

Aggressive panhandling sullies downtown core

Passers-by, retailers gripe about loitering, public drunkenness

By EDWARD STRATTON
The Daily Astorian

One restaurant owner said a homeless person asked his daughter to perform a sex act as she walked by. A young, female employee at a coffee shop said a group of homeless tried to offer her money and later banged on her car windows when she was returning from dinner.

Horror stories abound among locals downtown, up in arms at what they say are more aggressive tactics and public drunk-

ness by some homeless people hanging out in vacant storefronts, on Commercial Street, around the transit center and along the Astoria Riverwalk.

Police Chief and Assistant City Manager Brad Johnston addressed a gathering of merchants with the Astoria Downtown Historic District Association Friday. He said police are limited in their ability to address the situation, with many interactions covered by free speech rights. He said fines are an ineffective deterrent for people with no ability to pay.

"This isn't vagrancy," Johnston said. "We don't make decisions based on people's housing status. We're talking about behaviors, and I think when we reframe the

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Danny Miller/The Daily Astorian
Some vacant shops along Commercial Street offer homeless a location to panhandle in downtown Astoria.



The Daily Astorian/File Photo
Astoria District Forester Dan Goody looks for a springboard notch in a Douglas Fir that Goody thinks was cut down in the 1940s.

Forestry to relook at some fire fees

Landowners submitted appeals of assessments

By JACK HEFFERNAN
The Daily Astorian

Many landowners whose properties were recently classified as forestlands will not need to pay an additional fee for fire protection until next year, if ever.

A committee that originally added 4,750 lots — owned by 2,300 residents — as forestland will hold a public meeting sometime in April. At the meeting, the committee will reconsider certain lots in Seaside, Warrenton and Lewis and Clark.

The considerations will be based largely on 29 appeals submitted by landowners in early February, and about five to 10 lots likely will be permanently taken off the assessment roll, said Dan Goody, Astoria district forester with the Oregon Department of Forestry. The committee either will make its decisions at the meeting or schedule another one.

"Going through a very large process throughout the county, we want to make sure each parcel of land is treated equally," Goody said. "It's very small percentage-wise, but it's very important to do due diligence to get this right."

Soon after the appeals were submitted, the Clatsop County Assessor's Office told the Department of Forestry it would not be able to add all of the properties to this fall's property tax mailing, citing the high volume of properties that must be processed. As a result, a still unknown number of the newly classified properties will not be added to the assessment roll until 2018, Goody said.

The Department of Forestry provides fire protection to forest and grazing lands through money from both the state general fund and fees it collects from forestland property owners.

With the advice of the committee, the department had added the lands in July while also removing about 1,200

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Waldorf gets new life as housing



Danny Miller/The Daily Astorian

The Waldorf Hotel building adjacent to Astoria City Hall will likely become about 40 units of lower-income housing.

Workforce roles targeted for units

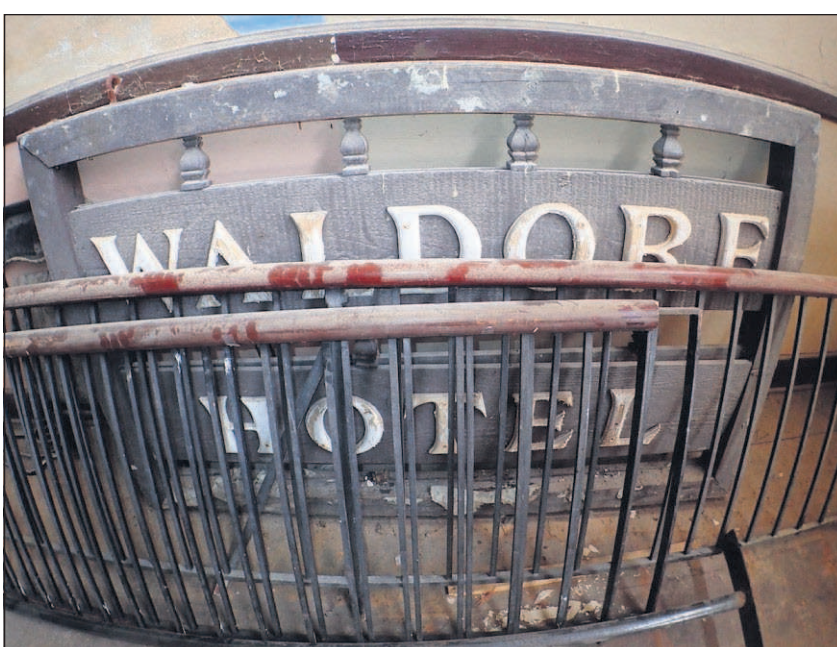
By EDWARD STRATTON
The Daily Astorian

The former Waldorf Hotel on Duane Street in downtown Astoria will likely become about 40 units of lower-income housing in the next couple of years.

A 90-day due diligence period began last week by Innovative Housing Inc., a Portland nonprofit that refurbishes old buildings into low-income housing. The nonprofit would then buy the building, also known as the Mervyn Hotel, from Groat Brothers Inc., a demolition and recycling company in Woodland, Washington, that acquired the building in 2012 with the intent of tearing it down.

Julie Garver, the housing development director for Innovative Housing, said the nonprofit is studying the geotechnical stability, roof and dry rot in the building, lodged

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Jeff Daly/Submitted Photo

The Waldorf Hotel sign behind some railings inside the Mervyn Building.

Astoria City Council adopts inclusivity resolution

Document will not stop federal immigration enforcement

By ERICK BENGEL
The Daily Astorian

Recognizing immigrants' important contributions to Astoria, the City Council adopted a resolution Tuesday reaffirming the city's policy of inclusivity.

But council members acknowledged the resolution cannot stop U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement

from apprehending and deporting the community's undocumented immigrants.

The inclusivity resolution comes amid President Donald Trump's nationwide crackdown on illegal immigration. Since Trump took office, ICE, a division of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, has ramped up raids, detentions and deportation, efforts the president claims protects American citizens. Trump signed the second draft of an executive order Monday restricting citizens from six Muslim-majority countries from entering the U.S.

An earlier version of the Astoria resolution, read at

a previous council meeting, would have precluded the city from providing a copy of Municipal Court dockets to ICE, which requests the documents electronically, City Manager Brett Estes said. The city must freely provide these public records by statute, since to refuse would violate open records law.

Jorge Gutierrez, the executive director of the Lower Columbia Hispanic Council, helped City Attorney Blair Henningsgaard revise the document, which was initially drafted by attorneys from the American Civil Liberties Union and Causa, an immigrants' rights advocacy group.



Jorge Gutierrez

The final version reads, "except as required by law, no city agency or employee shall use monies or equipment to detect or apprehend persons

whose only violation involves a federal immigration law."

In addition, "except as required by federal or state law, no city services or benefits of any kind shall be conditioned upon a resident's federal immigration status."

These clauses, like the rest of the resolution, reflect existing city practice.

The resolution does not make Astoria a "sanctuary city," a general term describing cities that seek to protect undocumented immigrants from federal immigration policies.

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