

Port: Rohne, Spence to join commission in July

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formed an alliance critical of Port management and Executive Director Jim Knight, and opposed to the agency's \$1.96 million bond measure to develop infrastructure at the Astoria Regional Airport.

Campbell, Rohne and Spence lauded staff's performance and supported the bond measure, which narrowly failed Tuesday.

Rohne, a former Clatsop County commissioner and Clatsop Community College Board member, said that although he is generally opposed to running on slates, one formed organically in response to their opponents' critique of Port staff. "It basically became people who want to see the current administration succeed, and those who want to replace the current administration," Rohne said.

"I think it definitely is a repudiation of our opponents' position and what they've been a part of in not moving the Port forward," Spence, a former city administrator and member of the Port's budget committee, said of the results.

Rohne and Spence will join the commission in July.

Campbell and Fulton

Most heated was the campaign between Fulton, a wetlands specialist for Warrenton Fiber, and Campbell, a marine contractor. Both were elected to the Port Commission in 2013. Campbell had also served on the Port Commission from 1965 to 1977.

Campbell, who captured more than 70 percent of the vote, said the message had gotten out about how disruptive Fulton and Hunsinger have been.

"I'm glad I won," he said. "Maybe we're getting one step closer to getting something done."

Facing a challenge by Rohne, Fulton changed seats at the filing deadline and ran against Campbell, with whom he has clashed repeatedly over differences of opinion regarding staff. The two have been on opposite ends of many 3-2 votes won by Campbell and Commissioners Mushen and John Raichl and lost by Fulton and Hunsinger.

Fulton dominated headlines with several allegations against Campbell throughout the campaign, from condoning a private clubhouse at the airport and conflicts of interest because he hangs an airplane at the airport to helping staff hide cost overruns on the Port's Pier 3 stormwater system, which has gone over budget and fallen several months behind schedule.

Campbell dismissed Fulton's allegations as political maneuvering. He intimated that Fulton's employer, Warrenton's Nygaard family, has



Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

James Campbell, left in red jacket, and Frank Spence, right, won their spots in the Port Commission races Tuesday night. They celebrated at Fort George Brewery.



Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

A voter drops their ballot in the box outside county offices at 820 Exchange St. in Astoria on Tuesday.



Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

Ballots are counted by volunteers during the special district election in Clatsop County on Tuesday.

been behind much of his campaign material, and that his campaign is part of a plot to get rid of Knight.

Fulton gathered no new political contributions to his campaign committee since the 2013 election, according to state campaign-finance records. Campbell received contributions from state Sen. Betsy Johnson, D-Scappoose, marine contractor John E. McAmis, Bornstein Seafoods, Bergerson Construction and Ann Bales, the wife of Philip Bales. Fulton had alleged that Philip Bales' "Man Cave" at the airport was an "unlicensed speakeasy," but the retired dentist and pilot was exonerated by a Clatsop County Sher-

iff's Office investigation.

Rohne and Hellberg

Rohne, a Brownsmead dairy farmer, had more than 69 percent of the vote in his race against Hellberg, a former Warrenton city commissioner, commercial fisherman, marine surveyor and longshoreman, for Fulton's seat on the Port Commission.

Rohne filed for the Port Commission in February on a campaign to bring stability, public trust and positive working relationships with local, state and national partners.

"I'm grateful that the results are what they are," Rohne said. "It seems like there's a mandate for supporting the man-

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agement and trying to move the Port forward in a positive direction."

Hellberg said he hopes the Port still prioritizes their money and focuses on maintaining revenue-generating properties on the central waterfront. He pointed to a demographic shift driven by more liberal retirees as contributing to his loss in the election. Port races are nonpartisan, but Rohne is a Democrat.

"The Democratic block in Astoria, they are what they are," he said. "They aren't going to vote for anything that upsets the peace in Astoria."

Hellberg, a former longshoreman, gathered contributions from other current and former longshoremen, including Hunsinger and local longshore union chapter President Chris Connaway. Rohne received contributions from state Sen. Johnson, Bornstein Seafoods and Bergerson Construction.

O'Grady and Spence

In the Port's quietest campaign, Spence had more than 60 percent of the vote against O'Grady, a local auto shop owner, farmer and longshoreman. Spence will replace Raichl, who was appointed in 2014 to fill out the term of Ric Gerttula after he resigned.

O'Grady largely echoed Fulton's positions on many issues, calling for more disclosure by staff to the Port Commission. Spence campaigned on bringing his expertise in government and budgeting to the Port.

Like Hellberg, O'Grady gathered contributions from other current and former longshoremen. Spence received contributions from Bridgewater Bistro owner Tony Kischner and Bornstein Seafoods.



The Daily Astorian/File Photo

Life Flight Pilot and Customer Service Manager Dan Travers points to one of the proposed locations for the Life Flight base and hangar in the southeastern airport property in Warrenton. Currently, Life Flight's base and hangar are separated by about a quarter mile.

Bond: 'Nobody wants to pay more taxes'

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among Clatsop County's political leadership, failed 51 percent to 49 percent, or by 145 votes.

The Port wanted \$1.96 million in bonds over three years to develop about 10 acres of land at the southern end of the airport.

"I think it was as much a voice of the people who are tired of being taxed," Jim Knight, the Port's executive director, said of the results.

Part of the project would have provided a pad for Life Flight Network, which has received a state grant to help finance a new permanent hangar and crew quarters. The medevac service has been operating out of a trailer near the 12th Place entrance to the airport, while storing its helicopter in a rented hangar a quarter mile away during bad weather. The current location has been deemed unsuitable in the long term because of issues with noise and nearby U.S. Coast Guard, taxiway and refueling traffic.

Knight said Life Flight had been clear that it did not want to pay for the infrastructure involved in its new hangar, while the Port was clear it could not afford the development to move Life Flight.

The bond would have paid to extend Flightline Drive to a new southern entrance at Airport Lane, created an access driveway for Life Flight's hangar, extended utilities to the area and made shovel-ready several acres of adjacent land.

After researching five locations around the airport's tarmac, Port staff recommended the southern site as the best location for Life Flight. The site also received backing by the Airport Advisory Committee, a subgroup of the Port Commission made up of tenants including the U.S. Coast Guard and airplane tug manufacturer Lektro, and signoff from the Federal Aviation Administration.

A political action committee, the Coastal Air Medical Protection PAC, formed to stump for the bond measure and was led by former Astoria Mayor Willis Van Dusen. The committee has been financed by contributions from Van Dusen and state Sen. Betsy Johnson, D-Scappoose.

Knight said he's not certain what the next move is. "It's going to be up to Life Flight what they want to do next."

Port Commission candidates James Campbell, Dirk Rohne and Frank Spence, who all won handily Tuesday, came out in favor of the bond measure.

Their opponents — Stephen Fulton, Dick Hellberg and Pat O'Grady — were supportive of helping relocate Life Flight but opposed the bond. They argued the bond is speculative development, and that the Port should find a cheaper alternative for Life Flight and focus on fixing existing revenue-producing infrastructure on the central waterfront.

Fulton, in particular, tried to create several alternatives to the bond, from creating a backup fund to build a pad for Life Flight to evicting an existing tenant from his private hangar to make way.

Rohne said that opposition by Fulton might have tipped the scales against the measure.

"Nobody wants to pay more taxes," he said. "It's difficult to pass a tax levy when there is no opposition."

He and Spence said the measure was also harmed by the county having no voter's pamphlet to explain the issue.

"The general public didn't know enough about the bond measure and what it was for," Spence said.

Waldorf: Estimated refurbish could cost up to \$6 million

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"You guys do win the prize for the most pigeons ever," Garver said. The building, she said lightly, has its "rough spots."

But it also carries a lot of promise and there are fascinating historical features, Garver added. She fell in love with the ground-floor lobby, she told the commission. Studio units and planned retail space located on this floor are going to have soaring, 15 1/2-foot high ceilings.

Innovative Housing is still in the midst of a due diligence period, "deciding on if the risk is worth us doing the project," Garver said. It could be at least a year before they even begin to break ground, assuming all the necessary funding comes in. On that timeline, apartments wouldn't be ready for tenants until summer 2019.

"That's longer than anyone wants," Garver said. But, she told the commission, it could cost up to \$6 million to refurbish the Waldorf — the bulk of which will come in the form of grants and tax credits. The group landed a



Jeff Daly/For The Daily Astorian

Innovative Housing of Portland hopes to convert the historic Waldorf Hotel into affordable housing while keeping many of its unique features. More photos of the historic Waldorf Hotel can be found online at DailyAstorian.com

\$100,000 state grant for the project earlier this month and one reason for the presentation Tuesday was to begin brainstorming with the community about other ways to fund the project.

Garver pointed out a picture of the building's facade,

the words "Save the Merwyn!" pasted on the window. "That's Astoria," she said. "That's what the community wants."

Remained the same

What some people wanted at one point, how-

ever, was a demolition. In 2012, Groat Brothers purchased the building intending to tear it down to make room for an expansion of the library. But preservationists and others in the community pushed back against these plans and the Historic

Landmarks Commission ultimately voted against demolishing the building. The library remained the same, and so has the Waldorf.

Innovative Housing is on the preservationists' side in many ways. After coming on the scene earlier this year,

they hope to keep some of the former hotel's character and many of its historic features intact. Things like the tall ceilings, or high-quality marble hidden under paint, Garver said. They plan to keep as many of the historic walls and original layout in place as possible, too, creating each apartment unit by simply combining two hotel rooms and opening up a doorway between them.

"It's exciting to see this go forward," said acting commission President Michelle Dieffenbach after Garver wrapped up her presentation. Garver showed the commission work Innovative Housing has accomplished at other historic buildings and talked about how the group involved the communities to achieve the end results.

Garver said she is looking to the Astoria community now. She wants to know how people want to participate in this project, what they want to see and how they want to make it work. For Innovative Housing to just come in and say, "Here it is" and "This is how we'll do it," Garver said, "There's not serendipity in that."