

City contracts out park maintenance

Move could expand capacity for parks staff

By **DERRICK DePLEDGE**
The Daily Astorian

A private contractor will take on maintenance of the Astoria Riverwalk, Smith Point, Fort Astoria Park and other downtown park property as the city hopes to raise the standard of care to a higher level.

The City Council agreed Monday night to award the \$94,850 contract to Greensmith Landscaping. Councilors had endorsed using Promote Astoria tourism dollars for the work as part of the city budget.

Angela Cosby, the director of the Parks and Recreation Department, said that using a contractor downtown could expand the ability of city staff



Alex Pajunas/The Daily Astorian

A private contractor will take over maintenance of the Astoria Riverwalk and other downtown parks.

to care for other parks by 15 to 20 percent.

The contractor will perform mowing, trimming,

pruning, hedging, edging, weeding, fertilization and aeration, along with two cleanup projects annually.

“So the fact that we’re discussing being able to take greater care of these tourist-related sites, we’re

excited about,” Cosby said.

In other business Monday night, the City Council:

- Held a moment of silence for Rae Goforth, a longtime community activist who died Sunday at 87.

Goforth, who was affectionately known as the “mayor of Uniontown,” was among the residents behind the Maritime Memorial under the Astoria Bridge.

“Just a tremendous force in our community,” Mayor Arline LaMear said.

City Councilor Russ Warr offered condolences to Goforth’s family. “She was just terrific. Wonderful person. And I miss her tremendously,” he said.

- Heard a plea from City Councilor Drew Herzig for the community to reduce the stigma around mental illness.

Herzig described himself as someone living with mental illness. He said he did not feel free to discuss the issue more

fully before because he did not want to jeopardize his effectiveness as an elected official. He has recently announced he is moving to Massachusetts and will not seek a second term on the council.

“So I want to call on our community to do everything in its power to reduce the stigma associated with mental illness,” Herzig said. “I know firsthand how much that stigma imposes shame and guilt on people trying to cope with mental illness, adding to the burden of living with a disability.

“It makes it difficult for us to seek help, and difficult to find help. The stigma sharpens our pain, and deepens our isolation. As I said, I can take the risk now in speaking out about this; others cannot because it is still too much of a risk.

“The stigma is still too powerful a deterrent. So we need your voices to speak on our behalf.”

Washington state attorney general files lawsuit against Comcast

\$100 million claim alleges customers were deceived

By **RACHEL LA CORTE**
Associated Press

OLYMPIA, Wash. — Washington State Attorney General Bob Ferguson on Monday filed a \$100 million lawsuit against Comcast, saying the cable and internet giant deceived customers into paying tens of millions of dollars in fees for a “near-worthless” service protection plan.

Ferguson, who filed the lawsuit in King County Superior Court, said at a news conference that in addition to its misleading service protection plan, Philadelphia-based Comcast committed more than 1.8 million violations of the state’s Consumer Protection Act by charging improper service call fees and using improper credit screening practices.

“This case is a classic example of a big corporation systematically deceiving Washington state consumers and putting profits above those consumers,” said Ferguson said.

According to the lawsuit, Comcast misled 500,000 customers in Washington state by having them pay a \$4.99 monthly fee to avoid being charged if a technician visited their home to fix an issue covered by the plan. But Ferguson said the company didn’t reveal that the plan didn’t cover repairs to wiring inside a wall. As part of the investigation, customers contacted Comcast numerous times. Ferguson said that 75 percent of the time, Comcast representatives falsely told the customers that the plan covered all inside wiring.



AP Photo/Tali Arbel

Comcast trucks parked in a lot in the company’s Westford, Mass., operations center. Washington state has sued the cable giant for \$100 million, alleging the company deceived customers with a service protection plan.

More than \$73 million of the amount that Ferguson is seeking is for restitution to customers who paid for the protection plan over the past five years.

“Comcast needs to pay that money back,” he said.

The remainder of the amount he is seeking is for restitution for charging improper service call fees and for penalties related to violation of the state’s consumer protection act.

First in the country

The lawsuit says that Comcast violated that act to all of its nearly 1.2 million customers in the state because of its deception. He noted that the Washington lawsuit was the first on this issue in the country, though the company’s service protection plan is a nationwide program. Ferguson said he’s not yet aware of any other states planning to sue the company.

“Over and over and over again, Comcast most certainly did not play by the rules,” Ferguson said.

Ferguson said that the investigation began after an employee of his office brought the credit screening issue to his attention. Comcast requires a deposit for equipment, but customers can have that deposit waived if they undergo a credit check and have a high credit score. However, Ferguson said that on more than 6,000 occasions, deposits were paid by people who still had their credit checked, meaning that either Comcast wrongfully ran a credit check in spite of the customers paying the deposit or else the company still made the customers pay the deposit despite their high credit score.

Warrenton schools need a volunteer

The Daily Astorian

A spot has opened on the Warrenton-Hammond School Board.

Joe Talamantez, who served in the fourth of seven positions on the board, moved out of the district. His term runs through June.

Talamantez, then a financial manager for Tongue Point Job Corps Center, was appointed to the board in February after Adam Neahring, a project engineer with Bergerson Con-

struction Inc., also moved out of the district.

The deadline for applying is Aug. 12, with applicant interviews Aug. 24 and appointment Sept. 13. Applicants must have been residents in the district for at least one year.

Applications can be downloaded at www.warrentonschools.com, or picked up from the district office at 820 S.W. Cedar Ave. from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday.



Joe Talamantez

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