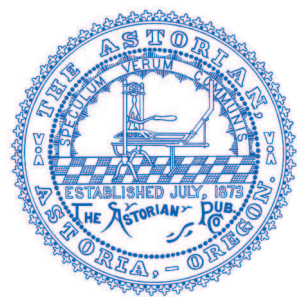


# THE DAILY ASTORIAN

Founded in 1873



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Danny Miller/The Daily Astorian

Port of Astoria commissioners begin their meeting last week in Astoria.

## Port of Astoria Commission's petty infighting needs to stop

Astoria's Port Commission has a long, tired history of petty infighting, personality clashes and meddling, which has kept the Port from achieving its modern potential. Past antics have even driven top talent from its leadership ranks.

Unfortunately, that history has been repeating itself lately and it needs to stop before it becomes damaging.

Ports and their management are unlike nearly all other public entities. They are economic and more like a for-profit private business — with commerce, leases, transportation and logistics — than the services and functions that most city and county governments provide and oversee. Port executives usually have deep business backgrounds and are more like business CEOs than the largely civil-oriented backgrounds of county or city managers.

But despite those differences, port commissions — except in rare instances — are composed of elected local commissioners, the same as other local governing bodies. Port commissioners, however, are usually more out-of-sight, out-of-mind for most residents because the damage from of a roadway pothole is more visible and immediate for most people than a downturn in business at a port. But the work of ports and their commissions, especially in cities like Astoria, is vitally important because of the large part a port plays in a region's economy. That's exactly why the Astoria Port Commission needs to stop its in-house squabbling and get down to business. For the port, there's no shortage of economic and infrastructure issues to tackle.

The port is led by its executive director, Jim Knight, and the commission is composed of its chairman, Robert Mushen, and commissioners James Campbell, Stephen Fulton, Bill Hunsinger and John Raichl.

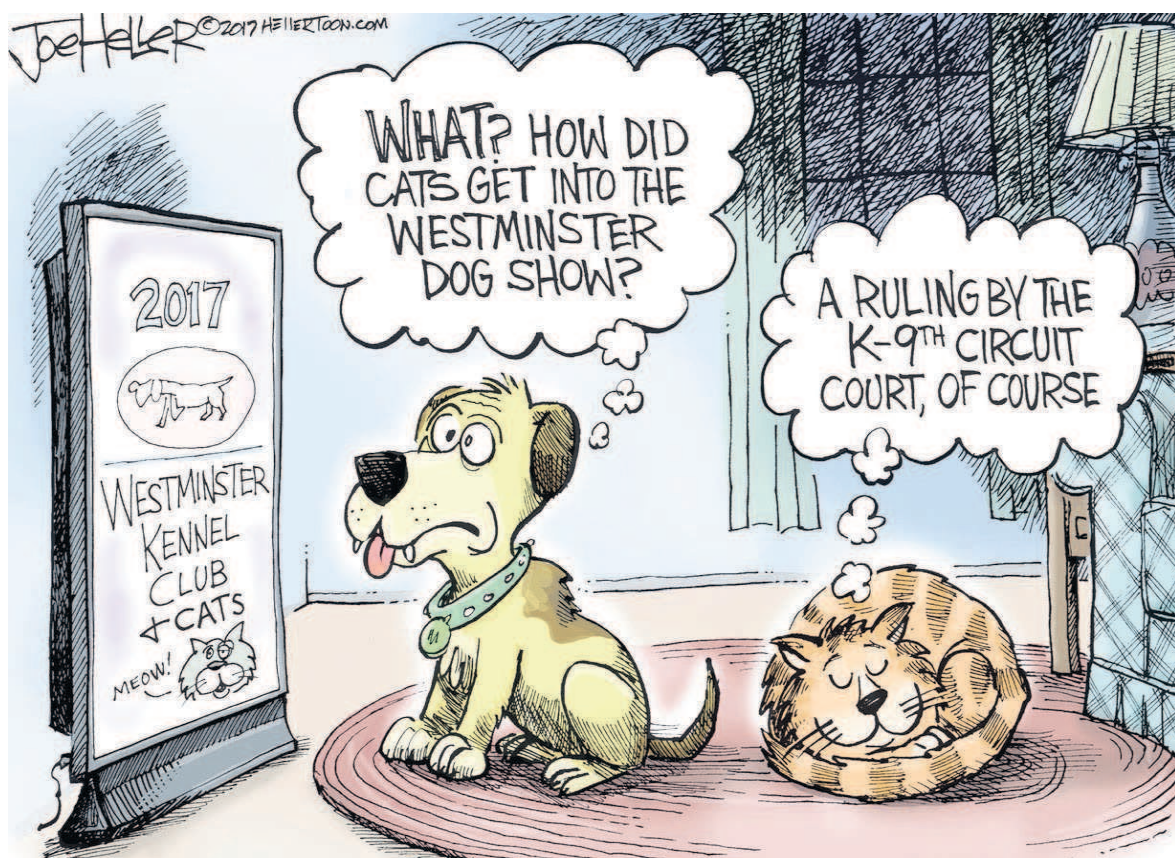
As The Daily Astorian's Edward Stratton reported last week, Mushen, Campbell and Raichl have largely been supportive of Knight's efforts, while Fulton and Hunsinger have been strong critics, often leading to a 3-2 vote divide.

Knight is well-respected by other port professionals as Port of Portland Executive Director Bill Wyatt noted during a recent visit here, saying, "Astoria is lucky to have him." Wyatt also said the Port's strife hasn't gone unnoticed.

Dissenting opinion on ideas is usually good for any business or governing body because in the right circumstances — and voiced professionally with facts and suggestions — it leads to moving only the best ideas forward. But therein lies the rub with the Port Commission, because the dissension from Fulton and Hunsinger isn't along those lines. At times it's been caustic, sometimes needling and personal, and often not about business ideas and policies for growing the Port's business. Instead, it's been time-wasting carping about parliamentary procedure, petty technicalities and the Port's bylaws. And, like a broken record, the dissension has often been subtly aimed at Knight and the support for him.

Interestingly, the commission seats of Campbell, Fulton and Raichl will each be up for grabs in the May election, so the makeup of the commission could potentially change. Hunsinger's and Mushen's terms run until 2019. The filing period for the May election began earlier this month and ends March 16, but nobody, including the incumbents, has publicly announced or filed for any of the three positions.

But no matter who fills the seats, the individual commissioners need to find whatever commonalities and interpersonal bridges they can to work with each other, and they need to be better focused on moving the Port forward if history is not to be repeated.



## Tourism is stronger without borders

By JON RAHL  
 For The Daily Astorian

It's quite common for towns and cities to forge friendly — or sometimes not so friendly — rivalries against nearby community neighbors. This can be most common in sports, especially when each community has its own high school and sports teams. The Clatsop Clash — where Astoria and Seaside compete for athletic bragging rights is a perfect example of this. But rivalries can of course also extend off the diamond, court or sports field.



In tourism, it might be a competition of restaurants, attractions and hotels. Many make the claim of having the best of this or the best of that. Marketers constantly point to top 10 lists that show an edge they may have over someone else. But sometimes neighbors and rivals come together to do more, and be stronger as one.

More than five years ago, the Seaside Visitors Bureau and Astoria-Warrenton Area Chamber of Commerce forged a relationship to use part of its individual funding to also promote this area as Oregon's North Coast. We'd still promote ourselves as individual communities, but we would also leverage some of our budget together, meaning we could stretch our dollars a little bit further. This was in the fall of 2011. The Cannon Beach Chamber of Commerce joined the coalition in 2012, and the partnership has shown strong growth over the last five years, while continuing to show tangible results for North Coast tourism.

The partnership has allowed the four communities to leverage more advertising dollars than they could have individually, and to advertise in

areas they otherwise would not have been able to reach successfully. Since 2011, the partnership has yielded close to \$350,000 in cooperative dollars to promote travel and tourism to the region. During that same time period, hotel occupancy has increased in Clatsop County from 54.7 percent in 2011 to 62.8 percent in 2016. Total hotel spending during those five years has increased from just under \$60 million in 2011 to more than \$70 million five years later.

As growth has occurred, the partnership has also sought out ways to be stronger and do things better. Grant dollars from the Oregon Tourism Commission helped us kick this coalition off in 2011. So when Clatsop County awarded the partnership a grant of \$16,800 in December, it meant we could continue our growth. One of the purposes of the new grant will be to help develop our social media presence. The group is looking to hire a local subcontractor to help boost visibility on platforms such as Instagram, Facebook and YouTube.

The Clatsop County grant was made possible by room-tax dollars collected in the unincorporated areas of Clatsop County. Per state law, 70 percent of dollars collected in municipalities or counties with room taxes in place are restricted for use in funding tourism promotion or tourism related facilities.

Tourism is a vital part of our north coast economy, throughout Clatsop County. Tourism shows no borders, especially to those that are visiting here. Visitors are simply seeking a retreat from daily life, and tourism across Oregon's North Coast allows for just that. Proof positive that when we all work together, we all win.

Jon Rahl is the director of tourism for the Seaside Visitors Bureau and assistant general manager of the Seaside Civic and Convention Center.

**But sometimes neighbors and rivals come together to do more, and be stronger as one.**

Betty Jo Hoidal and her boyfriend Brad Burton, both of Vancouver, Wash., find a spot to themselves for a sunset fire south of the Turnaround on the beach in Seaside.

Alex Pajunas/The Daily Astorian File Photo

