

OPINION

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OUR VIEW

LaMear has been a collaborative mayor

Mayor Willis Van Dusen was a tough act to follow. The charismatic Astoria leader was at the forefront of his beloved city's transformation for decades.

When he bowed out of public life three years ago, up stepped Arline LaMear.

A professional librarian with a deep passion for the community where she has lived since 1997, she had gained experience serving on the Astoria Planning Commission and the Astoria City Council. She won a contested election and became the city's second woman mayor after Edith Henningsgaard.

Last week, LaMear indicated she won't seek a second term. As she continues her diligent approach to running the city in the remaining year, it's fitting to reflect on her accomplishments.

LaMear has brought a noble gentility to the office, addressing issues with a polite studiousness that sometimes disguises the pace of activity. Her administration has seen some hiccups on staffing issues but no scandals.

The volume of duties when she switched from being a City Council member to mayor was somewhat taxing, she now admits. However, she embraced the added public appearances with aplomb, drawing on skills honed as president of the Astoria chapters of the American Association of University Women and the Women's Political Caucus.

Solid rapport with talented City Manager Paul Benoit and his successor, Brett Estes, has helped throughout her lengthy service with the city, and she is quick to praise both — and other city staff — for expertise and cooperation.

She had three high-profile goals — ending the Flavel standoff, creating a new Astoria Library and tackling the Merwyn/Waldorf Hotel issue. One has been fixed and two are under way.



Joshua Bessex/The Daily Astorian

Mayor Arline LaMear addresses the crowd during her first City Council meeting as mayor.

'LaMear has brought a noble gentility to the office, addressing issues with a polite studiousness that sometimes disguises the pace of activity.'

For years the city battled eccentric absentee owner Mary Louise Flavel over her dangerously deteriorating properties. But every time they reached the auction block, she would emerge from hiding to pay the back taxes and prolong the impasse. Finally a conservator had a heart-to-heart with Mary Louise, resulting in new owners with bright plans for the crumbling 15th Street mansion and key storefronts that blighted downtown for more than a decade.

LaMear wanted to deliver a state-of-the-art public library in the old Safeway space next to the Garden of Surging Waves. It could have become Astoria's sparkling community centerpiece, so it was disappointing that it didn't gain enough support. But she's excited that

library patrons are spearheading revised plans to refurbish the cramped but solid existing building, likely expanding into the basement to provide secure space to preserve precious archives.

The decision to keep the old library left the decaying Merwyn/Waldorf building intact, too. LaMear is pleased about the new owners' plans for 40 affordable apartments, something she sees as sorely needed, not least because the Warrenton Walmart under construction will create 200 low-income jobs.

Some delightful smaller successes have LaMear's stamp on them. City Hall insiders smile about her passion for out-of-town Volkswalks, because she always returns with photos and ideas. Two were the salmon label trash cans which

brighten the downtown and the CHIP-In volunteer park cleanup program. The latter — the acronym stands for Citizens Helping Improve Parks — fell victim to the budget ax, but for a couple of years it aided cash-strapped parks staff while building community.

Another success early in her tenure was when the City Council agreed to move drunken-driving cases from the city's Municipal Court to the state Circuit Court, where such serious crimes rightly belong. The opportunity for scoff-law repeat offenders to "game" the system and pose a continued danger on our highways without serious sanctions was removed.

LaMear quietly embraced the role of tutoring new colleagues when the "old guard" retired or left town. Never dogmatic, she has been an overtly collaborative mayor, involving all four members of the City Council plus staff and citizens in discussions, occasionally slowing decision-making by doing so.

Her commendable social conscience and caring nature have been evident outside of City Hall. She has advocated for the homeless — especially embracing the Astoria Warming Center — and delivered meals for seniors. She has served on the Clatsop County Commission on Children and Families and volunteered as a court-appointed special advocate.

In her final year in office, LaMear's goals include refurbishing the city's west entrance, addressing lingering controversies like parking and making progress on a vision-planning process which tackles the Heritage Square "hole" problem.

She wants her tenure to be remembered for listening and responding to concerns, while doing her homework on the issues, she said. City Hall colleagues and citizens likely will confirm she achieved those goals when she retires as mayor.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

May the heartbreak of violence against women vanish

There are as many kinds of heartbreaks as there are of love.

Around the age of 5, I was heartbroken by the seeming conflict between the two great wants of my imagined future self: to be good, and be loved by a girl. It seemed wrong to have any hope equal to being good.

When I was 10, two sisters, El Paso and Ciudad Juárez, broke my heart. Seeing the contrast, between the haves and the have-nots, made plain our cultural lies.

The border wall is already there: a wall of indifference.

Decades later, I was aware of the socio-economically muffled screams of hundreds of women and girls being murdered in Juárez.

Love stories often begin with a chance meeting, but one pregnant with something more. This Valentine's Day has a touch of that for me. I stumbled upon learning about V-Day, Feb. 14; more than a day, a worldwide movement to end violence against women and girls.

V-Day helped end the indifference to femicide in Juárez.

It's taken a lifetime of heartbreak to know what's most important to me. This V-Day, or Valentine's Day, I hope the heartbreaks, for all of us, are fewer. May there be no walls of indifference to your needs. May the heartbreak of violence against women and girls, be amongst the first to vanish.

MICHAELA. "SASHA" MILLER
Astoria

The power of love, not love of power

We live in a world of conflict, where we can't have winners without having losers. If we continue down this path, we will all be losers. I have a vision of a world where the power of love is the prevailing energy, not the love of power. I'd like to give a shout out to a woman who shares this vision: Lianne Thompson, Clatsop County Commissioner.

Having worked with Lianne for over 10 years on community projects, I know Lianne cares deeply for the people and the planet we inhabit. She is thoughtful with her words and ideas, and looks for real solutions to the com-

plex problems we face.

More importantly, she knows that real change can only come when all parties come together in a spirit of cooperation and hammer out differences without hammering each other with egos. She has bravely stepped into the political arena to do her best to make decisions for the good of the land.

Does everyone always agree with these decisions? No. We each see the world through our unique lens, and in the world where love is the prevailing energy, our gifts could be used to solve problems.

A step each of us can take is to stop seeing those with whom we disagree as our enemy. The truth is that we simply disagree, and that we each might have a necessary piece of the answer.

Another step we all can take is to put love into the world wherever and however we can.

BARBARA McLAUGHLIN
Nehalem

Need to fill the seats at Liberty Theatre

On Jan. 4, I attended a wonderful concert, part of a series brought to us by our innovative new team at the Liberty Theatre. We have a beautiful theater, dedicated volunteers and an enthusiastic audience. The only thing missing is larger audience.

If we want to keep the Liberty alive and growing, we need to fill the seats. The next concert in the series is on Feb. 4. Wouldn't it be great if there were a crowd?

PETRA MATHERS
Astoria

Foolish rental hike

Raising the monthly rent by \$200 on a 74-year-old tenant residing in a low-income facility for over 20 years is not only unconscionable, but foolish ("Group starts fund to assist senior citizens in Astoria," The Daily Astorian, Jan. 2)

While managing both low-income rentals (\$700 per month) and high-income ones (\$2,500 per month), I learned early on that it made no sense to impose a huge rent increase on limited-income tenants. This is especially true with respect to long-term tenants who have made very few demands.



It is truly admirable that this community has people like Chelsea Johnsen, who rise to the occasion and organizes others to assist seniors in dire circumstances. However, it is the government's responsibility to impose limits in situations where low-income tenants are essentially being told: "Go live under a bridge or someplace."

In Oregon, the state has preempted the right of local jurisdictions to pass rent stabilization laws. In the last legislative session, the lawmakers came close to rescinding this prohibition. In the end, they caved in to the real estate lobby.

Hopefully, in the future, state legislators will see the wisdom and practicality of allowing cities and counties to offer some rental hike protections to low-income renters.

GEORGE McCARTIN
Astoria

What is Gearhart doing to plan for septic failures?

The story about the septic squabble in Gearhart had one aspect that stuck out for me: It said the homeowner was given three options, one of which was "hire a professional contractor to hook up to a municipal sewer" ("Double trouble: Gearhart neighbors spar

over septic system," The Daily Astorian, Jan. 10).

The city of Gearhart is giving the homeowner the option of hooking up to something which does not exist. So, in reality, they have given the homeowner two options, come up with a plan to fix the problem, or move.

Here's the reality, and the real issue that is not being addressed by this story, or, apparently, the city. The average septic system leach field has a life span of about 20 years, give or take. Because Gearhart is perched on dunal sands, which I am told tend to have a pretty good percolation character, you can possibly double that life span. That's assuming the septic system is working properly, and regularly maintained.

The fact is, the majority of the septic systems in Gearhart are at the end of, or have exceeded their expected life spans. Very few lots have sufficient room to move their leach fields. Maintenance of existing systems is spotty, at best, and usually only occurs when there is a problem. Replacing systems and moving leach fields is incredibly expensive.

Stories, like this one, of septic system failure will be very common very soon. Since Gearhart has no municipal sewer system, what exactly is the city doing to plan for this unfortunate, but certain eventuality?

BILL GRAFFIUS
Gearhart