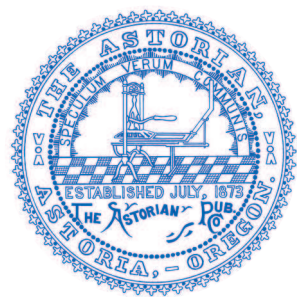


THE DAILY ASTORIAN

Founded in 1873



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OUR VIEW

Parks shortfall shows need for strategic plan

Astoria city councilors will face tough choices when they begin making decisions on the Parks and Recreation Department's budget for the next fiscal year.

The department has a looming \$100,000 shortfall, which was outlined at a council work session last week. City Manager Brett Estes and Parks and Recreation Director Angela Cosby detailed the problems the department faces, and offered potential courses of action which include possible cuts, land sales and new taxes.

Many will ask how has it got to this critical point, what can be done about it and how can it be prevented from happening in the future.

As Estes and Cosby detailed, the department's budget and staffing have shrunk over time, while both the services and programs the department offers and its ongoing maintenance obligations have grown. The city used to spend 12 percent of its general fund on parks and recreation programs and maintenance; now that number stands at 7 percent.

The real root of the problem is that there's only so much "more" that can be done with "less," which isn't addressed and resolved in any of the city's previous long-term planning. It's also likely that there will be other perplexing budgetary issues like the parks shortfall that will confront the councilors as the budgetary process moves into full swing.

At the work session, Estes and Cosby told councilors they are approaching the problem with the goal of getting the most bang for the buck with an impact to the fewest number of people.

That's a good starting point to solve the immediate problem, and we hope the City Council will take a long look at their recommendations, and an even longer look into more thorough strategic planning.

To overcome the deficit, Estes and Cosby said, programs will need to be cut, and park land possibly sold. New taxes may also be needed.

Cosby's list of possible programs to cut included the drop-in child care at the Astoria Recreation Center, CPR and first aid classes and health-and-wellness programs such as the Gobbler Gallop, Astoria Wellness Challenge and New Year's Day

Fun Run. Special events at Port of Play — the Family Pumpkin Carving, Easter Egg Dyeing, Valentine's Day Tea and Dr. Seuss Celebration Night — may also wind up on the chopping block, along with other free community and family-based events, such as the Easter Egg Hunt, the Father/Daughter Valentine's Day Dance and Summer Movies in the Park. Many of these activities — nice though they are — would be more appropriately sponsored and run by local civic groups and nonprofits.

Cosby also brought up the possibility of ending youth and adult athletics and closing the expensive-to-operate Aquatic Center, which would likely meet stiff, deafening opposition. We hope it doesn't get to the point of cutting those valuable programs.

As far as land sales, the parks department has considered selling four properties, and the one with the fewest deed restrictions is Birch Field and Park, a 0.96-acre site at Birch and 50th streets. The department lists it in poor condition with very low usage.

While land sales won't provide a sustainable source of revenue, it could help alleviate the immediate problem and lessen the future maintenance costs the department will face. They should be considered.

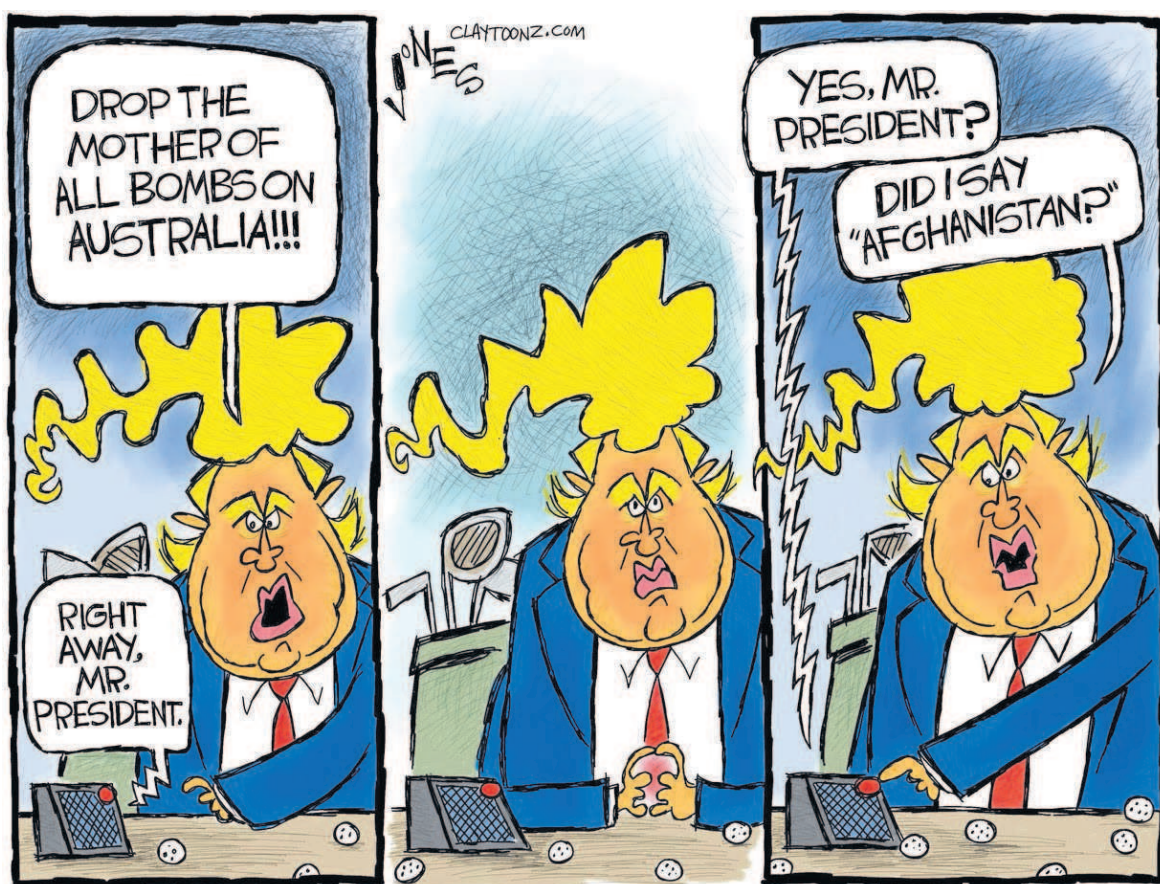
Land sales of high maintenance, low usage properties would also buy time for the council — together with the Parks and Recreation Department — to strategically dive first into the task of prioritizing the programs the city believes it should provide and then in finding the right sustainable funding mechanisms to pay for those programs. Like in business, it doesn't make strategic sense for a company to try and determine revenue and costs until it knows what products it is going to produce.

Astoria parks share a key trait with state and national parks — they are easier to create than they are to sustain. Smart long-term planning will consider the need for parks and open spaces as our region's population density grows, while at the same time factoring in how much recreation land we can afford in terms of staff time and maintenance.

What the parks problem really illustrates is the city's need for a solid, well thought out strategic plan. Councilors should consider using the immediate problem as a catalyst for long-term, positive change.



Joshua Bessex/The Daily Astorian
A boy watches a baseball game from a tree near Tapiola Park in Astoria.



GUEST COLUMN

Lifestyle Green Community
Open spaces Outdoors
Environment Fresh air
Mountains Natural Spirit
Government Beauty Clean air
Social values Climate Affordable
Progressive Nice Quality of life

Oregonians unite as raining champs

By ADAM DAVIS
Special to The Daily Astorian

Drip, drip, drip. Snow, ice and rain.

Lots of rain.

It's been record-breaking since

December. Yet despite the hard winter, Oregonians continue to name the "climate" or "weather" as one of the things they most value about living in Oregon — and it remains an important reason why people move to our state.

Since 1977, DHM Research has been asking Oregonians, "What do you personally value about living in Oregon?" The climate has always been, and continues to be, one of the most frequent responses. We keep hearing "beautiful climate," "varied climates," "climate with no humidity" and "climate, it's mild." Other common responses are: "weather," "decent weather," "acceptable weather" and "good weather."

Oregonians value our climate in part for its direct relationship to the state's other top attractions: natural beauty, clean air and water, outdoor recreation opportunities and sense of community. People connect the dots

and appreciate the contribution that rain, relatively mild temperatures and the changing seasons contribute to these other features of the state. "I personally value everything, the weather, how green it is, the fact that I can go to the mountains, or the coast and be there within two hours," one person remarked. "Fresh air, the climate, more environmentally responsible than many other states, has the ocean and mountains and forests, has no sales tax, has many organic farmer's markets, has wine growing regions, many outdoor sports opportunities, has cultural activities, especially in the cities," said another.

Oregonians' fondness for the climate cuts across population subgroups: young and old, female and male, urban and rural. More telling, it is something Republicans, Democrats and NonAffiliated/Other voters agree on.

So far, valuing Oregon's climate has survived the hard winter and what looks to be a wet spring. Just a few weeks ago DHM Research asked Oregonians what they value about living in the state, and once again the climate or weather was a top response along with natural beauty. A word cloud illustrating responses features "natural," "environment," "climate,"

"beauty," "outdoors," "mountains," and "green," as the largest words.

Also, for the first time in a DHM Research survey, we asked respondents who moved to Oregon how important the climate was to them in deciding to move here. Among respondents who said they had moved to Oregon as adults (54 percent of the sample), nearly all said climate was a positive consideration that influenced their decision to come here.

Our climate underpins much of what we value about the state — and it sure beats what many people elsewhere deal with (As one survey respondent noted, "The weather is great; I can ride my skateboard year-round.")

English art critic John Ruskin could have been writing about Oregon when he said, "Sunshine is delicious, rain is refreshing, wind braces us up, snow is exhilarating; there is really no such thing as bad weather, only different kinds of good weather."

Adam Davis, who has been conducting opinion research in Oregon for 40 years, is a founding principal in DHM Research, a nonpartisan firm specializing in assisting with public policy making and communications.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Fix the slump

A quarter of a mile past Kern Lane, on Oregon Highway 202, a very popular and well-traveled road, the southbound lane has a decent sized slump in the middle of the lane that keeps getting a temporary fix — and always comes back after facing a cold and wet winter. The slump is enough to bottom out someone's suspension, and over time it just gets worse. This is dangerous on such a windy and narrow high-speed road.

Instead of temporarily fixing the slump every summer, so it just drops back down after a harsh, wet and cold winter, we should move the road slightly to the west and provide a long-term fix in order to avoid cars from hitting this reappearing slump.

DESIREE ANDRADE
 Astoria

Keep the woods clean

Keeping our woods clean needs to happen. You can't drive in the woods for five minutes without seeing garbage. It's not a small amount, either. It's everywhere. If you go up Pipeline Road, you will see mass amounts of garbage. The woods can have some beautiful scenery. Sadly, that is starting to be taken over by garbage. This is

something that has to change.

Its starting to become normal for people to just dump their garbage in the woods. It's not just little things that they are dumping. People are dumping washers, dryers and full bags of household garbage. It's not just making the woods look bad, but it puts animals and others at risk. The woods are too beautiful to be destroyed by a bunch of garbage.

ETHAN RUBUS
 Astoria

Needs a stop sign

The county needs to go put a stop sign at the intersection of Svensen Market and George Hill roads. This three-way intersection only has a stop coming from George Hill. It would work a lot better if they made this dangerous intersection a three-way stop where the roads all meet. Coming up from that road, you cannot see both sides of the intersection, where there currently are no signs. There are a lot of new drivers around, and people who are not familiar with that intersection. The county should do everything in their power to make sure all roads are as safe as possible.

ALISHA MURPHY
 Astoria

LETTERS WELCOME

Letters should be exclusive to The Daily Astorian.

Letters should be fewer than 350 words and must include the writer's name, address and phone numbers. You will be contacted to confirm authorship.

All letters are subject to editing for space, grammar and, on occasion, factual accuracy. Only two

letters per writer are printed each month.

Letters written in response to other letter writers should address the issue at hand and, rather than mentioning the writer by name, should refer to the headline and date the letter was published. Disclosure should be civil and people should be referred to in a respect-

ful manner.

Submissions may be sent in any of these ways:

E-mail to editor@dailyastorian.com; online at www.dailyastorian.com; delivered to the Astorian offices at 949 Exchange St. and 1555 N. Roosevelt in Seaside or by mail to Letters to the Editor, P.O. Box 210, Astoria, OR 97103.