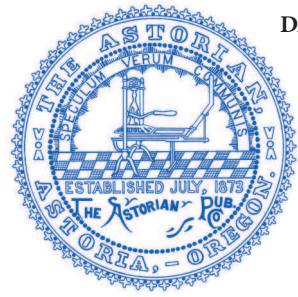


THE DAILY ASTORIAN

Founded in 1873



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OUR VIEW

Is Seaside's deal with Airbnb fair to its competitors?

Seaside city councilors approved a no cost, voluntary deal with Airbnb last week to allow the short-term vacation rental giant to act as an agent for the properties they represent to collect lodging taxes and send collections to the city. The deal has that good for some, maybe not so good for others kind of feel.

For the city, it's a good deal because those taxes — thousands of dollars annually — weren't previously collected and represent an untapped revenue stream. Collections will be aided by software that tracks Airbnb short-term rentals and City Manager Mark Winstanley said there are no costs for the agreement.

Of course the elephant in the room is the question of why those taxes weren't previously collected, and whether deals with other vacation rental firms will now be in the offing. Airbnb has deals with the state and 14 other cities and counties in Oregon.

Questions of fairness

But the Airbnb contract also raises the question of whether the accord will give the multibillion dollar company an unfair advantage over its commercial competitors, the area's hotels and inns.

Terry Bichsel, owner of the Seaside Best Western Ocean View Resort and Rivertide Suites and a member of the Best Western International Board of Directors, asked councilors to delay deciding because he doesn't believe the deal's terms are equitable.

Bichsel advocated that all rental properties, whether managed by Airbnb or not, should have to register with the city the same as hotels, collect lodging taxes and abide by the same regulations and oversight. The agreement doesn't do all of that, he said, which creates an unlevel playing field. He pointed out that the contract also limits the city's ability to audit Airbnb's reporting to only one year out of four. Bichsel urged the city to take time "to get it right."

Cynthia Malkowski, who with her husband owns the Arch Cape Inn and Retreat, echoed Bichsel's comments. After the council's 4-2 approval of the deal, Malkowski said she was "stunned" the agreement was approved, and that the "contract with Airbnb creates a double preferential standard for Airbnb, one that greatly discriminates against local law-abiding businesses and exacerbates our housing crisis."

Rental numbers

Seaside has the highest number of Airbnb rentals across the region.

According to Airbnb's public policy director for the Northwest, Laura Spanjian, 140 active Airbnb hosts in Seaside welcomed 14,000 guests during the past year. The typical host rents their home for two nights a month, she said. In Cannon Beach there are 30 active hosts who welcomed 6,000 guests in the past year, with the typical host renting fewer than 30 nights a year. In Astoria there are 50 active hosts with 6,000 guests over the past year with 80 percent of the hosts renting their home for fewer than 90 nights a year, she said.

The Airbnb agreement goes into effect July 1 and has a 90-day termination clause. Councilors shouldn't hesitate to exercise it if the deal shows any signs of inequity that Bichsel and Malkowski referred to.

The real issues

The issue of vacation rentals has been extremely divisive between year-round homeowners, vacation rental owners and their commercial competitors across the region.

The issue, however, isn't whether vacation rentals should be allowed, they already exist, with limitations. What's really at stake is fairness and recognition that vacation rentals are a business — especially when the large rental facilitators like Airbnb are involved. Dollars are changing hands between owners and visitors each time the homes are rented. Those transactions should be subject to similar lodging taxes and oversight as hotels and inns face so all are on a fair playing field. They need to be efficiently monitored so cities benefit from the tax collections with the least amount of overhead and bureaucracy.

Fairness is key, though, and it should be closely watched.



SOUTHERN EXPOSURE



Submitted Photo

View of estuary at Sitka Sedge Natural Area.

Beyond the trail and into the parks

"Robin proudly and passionately served on the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department Commission from 2008 to 2017. During her tenure, she welcomed several new state parks into the system, Chrissy Field, Iwetemlaykin, Bates, Beaver Creek and Cottonwood Canyon. Robin encouraged the department to pursue and secure the acquisition of the Sitka Sedge State Park, which will be opening for the late fall season. Risley could continually be counted on for her reliability, dedication and involvement. She went above and beyond donating her own time attending public meetings all around the state regarding various rule changes and policy impacts to communities and park visitors. She was a great commissioner always listening and advocating for what she believed the public wants it. Her service was top-notch and will be deeply missed."

— Lisa Sumption, director, Oregon Parks and Recreation Commission, on Robin Risley

Q: When you were a member of the state's Parks and Recreation Department Commission, did you find a conflict with industry and parkland preservation?

A: We've had some issues in Eastern Oregon, with so much of the land owned by the government. Some people can be a little bit upset to hear that maybe a property that they hold dear would be public when they would rather stay private land. We have gone to meetings that start out fairly contentious. But as we go along through the process, we just don't have one meeting. We have many meetings, to get an idea of the temperature of the community.

Q: Do you anticipate federal policy changes will change the way land is managed in our state?

A: That remains to be seen.

Q: Tell me about your background.

A: I grew up in Milwaukie, Oregon, and my family were pioneers. They came over the Oregon Trail the Mount Hood way. They got two donation land claims. The family settled in 1843. There is a Risley Park and the Risley Landing Gardens today.

I graduated from Oregon State University with a degree in scientific illustration. Then I went to work for Myron Frank as an illustrator.

Q: How did you land on the



R.J. Marx/The Daily Astorian
Robin Risley



Submitted Photo
Historic fence post at Sitka Sedge Natural Area.

coast?

A: I married a fellow whose family owned the Crab Broiler restaurant. It seated 292 people and people would have to wait two hours to get a table. They would check in and come back. It was wonderful.

Q: The restaurant had quite a reputation.

A: It was named "Outstanding Roadside Restaurant" by Life magazine. We had 100 employees. Behind Crown Zellerbach, we were the largest employer in Clatsop County.

Q: What happened to the Crab Broiler?

A: The family closed it. They sold it three times and the last one stuck. It's been 25 years maybe since.

Q: What was your next move?

A: I left and went to Lake Oswego for a little while then came back and I've been here ever since. I came into realty in 1989.

Q: Do you have a particular focus?

A: I've always worked in Gearhart, Seaside, Cannon Beach and Arch Cape. I'm with Sotheby's now. I don't usually work in Astoria, just because I think it's a different animal.

Q: When did you become interested in civic affairs?

A: I've always been involved one way or another supporting different candidates for offices. I've always been involved in decision-making to a degree or helping to do that. I am on the Planning Commission for the county and also for Cannon Beach.

Q: How did you get involved with the Parks and Recreation Department?

A: I got a call from a friend and they said there was a vacancy if I was interested. And I have to thank Debbie Boone, our house representative, and (state Sen.) Betsy (Johnson) because they encouraged me. I joined in 2008. I served under three governors: (Ted) Kulongoski, (John) Kitzhaber and (Kate) Brown.

Q: From your perspective as a Realtor, what are people looking for in Cannon Beach?

A: People always want to be by the ocean and they always want to have a walk. Ever since the tsunami concerns sometimes people request that they request to be higher up.

Q: How do you address the tsunami threat?

A: You need to be up-front with every concern people might have.

Q: As a real estate agent, do you see a celebrity culture here?

A: It goes back to "Kindergarten Cop" and Arnold Schwarzenegger. I used to be a stringer for the film and video department. We did "Kindergarten Cop," we did "Goonies" and we did "Point Break."

I'm on the Arts Council for Clatsop County. We finished doing a survey of the different events throughout the county. In the next month we're going to come up with the value that we think the arts provide in our community.

Q: What can we look forward to at the state Parks and Recreation Department?

A: Doug Deur is going to take my place — woo hoo! I am so excited!

He's going to bring a whole dimension to parks that I think they need, because a lot of our areas are very precious. And we need to honor them.

R.J. Marx is The Daily Astorian's South County reporter and editor of the Seaside Signal and Cannon Beach Gazette.