



Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

The Sunset Empire Transit Center has become one of the preferred places to hang out for the local homeless population.

## Homelessness: The transit center's ordinance will take effect June 24

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### 'Nice place'

Astoria's personality, temperate weather and small population tend to draw temporary crowds of homeless people from out of town, especially during the summer months.

"It's got its own groove," said Elaine Bruce, the executive director of Clatsop Community Action. "It's a nice place to be homeless."

When people come to town without their own transportation, their first stop is often the transit center. As is the case in many communities, the transit center — remodeled and reopened in 2004 — can become a hub for people without local shelter once they step off the bus.

"We're one of the favorite hangout spots," Jeff Hazen, the transit district's executive director, said. "It was designed as a clean, safe place for families to use. Over time, that increasing transient population has been taking over."

Hazen has worked for the transit district for about 2 1/2 years after a career in retail. When he first began his new career, he said he developed relationships with homeless people near the center. These people would report to him whenever they witnessed any criminal or unruly behavior. But those people have since moved on, he said.

Now his "gut feeling" is that he will not be able to establish the same rapport with the current crop of homeless. Recent problems at the transit center involve people using bathroom sinks as showers, adults gathering in children's play areas, lice infestation and loud music. Criminal behavior, such as assault, is also common.

Homeless people with connections to the community have a natural incentive to be good citizens since they were born here, have families and went to school in the area, but simply fell on hard times, Birdeno said. But the changing demographics have brought a host of challenges.

"I think it's an issue. I don't know the answer," Birdeno said. "You move them from one area and they go to another area."

Hazen began drafting an ordinance several months ago



ABOVE: Areas near the Astoria Riverwalk and the transit center are popular with the homeless in summer months. BELOW: Complaints about noise related to the homeless population in Astoria have also increased in recent months.



designed to regulate a wide range of behaviors — including body odor and use of shopping carts — at the transit center and on buses. The ordinance was passed unanimously by the transit district's Board of Commissioners last month.

The transit center's ordinance will officially take effect June 24, and Hazen plans to hire a private security team to enforce the rules at the beginning.

While the transit center has always had a loose set of guidelines governing conduct, the ordinance gives police more teeth to trespass someone from the property, Hazen said. He compares it to the Astoria Police Department's Property Watch program downtown. A response to aggressive pan-

handling, the program encourages businesses to post signs on the front of properties with banned activities so that police can trespass violators after business hours.

### Trespass complaints

Astoria Dispatch received more than five times more trespass calls and more than twice the number of abandoned junk calls in 2016 than in 2012. While trespass complaints often center on people camping outside storefronts, police responded multiple times in the past year to people living in recreational vehicles on city streets.

"Where you see the higher numbers of these calls is generally from the transient population," Halverson said.

Programs and polices such

as Property Watch and the transit center ordinance may be steps in addressing the issue. Bruce said she supports both but cautions against stigmatizing homeless people.

Only about 5 percent of the homeless population are causing the problems, she said. The rest are either victims themselves or often shoulder the blame for the minority.

Stereotypes about the homeless are becoming less valid as more families and children struggle to find housing.

"There are different tiers of homelessness," Bruce said. "Most of them look like you and me."

As for the small percentage of homeless people that do commit crimes and act unruly, Bruce said, "They're the ones that make everyone look bad."

## Port: 'This is an attack on a commissioner'

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"It is disconcerting, at the least, that Commissioner Hunsinger has chosen to make false representations and accusations regarding matters that have long ago been resolved by the commission," Knight wrote. "Commissioner Hunsinger's wrongful attack on our employee creates a hostile work environment for all of our employees. Additionally, Commissioner Hunsinger continues to significantly interfere with my ability to manage the Port."

At a Wednesday Port Budget Committee meeting, Hunsinger said the Port should increase its proposed legal expenses to help cover Jensen's legal costs. He again denied any involvement in the complaint.

"This is an attack on a commissioner," Hunsinger said of Knight's letter, "and this will be the last attack on me, I guarantee you."

### Past accusations

Knight previously accused Hunsinger of "unprofessional, threatening and bullying tactics"

after a phone call in March between the two men, who both live near Knappa. In a memo to the Port Commission, Knight said Hunsinger commented during the phone call that there were "a lot of bad guys that are near where I live and that there is a lot of illegal activities — like drug running." Knight said Hunsinger told him he needed to be careful and should "get a gun and a concealed weapons permit because you never know, bad things can happen and you need to protect yourself."

Knight said it was the third time he's registered complaints about Hunsinger, although no complaints have been filed against Hunsinger with the Oregon Government Ethics Commission. Knight has said he will call 911 if Hunsinger is seen at his home and will only meet with Hunsinger publicly or with witnesses and at a location of his choice.

Sheriff Tom Bergin said the phone conversation was concerning, but not criminal. Mushen called the episode a "tempest in a teapot," and said he would take no action.

## WORLD IN BRIEF

Associated Press

### May's UK election gamble backfires as Tories lose majority

LONDON — Spectacularly punished by voters who took away her majority in parliament, a politically wounded Theresa May sought to soldier today as Britain's prime minister, resisting pressure to resign after the failure of her high-stakes election gamble made the massive challenge of untangling Britain from the European Union only more complex and uncertain.

Having called an early election in hopes of getting an increased majority that could have strengthened her hand in Britain's exit talks with the EU, May instead saw her majority evaporate completely — leaving her fortunes hanging by a thread.

Still, rather than resign, May clung to the hope that her Conservatives might still be able to govern by making deals with another party or group of parties. She was planning to seek Queen Elizabeth II's approval — a largely symbolic step — to form a government later today.

The shock result and the prospect that the EU will now be negotiating with a shaky British government cast dark clouds over the Brexit negotiations just 10 days before they are due to start. The pound lost more than 3 cents against the dollar.

With 649 of 650 seats in the House of Commons declared, May's bruised Conservatives had 318 seats — short of the 326 they needed for an outright majority and well down from the 330 seats they had before May's roll of the electoral dice. Labour has 261.

### Distrust of Trump marks Comey's testimony about his firing

WASHINGTON — Former FBI Director James Comey laid bare months of White House distrust, accusing the administration at an extraordinary open hearing of spreading "lies" and bluntly asserting that President Donald Trump had fired him to interfere with an investigation of Russia's ties to the Trump campaign.

At his first congressional appearance since his abrupt firing last month, Comey revealed that he'd orchestrated the public release of information about his private conversations with the president in an effort to further the investigation.

Comey's testimony, at a hugely anticipated hearing that captured the country's attention, provided a gripping account of his interactions with Trump and underscored the discord that had soured their relationship.

He portrayed Trump as a chief executive dismissive of the FBI's independence and made clear that he interpreted Trump's request to end an investigation into his former national security adviser as an order coming from the president.

Though Republicans worked to discredit Comey and to blunt the impact of his testimony, the ex-director's statement deepened questions about the basis for his May 9 dismissal and about whether Trump's actions constituted obstruction of justice. The veteran lawman expressed confidence that could be a matter ripe for investigation by special counsel Robert Mueller, though he declined to offer an opinion on whether it met such a threshold.

### Analysis: Trump's credibility is Comey's primary target

WASHINGTON — For three hours, former FBI Director James Comey leveled an unrelenting attack on the credibility of the president of the United States.

The White House's statements were "lies, plain and simple." Comey took notes on their conversations because he worried the president "might lie" later. After a while, he said, he so distrusted the man running the country that he did not want to be left alone with him.

It was a riveting, televised portrait of President Donald Trump, one unrivaled in recent memory for its potential to undermine a presidency. Comey's message, delivered in meticulous detail, amounted to a challenge to lawmakers, the public and the special counsel now investigating possible links between Trump's campaign and Russia: Whose account do you believe — the nation's former top law enforcement official testifying under oath or a president with a record of skirting the truth on issues big and small?

The answer to that question ultimately may not impact the outcome of the FBI and congressional Russia probes, and it may not move Republican lawmakers any closer to a dramatic break from their party leader. But it could leave the president in a perilously weak political position not yet five months into his term.

"A president cannot communicate effectively if their trust tank is full of holes and credibility has leaked out all over the political landscape," said Matthew Dowd, who served as chief strategist for President George W. Bush's re-election campaign.

### Bill: 'I think we are just focusing on the symptoms and not really the problem'

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The Senate majority leader said reasons for opposing the bill vary from person to person.

"A lot of it is fully understanding what is being talked about. That is part of challenge here. There have been compelling arguments on behalf of tenants and also compelling arguments on other side. It's our job as the Legislature is to work through those."

All of the Republicans in the Senate are opposed to the bill, according to the Senate Republicans Office.

At least two Senate Democrats also have indicated they plan to vote no. Sen. Rod Monroe, D-Portland, still opposes the bill, according to his office.

"I think we are just focusing on the symptoms and not really the problem. I am try-

ing to focus the Legislature on the real issues, which is supply and demand issues," said Sen. Tim Knopp, R-Bend.

Knopp said the legislation already has had a negative effect on the rental supply. He said he knows of landlords who have advertised their properties for sale after hearing about the bill.

"Almost all of the sales will put rentals in the owner-occupied market," he said.

Some of the sticking points in the bill are no-cause eviction and how to address landlord abuses without penalizing all landlords.

"We are struggling with how to prevent the abuses that have occurred. Really my goal is to focus on the abuses and try to deal with those in a way that is least disruptive of responsible landlords," Burdick said.