

OPINION

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Water under the bridge



Compiled by Bob Duke

From the pages of Astoria's daily newspapers

10 years ago this week — 2008

Clatsop County Commissioner Sam Patrick has strong words for county leadership over its failure to put a disaster plan in place.

"County management's been asleep at the switch," Patrick said Tuesday.

He blasted county leadership for placing the burden of building a Disaster Mitigation Plan on Sheriff Tom Bergin and Emergency Operations Coordinator Gene Strong.

"The mitigation plan should be done in management's office or County Planning," Patrick said.

His comments came as North Coast officials and state leaders continued their investigation into the emergency response to the Dec. 2-3 windstorm.

The historic Flavel House, built in 1886 for prominent Astorian, Capt. George Flavel, has weathered many a storm.

The big windstorm that roared through Clatsop County in early December didn't faze the sturdy structure, but several of the trees that surround it didn't fare as well. A couple of rare cork elms were lost during the storm, and two more might have to be removed.

But the worst storm casualties weren't discovered immediately.

Two cypress trees on the south side of the house are leaning ominously toward it — threatening to fall on the restored mansion at Eighth Street and Franklin Avenue, which has been a museum for more than 50 years.

"We know they're going to fall. We need to take them down before it happens, said Mac Burns, executive director of the Clatsop county Historical Society.

Sometimes silence speaks louder than words.

But when the silence at the Clatsop County Planning Commission meeting ended Tuesday, planners had for the third time approved a NorthernStar Bradwood Landing application, and ignored county staff's recommendation for denial.

The vote was 4-3.



50 years ago — 1968

Representatives of Cornell, Howland, Hayes and Merryfield showed several possible plans for development of downtown Astoria into an attractive shopping district to members of the city council and planning commission Monday night.

The consultants showed several possible alternative plans for routing highway traffic to leave Commercial Street free of trucks and other highway traffic, for possible conversion into a pedestrian mall, beautified to make it attractive to shoppers.

One plan involved routing highway traffic both ways along Marine Drive past the downtown area, with possible future development of a one-way couplet using Exchange rather than Commercial for eastbound highway traffic.

The beach bill passed by the 1967 legislature places a "cloud on every property title on the Oregon beaches," the Legislative highway Interim Committee was told Monday.

The testimony came from Charles H. Knox of Gold Beach who said the state has enough land and should not take any more ocean frontage.

"Is this the Highway Commission policy — to get our lands by any means?" he asked.

Rep. Lee Johnson, R-Portland, committee chairman, said the important part of the bill was that the beaches have been zoned.

"The problem of property rights involving adverse possession will be up to courts," he said.

75 years ago — 1943

Women welders, cops and even railroad section hands fail to cause any unusual astonishment these days and so likewise, motorists driving into the Shell station at Ninth and Bond streets have seemed to take it as a matter of course that a woman should now be filling their gas tanks and checking their tires.

The blonde young Amazon is Valeria Rowe, of Route 1, Warrenton, and she's the first female service station operator in Astoria. Garbed in olive-green overalls and cap with her hair neatly confined in a net, Miss Rowe looked ready to tackle any job which came her way.

"I always liked to putter around with cars," she said, "and so I decided I might just as well be getting paid for it. Before starting here I worked in a dry cleaning shop."

To prepare for her work as an operator, Miss Rowe attended a two weeks' Shell school in Portland, together with nine other young women, where she learned about filling tanks, changing tires, lubrication, etc. She has now been working in Astoria for over two months.

Questioned as to what she felt she and other women now taking men's places in business and industry would do after the war, she declared that she would like to stay on in the service station business, but that if it means depriving some man of the job, she would be willing to return to her former employment.

Clatsop County it was learned today has been chosen as one of three counties in Oregon and Washington for a test of the OPA's new food point ration system due to go into effect sometime during February.

From 5,000 to 10,000 women in 58 counties throughout the nation will be chosen and their shopping habits checked through daily reports. The purpose is to compile a cross section of what types of food Americans are eating and how much of each so the number of points can be more accurately assigned to various commodities.

GUEST COLUMN

Vacation rentals exacerbate affordable housing, homeless crisis

On Jan. 24, our county commissioners will vote on a vacation rental ordinance that will allow for unlimited vacation rentals with inadequate regulations throughout Clatsop County.

This, at a time when other communities in our region are tightening restrictions on the number of vacation rentals and expanding their regulations to mitigate and protect their communities from the continuing conversion of housing rentals to vacation rentals.

This vote, if it passes, will do the opposite of protecting our county.

Our quality of life and livability are at stake. Once this land use wall has been breached, there will be no going back.

Reflecting the sentiment of our county in the recent ballot measure, Gearhart affirmed stronger vacation rental limits and regulations by a decisive 77 percent voter margin.

Therefore, it seems inconceivable that any county commissioner could vote for this ordinance, in defiance of this overwhelming public mandate rejecting these measures.

While I am a local lodging owner, I am coming at this as a concerned resident and small business employer who creates local jobs and cares greatly for our employees.

The biggest and most difficult challenges confronting all of us in this area, both immediately and in the future, is affordable housing.

Over the last 10 years it worsened every year. During this same period, vacation rentals in Clatsop County rose 100 percent.

A report from UCLA highlights that nationally, every 10 percent increase in vacation rental listings resulted in a .39 percent increase in rent and a .64 percent increase in house prices. Putting that into context, rents rose 7.5 percent annually between 2012-2017 in Clatsop County, meaning that over a third of rent increases in that time frame can be attributed to vacation rentals.

The "affordability crisis" disproportionately impacts low- and middle-income individuals, many of whom are now spending upwards of 40 percent of their income on rent, a 9 percent-

age point increase over the last 14 years.

On top of this, individuals who hope to own a home are being priced out of their ability to buy a house, unable to meet the sustainable threshold of their income going towards a mortgage payment.

The upshot is that all of this triggers instability for working families with children in our county, in addition to creating downward pressure on our increasing low-income and homeless population.

Unlimited vacation rentals are making it difficult for most individuals to live in their current neighborhoods. As long-term residents get priced out of the neighborhood, who remains? Only those who already own a home, and don't rent it out short-term.

Goodbye new families. Goodbye young couples struggling to pay the rent. Goodbye students, artists, seniors, and anyone who can't afford to compete with vacationers' budgets. Goodbye neighborhood diversity, goodbye affordable housing.

Some facts:

- Vacation rentals are a rapidly increasing component of visitor accommodations in Clatsop County.

- The vacation rental marketing platforms have effectively incorporated single-family homes in residential neighborhoods to the county's lodging rental unit pool, thus competing with residents for these units.

- There is a measurable shift in housing supply, otherwise available to the county's working families, to vacation rentals and other nonresident-serving uses.

- Additional regulation and mitigation can limit the loss of affordable housing units otherwise available to the county's working families.

The growing number of vacation rentals in Clatsop County creates two impacts related to housing supply.

First, by increasing the supply of lodging and accommodating additional visitors, vacation rentals increase economic activity and employment in the county's tourism business sector. This increase in employment creates demand for housing. Given that the tourist sector employment is dominated by service industries including lodging and food services,



"WAIT. YOU'RE THE STEVE BANNON - THE GUY WHO MANAGED TO PERSONALLY LOSE EVERYTHING WITHOUT BEING A SERIAL SEXUAL HARASSER?"

with average wages below \$30,000 per year, there is, and will continue to be an increased demand for affordably priced housing as the industry grows.

Second, as whole housing units are shifted from providing housing for the county's low-income and working families to providing lodging for visitors, there will be less housing supply. As these two impacts contribute to what is a larger housing supply problem in Clatsop County, they should be mitigated as a part of a broader effort to expand housing available to the homeless, economically disadvantaged, and the county's workforce.

The shift of long-term housing to vacation rentals that has already occurred, along with the expectation for the continued rapid growth of the vacation rentals, strongly suggests that additional restrictions, regulations and mitigation measures are needed to protect the county's supply of affordable housing.

Therefore, county commissioners need to place additional restrictions on vacation-rental housing, lest it make the supply of affordable housing scarcer than it already is.

If commissioners do not limit vacation rentals it will take even more housing away from those who live and work here, benefiting only tourists and other temporary visitors, while leaving our residents and families in the cold.

Any new ordinance needs to provide reasonable and necessary regulations for the licensing of short-term rental of residential dwelling units in order to:

1. Ensure the safety, welfare and convenience of renters, owners and neighboring property owners throughout Clatsop County.
2. Balance the legitimate livability concerns

with the rights of property owners to use their property as they choose.

3. Recognize the need to limit vacation rental options within neighborhoods to ensure compatibility, while recognizing the benefits of vacation rentals in providing recreation and employment opportunities.

4. Help maintain the county's needed housing supply for residential use.

5. Protect the character of the county's residential neighborhoods by limiting the number and concentration of full-time vacation rentals. In the adoption of these regulations, the county should find that the transient rental of dwelling units has the potential to be incompatible with surrounding residential uses. Therefore, special regulation of dwellings listed for transient occupancy is necessary to ensure that these uses will be compatible with surrounding residential uses and will not materially alter the neighborhoods in which they are located.

Vacation rentals are disrupting neighborhoods, making it harder for individuals and working families to find affordable housing and forcing an increase in our homeless population.

I encourage you to email the commissioners your feelings regarding vacation rentals and affordable housing before Jan. 24. Send your comments to Scott Lee (slee@co.clatsop.or.us), Sarah Nebeker (snebeker@co.clatsop.or.us), Lisa Clement (lclement@co.clatsop.or.us), Kathleen Sullivan (ksullivan@co.clatsop.or.us) and Lianne Thompson (lthompson@co.clatsop.or.us).

Time to speak up. Take action today!
Stephen Malkowski is owner of Arch Cape Inn and Retreat in Cannon Beach and a former planning commissioner of Clatsop County.



Stephen Malkowski