

County ready to tackle vacation rentals

Permits may be required

By JACK HEFFERNAN
The Daily Astorian

New vacation rental regulations may become law in Clatsop County by the end of the year.

The county Board of Commissioners will hold its first public hearing Wednesday on a possible ordinance. The regulations represent the county's response to an issue that has unsettled the North Coast as the region becomes increasingly popular with tourists.

Since 2010, the county estimates the number of rentals available for up to 30 days has increased from 93 to 173. That figure is merely a guess, though, and permits would offer a more accurate glimpse.

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Alex Pajunas/The Daily Astorian
Razor clamming has been authorized for a stretch of Clatsop County beach starting Sunday.

Razor clamming OK'd on North Coast

Fewer clams to go around, though

By KATIE FRANKOWICZ
The Daily Astorian

For the first time in more than a year, a popular stretch of beach in Clatsop County will reopen for razor clam digging starting Sunday, but fish and wildlife biologists say there will be fewer clams to go around.

High levels of the biotoxin domoic acid in the clams coupled with an annual summer closure to protect young clams have kept the 18-mile stretch of beaches between South Jetty in Fort Stevens State Park and Tillamook Head in Seaside off-limits to diggers since last July. Before the closure, clambers had experienced a record with an estimated 16 million clams available on the Clatsop beaches last year. Clammers quickly and easily hit their daily bag limits.

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Kelly Short

Hammond Marina, seen here from the air, will have a new owner sometime next year after Warrenton was able to secure the transfer from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

By KATIE FRANKOWICZ
The Daily Astorian

WARRENTON — When boat traffic was at its peak this summer in the Hammond Marina, some fishermen found themselves nearly trapped at the docks at low tide with only 7 to 10 inches of water under their boats.

After decades of hoping, negotiating and keeping a close eye on bills flying off to Congress, Warrenton is on its way to full ownership of the marina and boat basin. The city expects a transfer of ownership from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers next year, but one thing is already clear: Dredging needs to be priority No. 1.

In fact, members of the newly re-formed Hammond Marina Task Force and city officials are already looking to put dredging plans in motion — even before the transfer is final. At their first meeting this summer, the task force members concluded there was “no sense” in even talking about improvements or other development plans until the marina is dredged.

Local fishing guide Kelly Short used a drone to take overhead photos of the marina for Warrenton Harbormaster Jane Sweet during the summer fishing season. In one photo, trucks and boat trailers are everywhere, metal glinting in the sunlight. Another photo, taken at low tide, shows boats tied up along a stretch of dock. The pale brown-green bottom of the basin is clearly visible.

Dredging woes

Sweet has talked to several engineers about the feasibility of setting up dredging soon. Still, she expects it to be a time-consuming process; it's not something she wants to put off until the city has full ownership.

The marina hasn't been dredged in more than a decade. Back then, the work cost between \$200,000 and \$250,000. Both the cost and the marina itself have likely shifted since, and whoever takes on the work now will have to redo surveys and soundings of the boat basin, Sweet said.

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Photos by Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

ABOVE: Warrenton is expecting a transfer of ownership of the Hammond Marina from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers sometime next year. **BELOW:** The Hammond Marina has not been dredged in more than a decade.



‘IT’S A HUGE ECONOMIC IMPACT IF WE DON’T HAVE THAT (MARINA).’

Pam Ackley | Warrenton city commissioner

Comfort Suites evacuated after gas leak and fire

Guests sent scrambling Monday night

By KATIE FRANKOWICZ
The Daily Astorian

The Comfort Suites in Astoria was evacuated Monday night after a gas leak and a fire threatened the building and displaced dozens of guests.

There were no reports of injuries and the cause of the gas leak is being investigated. A fire investigation team met at the site today.

Though it isn't known yet



Katie Frankowicz/The Daily Astorian

Guests at the Comfort Suites in Astoria were evacuated Monday night after a gas leak and a fire.

what caused the leak or how the gas ignited, it is clear the situation could have been much worse, Astoria Fire Chief Ted Ames said.

“This could have been horrible,” Ames said. “We dodged

a bullet. Everybody involved: the guests, the hotel, staff, owners, police, fire department. Everybody dodged a huge bullet.”

Comfort Suites General Manager Amy Gambino

and her staff found rooms for guests at other hotels in Astoria and Warrenton. She said all of the hotel's 75 rooms had been occupied at the time of the alarm.

“The safety of our guests is our top concern,” Gambino said.

Ames said the gas leak began near a meter at the back of the building on Lief Erikson Drive, facing the Columbia River, and extended a bit into the building. A fire started, the bulk of it outside, but flames reached the hotel's laundry room. This part of the fire was extinguished after a water pipe burst and a ceiling sprinkler activated.

The pipe kept pumping water into the hotel, however. Ames said several inches of water covered the ground floor.

Maggie McKinlay of California was in Astoria hoping for a vacation. Instead, she stood in a queue with other guests Monday night, many of them in their pajamas and several barefoot, waiting for firefighters to lead them back to their rooms to collect their belongings.

McKinlay and her husband were staying in a room on the ground floor not far from where the gas leak started. “It sounded like a jet engine,” she said. “We heard it in our room. Over the TV, over everything.”

