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OUR VIEW

Downtown retailers should focus on locals

While some people may believe tourists dominate the downtown Astoria shopping scene, a recent study dispels the perception and offers the business community solid information to act upon.

The analysis, commissioned by the Astoria Downtown Historic District Association, shows two-thirds of the people entering downtown's shops and restaurants are locals rather than tourists, and nearly half of the locals are from Astoria. The study also points out that downtown residents and the estimated 1,300 people who work there comprise the largest segment of estimated consumer spending. Visitors are the second largest segment, but spend more per customer. But that's not surprising because tourists also incur costs for lodging and multiple meals that local shoppers don't experience.

The analysis included a survey of 327 people and looked at spending and downtown perceptions.

Among the specific findings is a need for more staple and regional goods, later shopping hours, more diversity of cuisine and additional grocery options. Respondents also said there's a need for better access to parking. Parking problems are also not surprising, it has been a persistent issue and must be addressed no matter who the customers are.

David Reid, the former chairman of the downtown association's business development committee, says a clear result is the need for retailers to focus on locals as the core demographic.

While tourism provides additional dollars, the local numbers show Reid's right. Reid says the association will use the report to help downtown businesses while also using it to recruit where gaps exist.

For the business community, that's news to use. With changing consumer habits brought on by internet behemoths like Amazon, retailers must be more nimble and willing to try new ideas, seizing opportunities where they exist. Downtown contains stores in most retail categories, but it lacks category clusters. That's also an opportunity and makes recruiting a priority.

The demographics of Astoria, Clatsop County and the Long Beach Peninsula are more interesting to retailers today than they were a decade ago, and with the closure of the downtown J.C. Penney and other vacant storefronts, space and location shouldn't be an obstacle.

Residents should do their part, too, to keep dollars in the community where the money can do the most good. Shop local.

County on the clock on new jail location

In the coming months, Clatsop County commissioners will likely face a tough law-and-order decision. They are studying whether to relocate and expand the county jail to the shuttered North Coast Youth Correctional Facility in Warrenton, and the potential price tag ranges from an expensive \$12 million to a whopping \$28 million.

The 60-bed county jail in Astoria opened in 1980 and has a staff of 29. This year, it has averaged a population of 68 inmates per day and the overcrowding is growing. The crowding often results in inmates being released early, without having to post bail, even when they have criminal charges pending. Sheriff Tom Bergin cites multiple studies showing the need for expansion, and District Attorney Josh Marquis says without it law enforcement will "constantly be chasing the same people over and over again." But two previous bond measures failed, leaving it to county commissioners to deliberate without any money to work with.

After learning the youth facility was closing, a \$51,000 feasibility study on relocating the jail was conducted. Two potential options resulted.

One proposal advocates renovating and expanding the youth facility to 140 beds at a construction cost of \$12 million. It would require a jail staff of 46.

The second option, at a price of \$28 million, would be a much larger project, expanding the facility to 200 beds with room to grow to 252. It would require only 36 staffers because of its design features.

The higher cost of the second option would be mitigated after 10 years by its lower staffing cost, the study predicts. But both options represent significant payroll increases from current levels.

Moving the jail to the Warrenton site could solve two immediate problems of what to do with the closed facility, and how to expand jail space. But without a solid plan and obtainable funding for construction and subsequent payroll, neither are likely to happen. There are still many unanswered questions. While the idea is promising, unfortunately, the reality may not be without money to finance it.

The state is officially closing the youth facility this month so the county is now on the clock.



SOUTHERN EXPOSURE

An illuminating discussion in Arch Cape

By R.J. MARX
The Daily Astorian

ARCH CAPE — "One of the many projects on the books," is how Oregon Department of Transportation Northwest Area Project Leader Michael Schroeder described replacement of lights and fixtures at the Arch Cape Tunnel during a September information session at the fire station.



Once upon a time, Arch Cape was at the end of a wagon road from Seaside. The 1,230-yard long tunnel on U.S. Highway 101 connected the North Coast to Manzanita.

The lights were probably the easiest part of the original construction project.

According to "Arch Cape Chronicles: The History of Arch Cape," some of the rock was sandstone while other rock was a much harder basalt. Sandstone is less stable than basalt and when exposed to air, immediately becomes soft and crumbles like dirt. Timber beams were necessary to prevent a cave-in.

During construction, workers stayed on the ocean side of the north entrance at the Arch Cape Hotel. Carbon monoxide and gas fumes felled the men, who rarely lasted longer than a few months on the job.

Tunnel worker Charles Haddock said in a 1993 interview that while the brakes of his International Harvester truck were good and the cab kept out of the rain, "I can recall no other comforts by today's standards."

The project was delayed by heavy rains, mud, inexperienced supervision, improper equipment and transport woes.

Winds of up to 70 mph battered workers and lashed unheated cabins in what laborers described as "wild country."

Construction began in early 1936. Completion was expected by year-end, but weather, inexperience and equipment delays extended the completion date until 1938. It wasn't until March 1940 that work was completed with the laying of asphalt, gutters and curbs.

Arch Cape was no longer isolated. The Oregon Department of Transportation estimates the tunnel receives about 5,000 vehicles a day.

Let there be light

The original lighting used mercury bulbs and PCB ballasts, Schroeder said, using a chemical banned in 1976 and phased out in years to come due to their toxic effects.

A multimillion-dollar 1998 construction project replaced the tunnel's rotting timber linings with steel-reinforced concrete. Engineers swapped lighting fixtures with halogen lamps. The reopening was celebrated with the "crashing" of a paper barrier by three jeeps.

The state's tunnel inspection program selected the Arch Cape Tunnel as one of three (of nine tunnels managed by ODOT) for "in-depth" 10-year inspections.

Two have been performed, in 2000 and 2010, with regular inspections every two years and drainage cleaning twice a year.

Inspections focused on the tunnel's entrances, liners and lighting.

Since that time, while they're all working, they require "a lot of power" and frequent repair,



R.J. Marx/The Daily Astorian
Project manager Walter Bartel and Michael Schroeder of the Oregon Department of Transportation at an open house introducing the new lighting system for the Arch Cape Tunnel.



Submitted Photo

Tunnel at a 2010 site visit.

Schroeder said.

Galvanized aluminum harnesses have rusted out, and while not in danger of dropping off the ceiling "anytime soon," in five to 10 years they could become a danger to the motoring public.

Energy friendly

About two years ago, ODOT applied for a federal grant to replace the lamps, seeking about \$1 million for the project.

The Federal Highway Administration saw the need and approved funds to replace the system. The state will also receive a rebate from the Energy Trust of Oregon.

The lighting project is slated for a 90-day spring construction schedule.

Materials will be stainless steel, except for the lights, which will be ceramic. High-lifts will take the system down and drill the bolts to hang the hangers. Lights will be epoxy-bolted in a concrete liner drilled into solid rock before wiring through a conduit.

Most of the work will be done at night. The new lights will be built next to the existing ones so there will be no interruption of service.

During installation, one lane will be closed and a pilot car will lead a single-lane of traffic.

When complete, LED lighting will reduce electrical costs by 56 percent, Schroeder said.

The lights will be managed by a timer in a controller cabinet.

Bike-warning lights will also be enhanced to protect cyclists heading through the tunnel.

Maybe next on the tunnel modification agenda will be a genuine bike lane. Right now, it's a daunting proposition for anyone on two wheels.

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

Tunnel construction at the north portal.

Submitted Photo

