## **OPINION**





Founded in 1873 —

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### OUR VIEW

E ach week we recognize those people and organizations in the community deserving of public praise for the good things they do to make the North Coast a better place to live, and also those who should be called out for their actions.



This week's Shoutouts go to:

• Cannon Beach Chamber of Commerce members who received honors last week during the organization's annual membership awards ceremony. Beachcomber Vacation Homes was named Member of the Year, while Maggie & Henry was honored for Excellence in Customer Service. Buddie Asay Anderson Deni received the honor of Volunteer of the Year and Coaster Construction earned recognition as Supporter of the Year. Chamber Executive Director Court Carrier detailed the chamber's most recent accomplishments and told the gathering it had been an "incredible year." Carrier cited a number of the city's economic achievements including continued growth in tourism throughout the year.

• The Astoria Music Festival, which is preparing to open for its 15th season in June. The nonprofit festival organization will hold a series of classical music events featuring international artists from June 10 through June 25. The festival's season will open with a memorial tribute to Michael Foster, an Astoria teacher, art collector and longtime board member who died in December. The musical tribute will be a performance of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, which was Foster's favorite piece of music.



# Warrenton wants to use dam for flood control

**By MARK KUJALA** For The Daily Astorian

any people have asked: "What is going on with the Eighth Street Dam?"

The dam is a flood control structure



constructed similar to the numerous levees Warrenton maintains on the Skipanon River. It's located off of S. Main and Eighth Street. It has a gravel road across the top and a large opening in the

middle to control water flow during the incoming and outgoing tides.

The structure was built during the early 1960s to control the water levels upstream along the Skipanon River for agriculture land use, which benefited upriver landowners with flood control of their property. The Skipanon Water Control District was created to manage the structure. The water levels were originally controlled through a series of boards that were placed-horizontally in the opening of the structure.

#### Design change

In 2002, the water district decided to change the design of the structure to make it easier to operate and maintain, and to create opportunities for fish passage and to enhance water flow. The structure was altered without input from the community, and the water levels significantly increased upstream of the dam because it was now subject to tidal influx.

The water district later approached the city wishing to remove the Eighth Street structure entirely. The city agreed to look into a bridge proposal to replace the dam, and engaged the Columbia River Estuary Study Taskforce to further explore the possibility.

As engineering and hydrology reports associated with the project were revealed, it came to the city's attention there might be additional flooding to properties upstream and a potential impact to the levees. Furthermore, a 2002 Natural Resources and Conservation Service report detailed that before the 2002 modification to the structure was to take place; levees, tide gates, and waterfront property should have been fortified so that any damage from the new incoming tides and elevated water levels wouldn't adversely affect both property and city infrastructure. It was also suggested that flood plain easements might need to be purchased from property owners before changes to the dam were made. Those steps never occurred, and the 2002 NRCS report was just recently made public late in 2016.

### POINT / COUNTERPOINT

# Dam is obsolete and potentially dangerous

By TESSA SCHELLER and GAIL GALEN For The Daily Astorian

The Eighth Street Dam was one of 10,000 federally funded projects for agricultural lands in the U.S. that were prone to flooding. Completed in 1963, it had a design life of 50 years. A special district was formed under Oregon law for taxation. A taxpayer elected Board of Directors manages the dam.

The dam is located in Warrenton, but the bulk of the water district (the lands intended to be improved) are outside of Warrenton in Clatsop Plains. Property owners within the district have paid a special tax since 1963 for the management of the dam.

Unfortunately, there was a gross underestimation of our rainfall during the original design process. This resulted in undersized culverts in the dam that cannot adequately empty the vast watershed that drains through the mouth of the Skipanon River.

#### **Fiction for fact**

Mayor Mark Kujala stated that he wants to operate the structure "as intended, for the benefit of the citizens of Warrenton." That substitutes fiction for fact. The dam was never intended to benefit the city.

Mayor Kujala also stated that dam management changes were made "without input from the community." This statement is also fiction. There have been many documented public meetings on the dam, frequently attended by the mayor's own family. The City Commission was often specifically invited, but declined to attend.

All recommendations made by the Natural Resources Conservation Service in 2002, including those listed by the mayor, were taken into consideration by the district. The district is using new scientific, technical analyses, performed by an independent, international, engineering firm.

The mayor claims that there has been "considerable" flood damage to city properties for the last 14 years. That period includes 10 years during which the tide gates were in operation, before they were permanently lifted, and later removed. So obviously, by the mayor's own admission, the tide gates did not perform to prevent property flooding.

As to the mayor's comments about riverside property erosion risks; any property on any river is at risk for erosion, unless the river is enclosed in concrete.

#### **Moving forward**

A dam inspection was performed by the Oregon Water Resources Department in December 2012.

Key findings noted the lack of an emergency

Danny Miller/The Daily Astorian

Naselle Youth Camp students dig and plant along the Megler Creek restoration project near Dismal Nitch.

• Students from the **Naselle Youth Camp** in Washington state who recently participated in a restoration project near Dismal Nitch. Six students and two instructors, in partnership with the Lewis and Clark Historical Park and the Columbia River Estuary Taskforce, planted native species such as thimbleberry and red twig along the east bank of Megler Creek as part of the effort to restore the creek.

• Astor School students who participated in the annual Jump Rope for Heart event on Valentine's Day. The event raised \$5,577 for the Heart Association.

• The **Ilwaco High School girls basketball team**, which concluded its season with a run in the state playoffs that landed them in the Top 5 in the 58-team 2B classification. The Lady Fishermen placed fifth in the state tournament with a 23-win regular season and had six additional wins in the playoffs. For the players, the season's achievements and the playoff run was "a dream come true." As player Makenzie Kaech said afterward, "Kids dream of playing here growing up."

• The Seaside High School boys and girls basketball teams, which advanced Thursday to the "Final Four" of the state 4A tournaments and will be in action again today.



#### This week's Callouts go to:

• The **Oregon Department of Transportation**, which is continuing to receive critical audits at a time when it's asking for huge budget increases for transportation infrastructure improvements. In the latest audit, released earlier this week by Secretary of State Dennis Richardson, it found that ODOT's contracting system is vulnerable to contractor gamesmanship and fraud despite a decade of warnings from the department's own employees. The audit found that the department fails to employ methods to track "unbalanced" bids, meaning those with unrealistic line-item amounts meant to boost profits. The audit's findings were similar to one in 2008 which cited "unbalanced" bidding, suggesting that the problem hasn't been correctly addressed. While ODOT officials questioned the audit's methodology, they agreed with the recommendation to more closely track line items in the bid through project completion.

#### Suggestions?

Do you have a Shoutout or Callout you think we should know about? Let us know at news@dailyastorian.com and we'll make sure to take a look.

#### **Complaints**

The city has received complaints about property flooding and erosion upstream of the dam. Tide gates and levees have been damaged and the cost to the city to fix these issues has been considerable during the last 14 years. Most troubling is that the water district removed the tide gate doors from the Eighth Street structure in November 2015 that were designed to prevent stormwater flooding in the winter months. The city believes these tide gate doors should be put back on and operated as intended, for the benefit of the citizens of Warrenton.

At an impasse with the water district, the city has reached out to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for assistance in determining what to do next. We have also remained open to mediation with the water district. The city was prepared for mediation in December; however the water district pulled out of that planned meeting. The city wishes to avoid litigation, but liabilities and responsibilities for the Eighth Street Dam have yet to be determined and hopefully that can be done swiftly.

Mark Kujala is the mayor of Warrenton.



Joshua Bessex/The Daily Astorian Warrenton wants to restore the Eighth Street Dam for flood control and has sought guidance from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

spinway and a substantial restriction to the natural drainage of stormwater. The dam hazard classification was rated between "significant" and "high." The report states, "An engineering analysis of the dam, and options for its removal are warranted".

That urgent advice from the state has been diligently followed by the district. With support from the city, the district obtained funds from the Bonneville Power Administration to remove the dam and to replace it with a safe bridge specifically for the benefit of Warrenton citizens, at no cost to them.

This was a "shovel ready" project of local significance, until the city's support was abruptly withdrawn in spite of permits already issued by both the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Oregon Department of State Lands.

As surprising and disappointing as that abrupt reversal was, the district was further shocked when the City Commission chose to spend city taxpayer money to hire an attorney to threaten litigation against the district.

It was the district, not the city, who initiated a mediation process several months ago. We hoped to resolve this puzzling aggression without an expensive adversarial conflict.

#### No evidence

There is no evidence that the Eighth Street Dam prevents significant flooding. There is plenty of evidence that the dam restricts outflow and actually contributes to flooding upstream. The dam is obsolete, maybe dangerous.

The district's board has a legal, fiduciary and constitutional duty to its taxpaying constituents who have funded the maintenance of this structure for over 50 years. Those taxpayers deserve to have their rights defended. Potential mismanagement of this aging structure by the city, for an imagined benefit to the city, could harm upstream taxpayers. Does that seem right?

A question the taxpayers of Warrenton should ask their elected representatives: How much taxpayer money has the city spent in an attempt to seize control of a dangerous and obsolete dam from another public body that has been working hard to do the right thing? And perhaps equally important: why?

As we move toward removal, imagine much improved water quality, a once again navigable Skipanon River, and more healthy salmon runs, all at no cost to city taxpayers. That was, and is, the district's goal. We hope you will agree that it should be the city's goal as well.

Tessa Scheller is the chairwoman and Gail Galen is secretary of the Skipanon Water Control District board.