

Council: Price said more lodging data needed before crafting policy

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In addition, the councilors wonder if homestay lodging — such as Airbnb-style operations — is undercutting Astoria's bed-and-breakfasts.

Loretta Maxwell, owner of Grandview Bed & Breakfast in Astoria, said Tuesday that her reservations have dwindled over the past three years, as the homestay lodging industry has taken root.

However, Dwight Caswell, who runs an Airbnb out of a spare room, said his operation doesn't threaten the town's bed-and-breakfasts because it attracts people who can't afford traditional B&Bs, motels and hotels.

"I'm competing with campgrounds," he said.

Caswell believes Airbnb sites like his do not erode permanent housing options, because, in many cases, renting the space on a monthly basis isn't feasible or desirable for the property owner.

"We would never consider renting that for long-term housing. We rent it when it's convenient for us to do that because, otherwise — on those rare occasions when I snore — my wife wouldn't have any place to go to," he said.



Danny Miller/The Daily Astorian

Some on the Astoria City Council worry homestay lodging could squeeze out housing for long-term renters.

Selling points

Caswell, a freelance writer for Coast Weekend, said one of his selling points is that he can recommend restaurants, breweries and other attractions to his guests.

"I am bringing people to this town, and having them spend money here that they wouldn't otherwise spend," he said, "and I don't know what's bad about that."

Diana Bartolotta, who man-

ages an Uppertown house and has hosted through Airbnb, said that she, like Caswell, helps her short-term guests plan their stay, even equipping them with maps from the Astoria-Warrenton Area Chamber of Commerce.

The council, she said, should not frame the housing issue as "long-term landlords versus the true B&Bs versus the Airbnbs, because we all serve a different function,"

she said.

"I think Airbnb hosts might not speak up, but somehow we're being vilified," she added. "And we, I think, as a community, can find some solutions to this without pitting people against each other."

Data gathering

Insisting that "it's not a matter of pitting anyone against anyone," Price said more data must be gathered on homestay

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Dwight Caswell

He runs an Airbnb out of a spare room

lodging for the City Council to begin crafting policy.

Questions that must be answered, she said, include: How many homestays currently exist in town? What amenities do they provide? Do they have a measurable impact on hotels, motels and bed-and-breakfasts?

"Making policy that will have long-term effects on a city's livability, its character, its economy, based on anecdote and lobbying of people who have a financial interest — or would like to have a financial interest — in a particular matter, just is not sensible," Price said. "And, at this time, we simply don't have very much data about the number of homestays that are out there."

Nemlowill, who said she worries that Astoria will lose its year-round community, believes that reforming the city's homestay lodging rules "could be the single biggest

way that we could protect the character of our city into the future."

City Councilor Bruce Jones said that, while he agrees with Price and Nemlowill on what the end result should be — namely, to create housing for permanent residents and preserve the community's character — "I don't see evidence that homestays are the primary culprit and the problem to be attacked here."

An outright ban on future homestays is "like taking a chainsaw to a problem that we might be able to address with pruning saws," he said. "Or, at least, I'd rather try the pruning saws first."

For example, Jones suggested, the city could cap the number of homestay permits allowed, while disincentivizing property owners from going the homestay route if they could set up a long-term rental by requiring them to obtain a permit with a hefty fee.

Airport: Port needs to submit ballot measure language for May 16 election

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The Oregon Department of Transportation awarded Life Flight a \$665,000 ConnectOregon infrastructure grant in August to build a new hangar and crew quarters. Life Flight will spend another \$285,000 on the hangar.

Not enough

Port staff came into the meeting with a cost estimate of slightly more than \$1.9 million, with an average annual cost of \$12.88 per \$100,000 in property value countywide on a three-year measure. But Commissioner Stephen Fulton said the price needed to account for potential mitigation costs for parts of the project determined to be wetlands. He suggested \$2.6 million.

Fulton is a wetlands specialist for Warrenton Fiber Co.-Nygaard Logging, which owns land adjacent to the airport. He declared a potential conflict of interest on the bond measure. Nygaard Land LLC was recently fined more than \$60,000 by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and forced to restore about 75 acres of wetlands illegally filled for pasture near the airport.

The bond effort has received support from each city and hospital in the region, and has been a top priority for the Port Commission. Former Astoria Mayor Willis Van Dusen emerged as a principal advocate for the project at the last Port meeting, saying he was all for the measure — as long as the price came in under \$2 million.

Fulton has shown support for the project, but has questioned the cost of developing so much additional land beyond Life Flight's footprint. He unsuccessfully attempted to have the Port commit \$300,000 to a new building pad for Life Flight's hangar, in case the bond measure fails.

Fulton said Life Flight was an essential service deserving of the Port's guarantee on a spot to build.

Port Executive Director

Jim Knight cautioned the Port Commission against subsidizing the costs of an individual customer, lest the agency set an expectation for others. The Port has, however, taken out more than \$1 million in loans in the past to help Lektro expand at the airport.

Commissioners Robert Mushen, James Campbell and John Raichl were more optimistic about the bond measure's prospects, and said the Port can allocate the money for a new building pad after the vote if needed. Fulton's measure was voted down 3-1-1, with Fulton in opposition and Commissioner Bill Hunsinger abstaining.

Raiding the bank

"Just driving by and looking out the window, it looks like they're going to be designated a wetland," Fulton said of the Port's project site. "They are in the National Wetlands Inventory. That means you're going to have 100 percent mitigation for this, and the cost of the mitigation is about \$115,000 an acre — times five. Should that be on this, that we're going to have to buy mitigation somewhere?"

State rules require development on wetlands to be offset by mitigation on other lands, in varying ratios. Airport Manager Gary Kobes said the Port has 15 acres available for mitigation of the 5-acre project site. But Fulton said the ratios for credits can be anywhere from between three to 15 acres mitigated for every one being developed.

The Port's bond counsel James Shannon said the Port doesn't have to sell \$2.6 million in bonds if the project costs less. Extrapolating the increased price of the bond sale by 35 percent to \$2.6 million, it would cost approximately \$17.39 per \$100,000 in property value annually on a three-year measure. Fulton's motion to increase the bond to \$2.6 million received unanimous approval from the Port Commission.

The Port needs to submit ballot measure language for the May 16 special districts election to the County Clerk's Office by March 16. Up for a vote along with the bond measure will be the seats of Campbell, the first incumbent to file for reelection, and Fulton, who has not filed but is being challenged by former Clatsop County Commissioner Dirk Rohne. Raichl recently announced he will not seek reelection. His seat was still open.

In other news:

- The Port Commission held a moment of silence for 12-year Port Commissioner Lawrence Pfund, who Mushen said died Monday night at 59. Hunsinger, who served with Pfund for eight years, made a motion — seconded ceremoniously by all commissioners — to fly the flag outside the Port's offices at half-staff Wednesday. Raichl, the former Clatsop County sheriff, said the Port needs permission from Gov. Kate Brown's office to lower the flag. Hunsinger said the Port wasn't going to call "that gal" on such an important honor, adding "we really love her here in Clatsop County." Mushen said the Port should ask for forgiveness instead of permission.

- The Port Commission voted unanimously to support Oregon Senate Bill 327, which would provide recreational immunity to landowners and their employees, volunteers and other agents from liability claims on land made available to the public. The state's Public Use of Lands Act protects private and public landowners from liability for injuries on land made available to the public. But the Oregon Supreme Court ruled the protection does not extend to employees, agents, and volunteers on behalf of the landowners.

- Dan Travers, former commander of the U.S. Coast Guard's Sector Columbia River and a local base manager for Life Flight, was unanimously appointed to the Airport Advisory Committee.



Life Flight Pilot Dan Leary performs a preflight inspection of Life Flight's helicopter in December. Life Flight's base and hangar are currently in separate areas of the Astoria Regional Airport. A new proposed space at the airport would combine the hangar and base into one centralized location.

Danny Miller
The Daily Astorian

Resolution: Council strongly supports it

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The City Council showed strong support for the resolution, which will be reworked with guidance from City Attorney Blair Henningsgaard and Police Chief Brad Johnston.

"On behalf of the Hispanic community, we thank you for your continued support and for your consideration of this request," Gutierrez said. "We are confident that we live in a city that opposes any form of discrimination, including that which is based on national origin, race or ethnicity. We know

that the city will take the right steps to ensure that everyone, including our immigrant community feels welcomed and supported in our city."

The council will vote on the resolution at the next meeting.

"Astoria was built by immigrants, and I stand by the community in Astoria," City Councilor Zetty Nemlowill said.

The resolution declares that "the use of city funds, personnel or equipment for the enforcement of federal immigration law is prohib-

ited," and "the provision of services or benefits by the city shall not be conditions upon a resident's federal immigration status, except as required by federal or state law." Johnston explained that the clauses prohibit actions the city doesn't engage in anyway.

After council discussion, Mayor LaMear began, "We don't usually encourage applause in this place, but ..."

She was quickly drowned out by a roomful of applause — much of it coming from members of the Hispanic community.



What's your point-of-view?





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