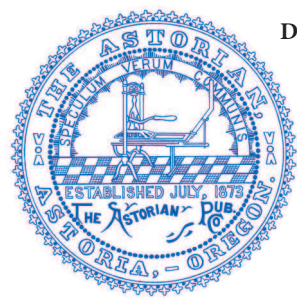


# THE DAILY ASTORIAN

Founded in 1873



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## OUR VIEW

# Marina village a worthy concept for the Port

**A** bold future vision is in the works for the area around the Port of Astoria's West Mooring Basin, but a messy court case could quash it from becoming a reality.

William Orr and Chester Trabucco envision the Port property with an appealing hotel, conference center and restaurant that can attract more guests, especially during the winter. With the marina and riverfront nearby it can be a majestic setting for a marina village project and would be an attractive basin-area centerpiece that would be a key asset for the community.

Trabucco's brother-in-law, former Astoria Port Director Peter Gearin — although he ran into trouble on other matters — had appealing ideas for broadening the Port's luster as a maritime service center. It was under Gearin that the Port began courting cruise ship business, for example. He recognized, as Trabucco and Orr clearly do, that a more polished west-end marina can play an essential role in revitalizing Uniontown. Studies have identified this community gateway as needing attention and beautification.

### Distinct improvement

Once the best hotel in town, years of inattention and lack of reinvestment turned the former Red Lion at the Port into an embarrassment. There already are distinct signs of improvement under the operators.

How can proposed next steps become a reality?

Orr is president of Signature Seafoods in Seattle and has long-time connections to Astoria. Trabucco is a developer who was behind the restoration of the Hotel Elliot. The pair, through two local companies, Astoria Hospitality Ventures LLC and Marina Village LLC, currently operate the Astoria Riverwalk Inn — once the Red Lion. They also recently signed a lease with the Port to take over daily operations of the Chinook Building, which includes a seafood market, a charter boat company and several other office tenants, including the Astoria Yacht Club. The building's upstairs has 7,500 square feet of available meeting space.

Between the Riverwalk Inn and the Chinook Building is the former Seafare restaurant, which has long been vacant and dilapidated from storm damage. Because of its condition, it would likely need to be demolished and rebuilt as a new restaurant.

With improvements to the hotel, restaurant property and Chinook Building, and potential development of other available property, the marina village vision could become a reality, creating another magnet attraction along the riverfront.

Potentially complicating matters, though, is a messy lawsuit that is scheduled for trial next month.

### Legal clash

The lawsuit was filed in 2015 by the Param Hotel Group, a Portland hotel operator, against the Port, which owns the hotel. The hotel was previously operated by heavily indebted Brad Smithart. Param contends it had been courting him about the lease since 2014 and had an agreement with the Port to take over operation. The Port canceled its contract with Smithart in 2015 but transferred short-term operation of the hotel to Astoria Hospitality Ventures, whose majority owner is Orr. His wife Sara Orr's brother is former Port Commissioner Stephen Fulton. The suit contends the Port breached a contract and favored the locally connected company. After the action was filed, the Port put long-term plans for the hotel's operation on hold pending the outcome of the case. Param is seeking the seven years it would have gained after taking over from Smithart, or \$4.5 million in damages.

The lawsuit certainly bears watching. Its outcome could have a serious financial impact on the Port and determine whether the vision ever comes into focus.

The stakes are definitely high. Such civil lawsuits nearly always end in negotiated settlements. That should be the outcome in this case. Without weighing in on the equities of Param's case, lawyers and the court must look for an outcome fair to all parties, and which clears the way for redevelopment of this key site.

It is worth noting that another Trabucco project, involving the landmark Morck Hotel in Aberdeen, Washington, has been slow to come to fruition. The Port of Astoria must make sure the marina development moves along at an expeditious rate, whom ever ultimately does it.

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# Trump's empty culture wars

By ROSS DOUTHAT

New York Times News Service

**T**he secret of culture war is that it is often a good and necessary thing. People don't



like culture wars when they're on the losing side, and while they're losing they often complain about how cultural concerns are distractions from the "real" issues, usually meaning something to do with the deficit or education or where to peg the Medicare growth rate or which terrorist haven the United States should be bombing next.

But in the sweep of American history, it's the battles over cultural norms and so-called social issues — over race and religion, intoxicants and sex, speech and censorship, immigration and assimilation — that for better or worse have often made us who we are.

Still, even a proud culture warrior should be able to concede that not all culture wars are created equal. A good culture war is one that, beneath all the posturing and demagoguery and noise, has clear policy implications, a core legal or moral question, a place where one side can win a necessary victory or where a new consensus can be hashed out. A bad culture war is one in which attitudinizing, tribalism and worst-case fearmongering float around unmoored from any specific legal question, in which mutual misunderstanding reigns and a thousand grievances are stirred up without a single issue being clarified or potentially resolved.

Unfortunately for us all, Donald Trump is a master, a virtuoso, of the second kind of culture war — and a master, too, of taking social and cultural debates that could be important and necessary and making them stupider and emptier and all about himself.

He is not the only figure pushing American arguments in that direction — cable news, reality TV, campus protesters and late-night political "comedy" all have a similar effect these days. But he is the president, which lends him a unique deranging influence, and he is unique as well in that unlike most culture warriors — who are usually initially idealists, however corrupted they may ultimately become — he has never cared about anything higher or nobler than himself, and so he's never happier than when the entire country seems to be having a culture war about, well, Donald Trump.

The NFL-national anthem controversy, the latest Trump-stoked social conflagration, is a quintessential bad culture war. It was trending that way already before Trump, because the act of protest that Colin Kaepernick chose to call attention to police shootings of unarmed black men — sitting and then kneeling for "The Star-Spangled Banner" — was clearer in the calculated offense it gave than in the specific



AP Photo/Marcio Jose Sanchez

San Francisco 49ers safety Eric Reid (35) and quarterback Colin Kaepernick (7) kneel during the national anthem before an NFL football game against the Los Angeles Rams in Santa Clara, Calif., in 2016.

**The NFL-national anthem controversy, the latest Trump-stoked social conflagration, is a quintessential bad culture war.**

cause it sought to further, clearer in its swipe at a Racist America than its prescription for redress. (That Kaepernick sported Fidel Castro T-shirts and socks depicting cops as pigs did not exactly help.)

But in his usual bullying and race-baiting way, Trump has made it much, much worse, by multiplying the reasons one might reasonably kneel — for solidarity with teammates, as a protest against the president's behavior, as a gesture in favor of free speech, as an act of racial pride — and then encouraging his own partisans to interpret the kneeling as a broad affront to their own patriotism and politics. So now we're "arguing" (I use the term loosely) about everything from the free-speech rights of pro athletes to whether the national anthem is right-wing political correctness to LeBron James' punditry on the miseducation of Trump voters ... and the specific issue that Kaepernick intended to raise, police misconduct, is buried seven layers of controversy deep.

You could say, it's always thus with culture wars and racial battles, but in fact it isn't and doesn't need to be. Arguments about race were often toxic in the 1970s and 1980s, but there were core policy issues that could be argued and ultimately compromised over — crime and welfare and affirmative action — and across the 1990s they were, to some extent, and as they were overt racial tensions eased considerably. In 2001, two-thirds of Americans (and more blacks than whites) described race relations as somewhat good or very good, and while the white view was usually slightly rosier thereafter, the two-thirds pattern held for more than a decade — until Ferguson, Missouri, and Black Lives Matter and the other controversies of the late

Obama years, followed by the rise of Trump, sent racial optimism into a tailspin.

For hope to resurface, we need specific issues and potential compromises to re-emerge. In particular, we need a public argument clearly tethered to the two big policy questions raised by police misconduct and the broader crime and incarceration debate.

First, can we have the greater accountability for cops that activists reasonably demand, in which juries convict more trigger-happy officers and police departments establish a less adversarial relationship to the communities they police, without the surge of violence that's accompanied the apparent retreat of the police in cities like Baltimore and Chicago?

Second, can we continue the move toward de-incarceration — supported, not that long ago, by Republicans as well as Democrats — without reversing the gains that have made many of our cities safe?

These are hard questions that can be answered only gradually, through trial-and-error and with various false starts. But they are questions that could have answers, that could point to a stable policy consensus around race and criminal justice, in a way that our present "Make America Great Again" versus "You're All White Supremacists" culture war does not.

For those answers to matter, for them to depolarize our country, we need a social and cultural debate focused on the substance that Colin Kaepernick's choice of protest unfortunately obscured, and Donald Trump's flagploitation has deliberately buried. Not an end to culture war, but a better culture war — in which victory and defeat can be defined, and peace becomes a possibility.

## 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. Discourse should be civil and people should be referred to in a

respectful 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.