes grave markers for the cemetery.

The city's cemetery rules and regulations describe perpetual care as cutting the grass at reasonable intervals, raking and cleaning, and pruning shrubs and trees. While the city does not promise perfection, cemetery grounds are supposed to be reasonably cared for forever.

"So people are angry. They're very angry," Warr said. "And they're angry with real justification."

Library: 'This is a serious issue'

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The problem may not be solved in the upcoming fiscal year, he said in an interview.

"It's something we need to take care of and we need to be focused on," he said. "I'm not panicking yet, but I do know this is a serious issue. At least on the surface, it looks like it's cost-prohibitive to make repairs to the building for long-term use."

A 'shotgun shack'

The library board has suspected for some time that the building — the former Hammond Town Hall — may not be worth spending great sums of money to fix, according to Judy Sivley, a library board member.

Though the board has dis-

cussed adding on to the structure — which was cobbled together in the first half of the 20th century — a feasible plan never came together.

The library is "iconic, and it's sweet," Calog said. "We're kind of a community center and a library and a job-hunting center — and a crabby grandma's house, let's not forget that."

She dislikes the idea of tearing it down, but doesn't see an alternative.

"In a perfect world, we could keep this building as a branch and have a new building in Warrenton. But it isn't a perfect world," she said.

Currently funded by a five-year tax levy that expires in 2017, the library opened in the 1990s and caters to local and seasonal visitors.

"We really appreciate the

work that (the board) has done with a very small budget," Mayor Mark Kujala said, "and we know the library is appreciated by both people who live in Warrenton and others that visit Fort Stevens throughout the summer, so we want to make sure it's a vital and active asset to the community."

Calog knows that the library needs more room to maintain current levels of service, let alone expand. "It's a shotgun shack," she said.

Even if the building wasn't deteriorating, it would still be too narrow and crowded, and require more parking, she said.

"I love this little building, and I'd just hate having anything happen to it," she said. "But you can feel the floor shaking when 12-year-olds walk by. It's just crazy."

Lawsuit: Several high-profile staffers have resigned from Clatsop Behavioral Healthcare

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in an email response earlier this week to the Holmes and Studinarz lawsuit, said: "It is our policy not to litigate in the press. We vigorously oppose any claims or allegations made against our agency."

Clatsop Behavioral Healthcare, Clatsop County's mental health contractor, is fielding pointed questions about the quality of care while dealing with what appears to be a revolt among key staff.

The agency is the subject

of an internal investigation and a review by the Oregon Health Authority. The labor union that represents staff cast a "no confidence" vote against Michele Crump-Hart, the clinical director, and several high-profile staffers have resigned.

Varese, who was hired in May 2013, claims in her lawsuit that she had sought to discipline or counsel case managers for poor performance and inappropriate talk about sex at work but was rebuffed by Watkins, who Varese says was friends with the case managers.

The lawsuit from Holmes and Studinarz also alleges that top administrators at the agency failed to take action against a case manager with a history of making homophobic and other inappropriate comments because she was a "local girl" who came from a "good family" and went to school with one of the administrators.

Varese, who attorneys say has depression, claims discrimination and retaliation for her disability and for seeking medical leave. She also claims whistleblower retaliation.



The Daily Astorian/File Photo

Larry Cary has had to change the name of his Astoria distillery twice because of trademark challenges.

Distiller: Business is doing all right despite its name changes

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Cary said he'll have to spend another \$10,000 to \$15,000 changing the name on all his products and properties to Pilot House Distillery, adding that every time he names his business or products, he checks trademarks.

"What I've learned is even if you do everything right and you trademark it ... if someone has bigger pockets than you, they can do whatever they want," he said.

Lawyers for House Spirits Distilling did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Cary said that despite the two name changes, his business is doing all right. He has opened a tasting room in Seaside and said he is looking to expand farther south. Pilot House Distilling is allowed up to five locations in Oregon under Oregon Liquor Control Commission rules.

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