



Danny Miller/The Daily Astorian

A runner jogs along the Astoria Riverwalk next to a set of trees knocked down from erosion and storm damage last year.

## Slog: County faced cleaning up debris, landslides from storm

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Pearson said the museum would have had to seek a 10-year loan with rather unattractive terms through the federal Small Business Administration. He said the museum is now waiting to see which contractor the city uses to repair waterfront erosion.

"Typically, there are some savings that can be found because they're already on site," he said.

### Erosion control

City Engineer Jeff Harrington said Astoria has claims of more than \$257,000, of which FEMA will cover 75 percent. In addition, he said, the state's Infrastructure Finance Authority agreed to pay the city's 25 percent local match.

Harrington said the city is waiting on a permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to repair nearly \$110,000 in erosion along the waterfront, hopefully in February.

"The other project is more complicated," he said.

Along Pipeline Road, a hillside eroded near a city waterline during the storms. The City Council approved repairing the slide with rock armoring, he said, but the National Marine Fisheries Service, which has to sign off on projects affecting fish-bearing streams, would not provide a permit.

"They wanted us to do a bioengineered fix," Harrington said.

The city convinced the federal agency to allow a temporary repair with a small amount of rock, he said, and staff are now evaluating an alternative long-term fix.

Despite the time it takes to get the federal funds and do the repairs, Harrington said, FEMA's put forth a good effort to help local agencies navigate the process. "We have one contact at FEMA, and they contact everyone else."



City of Astoria

The city of Astoria is still seeking permits from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to repair about 20 spots and \$110,000 worth of erosion along the Astoria waterfront.

### Embracing the process

After the storm, the county's Public Works Department faced cleaning up debris and landslides on rural roadways around Jewell, Elsie and Vinemarle.

"We got the bulk of reimbursement for that damage, after lots of paperwork and justification," said Michael Summers, the county's public works director. "We got a check for \$89,000, give or take ... in the last week."

Summers said the county also received reimbursement after removing a large tree that fell over and blocked Plympton Creek near Westport during the storms. He said there are still two more major storm-related projects to repair erosion on Svensen Island Road and a landslide on Cole Mountain Road near Hamlet, but that the county should receive all of its reimbursements — about \$175,000 — soon.

"We're making a lot of progress," Summers said, adding the county spent \$2,000 in staff and materials to get \$89,000. "It's a lot of paperwork. It's embracing the process."

### Waiting for a payout

No other entity has embraced the process more

than the Port of Astoria, the largest single waterfront landowner and the agency most affected by the storm.

The 75 percent coverage from FEMA could provide the Port with millions in federal funds to help repair numerous issues throughout the central waterfront. The agency has already secured more than \$1.5 million from the Oregon Department of Transportation's ConnectOregon infrastructure grants to cover the local match.

On Tuesday, the Port commission unanimously authorized KPFF Consulting Engineers from Portland to begin assessing the damage from the storms and create an estimate to send to FEMA that could create the basis for how much the agency receives.

### Stormwater support

The Commission unanimously authorized the agency earlier this year to take out a \$1.8 million loan from Key Bank to pay for the construction of a required stormwater-treatment facility on Pier 3. Port staff are planning to share the cost of repayment based on how much land the agency owns and the tenants lease in the affected area.

Jim Knight, the Port's executive director, has faced backlash from Port commissioners Stephen Fulton and Bill Hunsinger, who question how the Port is going to pay for the loan, while criticizing staff for not having a definite plan for tenants on the affected properties to help pay for half of the project.

"Tonight, you're signing an agreement with an engineer for work that might drastically reduce the cost of this (stormwater treatment) project," Knight said Tuesday, adding the engineer could take until March or April to come up with an estimate of last year's storm damage to the Port.

## Hotels: Hope city 'will clarify and correct this misadventure'

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tax, Finance Director Laurie Sawrey wrote in the September letter. The city interprets "gross room rent" to include any fee that is mandatory, not refundable and paid in order to occupy the room, which is consistent with the Oregon Department of Revenue definition.

"We are using the state's definition for consistency and because we think it's the right thing to do," Sawrey said in December.

The customer would pay more in taxes under the city's interpretation of "gross room rent."

"The amounts quantified by a recent audit are not significant, but still an amount that the city should be collecting based on our definition of gross rent," Sawrey said.

Representatives from local hotels and vacation rental businesses met in November to discuss the city's definition of "gross room rent." None agreed with the city.

"In our opinion the protocol for amending the municipal code must include a public process and direction from the City Council," states the letter to City Council from lodging industry members. "We respectfully ask that the city participate in appropriate dialogue with the Cannon Beach lodging industry to discuss elements of the code and work to clarify mutual expectations."

"In other Oregon municipalities where we are involved in business — specifically The Dalles, Beaverton, Seaside and our relationships in Portland — guests are taxed on room revenue only," Escape Lodging Co. President Patrick Nofield said in December.

Nofield said the room tax in Cannon Beach has only applied to room revenue until now, and lodging industry members are "concerned with the way the city implemented a change without vetting it through an appropriate process."

Escape Lodging reviewed



Submitted Photo

The Lodges at Cannon Beach, an Escape Lodging property, are among the hotels that could be affected by a January council decision.

the municipal code chapter regarding the room tax and found the definition of "rent" to be "the gross rent, exclusive of other services," Nofield said.

In an October letter responding to Escape Lodging's concerns, Sawrey said the city's code requirements for what is included in gross rents has not changed and the September letter was "a reminder and clarification" of code requirements.

"We maintain that the city has the legal authority to enforce all of the conditions and requirements outlined in the letter," Sawrey wrote.

Linda Sweeney, owner of Cannon Beach Vacation Rentals, said the city's interpretation of gross room tax could affect her business. She said there was a lack of public discussion about the interpretation, but she hopes that discussion with the City Council "will clarify and correct this misadventure."

"The local lodging industry was blindsided with the recent interpretation of the lodging tax collection," Sweeney said in an email. "We work hard to accomplish the highest quality product at the most stressful time of year. The small profit that results must carry us through

the remainder of the year. The city's unreasonable behavior, unfair tactics and greediness hurts not only my business but will also reflect on other small businesses in Cannon Beach as our guests are being priced out of our market. They will look elsewhere to spend their vacation dollars."

The September letter to Cannon Beach lodging operators also required lodging tax collection returns to include a copy of the state lodging tax quarterly return.

Hotel guests pay an 8 percent city tax and 1.8 percent state tax to the hotel. The hotel forwards to the city 95 percent of the tax paid by the customer and keeps 5 percent of the amount, Sawrey said.

The city is not asking lodging operators to go back and pay for room taxes they did not collect from nonoptional fees, Sawrey said.

Cannon Beach's interpretation is different from nearby Seaside. Seaside does not require hotels to collect non-optional fees for room tax, said Jackie McCulloch, accountant for the city. Seaside also does not require lodging companies to include a copy of the state lodging tax quarterly return in their room tax collection returns for the city, McCulloch said.

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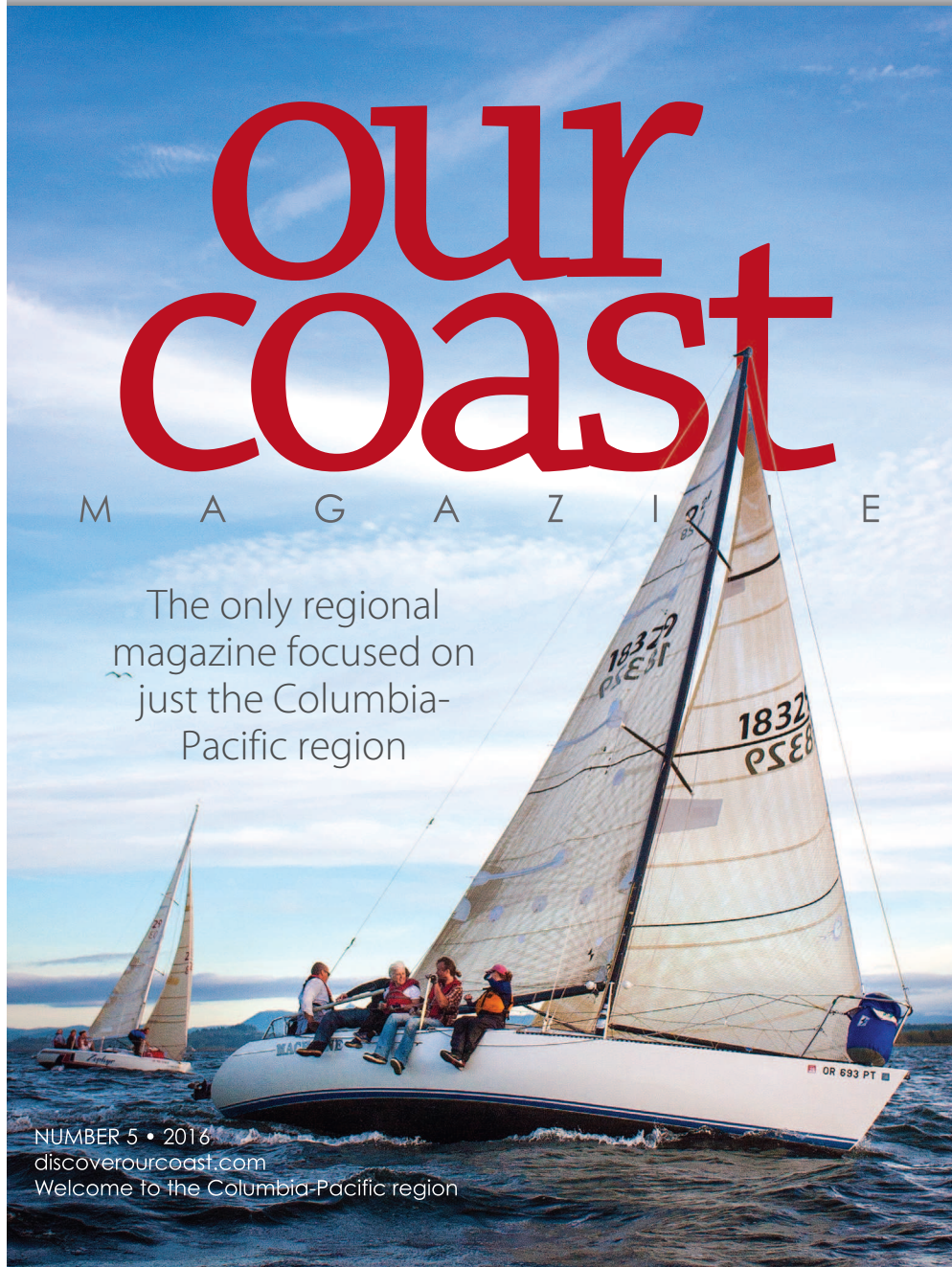
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## Camp: Naselle youth facility on state chopping block again

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but he praised their professionalism in light of the unwelcome news. The youth camp employs about 89 full-time workers, along with 26 on-call security staff and about 10 from the local school district.

"I'll say this — I have never worked with a more resilient group of people than here. I am so impressed," Escamilla said.

Established in 1966, the 23-acre facility is known for the vocational, firefighting, fisheries and forestry training it offers in collaboration with the state Department of Natural Resources. In recent years, the camp has also been recognized for achieving high test scores in the school program, run by Naselle-Grays River School District.

### Proposed closures

The fate of the youth camp will not be decided until the state Legislature has a crack at the budget during the 2017 legislative session, which starts in early January. It won't be the first time legislators have had to contemplate shuttering the

youth camp. Since the 1990s, the youth camp has survived several proposed closures, most recently in 2009, 2010 and 2011. Legislators have always found a way to save the camp in the eleventh hour, but there is no guarantee that will happen again.

"Being proposed by the governor does not necessarily make it a certainty," Naselle-Grays River School District Superintendent Lisa Nelson said. "I don't want to trivialize it, but, at the same time, I don't think it is yet time to conclude it is a done deal. The Legislature still has to develop a budget proposal. We may be able to turn it around through that process."

Public Utility District Commissioner and real estate agent Mike Swanson noted that closing the youth camp would also affect area businesses that provide services to the camp. For example, Swanson said, the youth camp is one of the top 10 consumers of electricity in the county, so the loss of that income could reduce utility revenues.

"I would anticipate closure of the camp would have a neg-

ative impact on property values in our area," Swanson said. "Some employees of the camp would probably have to leave the area to find employment, and would put their homes on the market. With the loss of employment opportunities, the universe of potential buyers would be reduced."

Glenn Ray, manager of the Okie's Select Market in Naselle, said the closure would negatively affect Okie's and other area businesses — and the youth who benefit from its programs. "I don't see how closing the camp, with its proven record, is anything but counterproductive to the goals of the state," he said.

The local concerns are being heard by the state.

"I've already seen some emails pointing out how important NYC is to the community there," said Chris Wright, a spokesman for the state Department of Social and Health Services, which oversees the Juvenile Rehabilitation Administration. "I'd stress again that you guys have been there before and have gotten through it. This is a lengthy process."