

Knight inks three more years as Port leader

Commission split in 3-2 vote

By EDWARD STRATTON
The Daily Astorian

Port of Astoria Executive Director Jim Knight received a three-year contract extension and a pay raise Tuesday after a 3-2 vote by the Port Commission.

Commissioners Frank Spence, James Campbell and Robert Stevens voted to extend Knight's contract. Commissioner Bill Hunsinger vocally opposed the extension and said Knight should resign or be fired. Although supportive of Knight, Commissioner Dirk Rohne preferred a rolling contract subject to annual performance reviews.



Jim Knight

Knight started at the Port in October 2014 on a three-year contract. His new contract, negotiated by Spence, starts in November at a base salary of \$168,375 — a 4 percent increase over his current salary — and runs three years. After the initial term, the contract includes two one-year extension options that would take Knight through 2022.

The contract extension comes days after a \$4 million verdict against the Port for breach of contract and fraud in a lawsuit brought by Param Hotel Corp. over operation of the Astoria Riverwalk Inn. A jury found that Knight knowingly made false representations and misled Param in the Portland company's failed negotiations to assume the remaining lease of troubled former hotel operator Brad Smithart.

Knight had an individual fraud claim brought by Param against him dismissed, but the verdict included nearly \$3.8 million in damages for fraud against the Port.

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Ballots head to voters in Gearhart

Vacation rental rules, years in the making, face repeal

By R.J. MARX
The Daily Astorian

GEARHART — Residents in Gearhart perceive the vote to repeal and replace vacation rental rules to be a dramatic turning point that could determine the future look and direction of the community.

With ballots on their way today to the city's 1,245 registered voters, advocates of Measure 4-188 say the new rules take away their property rights and will cost the city millions in lost tourism dollars.

City officials and many residents counter that a repeal would jeopardize Gearhart's residential character. They, too, say property rights are at stake and that the rules promote much-needed long-term rental housing.

Vote "no" advocates warn repeal could lead to overcrowding and health and safety hazards.

The issue comes to a head at the ballot box on Nov. 7, the result of years of discussion and debate.

Ongoing debate

In 2013, city leaders and residents raised concerns over "renters' mentality" and how vacation

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Out of the nest

Photos by Amelia O'Connor

Cormorants nesting at Cape Falcon Marine Reserve.

Volunteers help collect cormorant data at Cape Falcon

By KATIE FRANKOWICZ
The Daily Astorian



ABOVE: Citizen scientists can be important to research projects. BELOW: Volunteers help gather data on cormorants at Cape Falcon.

The cormorants always saw the eagles before he did.

Jeremy Sappington would be at his spotting scope above Devil's Cauldron in Oswald West State Park, watching the sea birds as they cleaned, preened and clamored. Then, suddenly, the birds would go deathly still. Out of the corner of his eye, Sappington would see an eagle cruise past the cliffs.

Sappington, who lives in Manzanita, was one of over a dozen volunteers who spent the summer observing cormorants at the Cape Falcon Marine Reserve. One day each week, they set up their scopes and honed in on the colonies, recording the number of eggs in nests and keeping track of the chicks' development from afar.

The data they have collected for the last two years will inform a report and comparison of data by the Audubon Society of Portland this fall, as well as feed broad, aerial surveys conducted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service each year.

While the agency can collect general information about the number of birds present in a region, community scientists are helping paint a more detailed picture of how the birds are faring.

Doing this work without volunteers would be challenging, especially for agencies like Fish and Wildlife where there is less and less funding to go around, said Joe Liebezeit, avian conservation manager for the Audubon Society of Portland.

"More and more, community science is going to be important for agencies and (organizations) like Audubon," he said.

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Joe Liebezeit | avian conservation manager for the Audubon Society of Portland

Housing developer moves forward on Waldorf project

Some affordable housing planned next to City Hall

By EDWARD STRATTON
The Daily Astorian

Innovative Housing is closing in on a purchase of the former Waldorf Hotel for \$80,000 from demolition and recycling company Groat Bros. Inc.

Earlier this year, Innovative Housing began a due diligence period on whether to buy the dilapidated hotel and turn it into 40 units of affordable housing next to Astoria City Hall. During a recent tour,

Julie Garver, the group's director of housing development, said the nonprofit had finished that due diligence after ensuring there was no extensive oil plume beneath the building. Innovative Housing has paid earnest money on the building, and will close the purchase in May, Garver said.

As part of its due diligence, Innovative Housing had a geotechnical engineer test soil underneath the foundation.

"When we dug into one hole, we found black soil that smelled like oil, and that means that there is oil there," Garver said.

The state Department of Environmental Quality was

notified, triggering a series of tests to see how much oil was in the ground, and where it was going.

"The DEQ actually made us take a drill rig out to the street to see if we had a plume of contamination that we were causing that was going toward the river, because that's what they start to get really excited about," Garver said. "And fortunately, we have no plume, and that is the reason we're buying the building."

The belief is that some underground piping from oil tanks to a boiler leaked, Garver said. Innovative



Julie Garver, left, the housing development director for Innovative Housing Inc., points out a boring the group did to test soils.

Edward Stratton
The Daily Astorian

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