

# Lodging tax: Some in the lodging community are pushing back

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The proposed tax increase, which is set to be discussed at a work session in August, would raise the lodging tax from 8 percent to 9 percent. The last time the lodging tax went up was in 2015, after the Chamber of Commerce argued new revenue would fund better marketing. The chamber is still in contract with the city to use the tourism-restricted money from the tax hike for promotion.

The new increase was first suggested during budget committee hearings by City Manager Bruce St. Denis as a way to address shrinking general-fund reserves. Years of heavily subsidizing other city funds like public works, which has projects that can't be covered by water and wastewater rates, has caused the general-fund balance to decrease over time.

"If everything stopped, we would make it about three months," St. Denis said in May, referencing the city's reserve.

Raising the lodging tax would allow the city to pay for items like the Visitor Information Center or a possible event center without having to dip into the general fund.

"There might be other things that are clearly related to tourism promotions and it would be nice to explore that," St. Denis said.

Some in the lodging community, however, are pushing back.

Jason Brandt, CEO of the Oregon Restaurant & Lodging Association, sent a letter to the Cannon Beach City Council last week, raising concerns about the proposal.

"Our concern has everything to do with little communication between city and lodging stakeholders," Brandt said in an interview.

In May, a Deschutes County judge ruled in favor of the industry group in a lawsuit against Bend, asserting the

city misappropriated lodging tax dollars to fix roads.

Brandt cited no specific concerns with how Cannon Beach so far has planned to use the tax revenue, but rather takes issue with the fact local hotels and vacation rentals weren't invited to the table before an increase was suggested.

"Local lodging property managers are the experts. They can help determine whether there is enough demand to justify an increase," Brandt said. "If the experts aren't at the table for the discussion, how are you going to make the best of these funds?"

Greg Swedenborg, the general manager of The Waves Cannon Beach, has come out against the tax increase, calling it an "extremely inefficient" choice since only 30 percent of the new tax would benefit the city's general fund.

"The other 70 percent goes into promotion, and a lot of our scuttlebutt in town is how we're promoting ourselves too much," Swedenborg said.

A common argument for raising local lodging taxes has been that the impact of the increase is minimal, often going unnoticed by hotel guests. But Swedenborg argues the lodging community is already "paying its fair share," with lodging tax dollars making up about 70 percent of Cannon Beach's general fund.

He said continuing to raise the lodging tax does not address the problem of maintaining city infrastructure under the pressure of thousands of tourists. He suggested instead that the city find revenue by taxing a different kind of tourist — those who only visit for the day — through parking surcharges or a food and beverage tax.

"You're going back to the same well, and you are making people already contributing 70 percent of the general fund contribute even more," Swedenborg said.



Photos by Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

Coast Guard crewmen on board the cutter Fir say goodbye to family and friends before heading out to sea.

# Cutter: 'There's nothing that the Fir can't do'

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The Fir — which is slower but larger than Astoria-docked cutters Steadfast and Alert — is built to withstand the weight of buoys, as well as the uncertain weather and sea conditions around the river.

"This buoy tender works the majority of the Coast Guard's biggest buoys. Because of the sea states, because of the muddy bottoms, working buoys here can be challenging and exhilarating," O'Brien said. "Sometimes you can feel the whole boat sway back and forth, which is kind of eerie."

The more than 40 crew members can sometimes work long days, especially when a buoy sinks. The relatively small crew has more opportunities to work closely together than many other ships in the Coast Guard.

"We have the biggest sense of family because we work the hardest in the Coast Guard.



Chains up to an inch in diameter are commonly used to hold buoys in place.

They can say they work harder than us, but they'd be lying," Boatswain's Mate Third Class Bryant Angel said.

While buoy tending is the primary responsibility, the cutter can also perform other operations, such as search-and-rescue missions. In 2010, for instance, the cutter responded to a massive oil spill in Gulf of Mexico as part of Operation

Deepwater Horizon. "We are a multimission platform. We can do anything the Coast Guard requires us to do," Boatswain's Mate First Class Johnny Barefoot said. "There's nothing that the Fir can't do as a cutter, unlike other cutters."

The Fir's journey to a Baltimore shipyard will be the longest since it was commissioned. After the maintenance,

it will return to service and be docked in Cordova, Alaska.

Astoria will be without a buoy tender for at least eight months. Crew members on the Fir have prepared for its absence by performing two years worth of buoy maintenance.

"We've just been running like crazy," O'Brien said. "Fingers crossed, hopefully the navigational buoys will be good to go."

Lt. Cmdr. Jason Haag is the Fir's commanding officer and hopes to remain in his position on the Elm.

Other than being five years older, the cutter Elm will not represent a significant operational shift from the Fir. For the crew, the difference is more mental.

"It'll be kind of weird," Haag said. "It's like taking over someone else's ship."

# Hotel: Critics refer to hotel as a 'box'

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will mesh with The Ship Inn building, a former restaurant.

Hollander Hospitality wants to construct a four-story, 66-room hotel — Astoria Fairfield Inn and Suites, part of the Marriott chain — at the base of Second Street off Marine Drive. The new building would merge with The Ship Inn building that is already there, turning the former restaurant and lounge into a lobby and dining area for the hotel.

The hotel as proposed would come in about 2 inches under the maximum 45-foot height allowed, with elements between 43 feet and 44 feet, 10 inches above ground.

Because of how the property is zoned, a hotel is an outright permitted use but other aspects of the project are up for discussion. The area also falls within the city's Bridge Vista, part of the Riverfront Vision Plan that guides development along the Columbia River.

The presence of a boiler from the former White Star Cannery located in front of the proposed hotel triggered review by the Historic Landmarks Commission. The commission designated the boiler, surrounding pilings and ballast rock as historic in 2015.



Carleton Hart Architecture

A proposed four-story hotel on the Astoria waterfront, part of the Marriott chain, will be discussed at two city meetings Monday.

In a packet submitted to the city, the developers wrote: "Though Marriott is a corporate hotel chain with standard prototypes, the proposed Fairfield Inn and Suites is a unique, site-specific design respectful of the past and present of Astoria, and the human-scale experience of visitors to and residents of the city."

The developers already pitched a version of the hotel project to the community at a forum in March.

While some hoteliers and business owners have thrown their support behind the project, others who attended the forum said the design will block views of the Astoria Bridge and Columbia River. They criticized the exterior and the materials developers plan to use: corrugated metal and synthetic wood siding,

among other details.

The appearance of the building along the river and the preservation of river views remain a concern. Online, critics have referred to the hotel as a "box."

"Investors are only parting with money, we're giving up majesty if the riverfront is not done perfectly," wrote Chuck Stuart in a letter to the Design Review Committee.

Glen Boring, the owner of a nearby condo unit, said the view was an important factor in his purchase.

"While some business owners in the tourist industry are in favor of the project, we who are neighbors are not," he wrote in a letter to the city about the hotel project. "The primary interest of the corporation is not to enhance Astoria — it is to turn a profit."

# Buoy Beer: 'Reach out to people if you need help'

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fries, a pasta dish known as cacio e pepe, a Filipino dish called sisig, a Japanese dish called tonkatsu and an Asian noodle dish with pork, clams, bean sprouts and Thai basil. More specials could be added in the next few days.

Jenkins initially wanted proceeds to go toward suicide prevention, but he couldn't find a program locally. The donation to the culinary arts

program will provide students at Seaside High School with more resources to learn about food.

"I started thinking, who could we donate to that could benefit from it?" Jenkins said. "I thought of the kids. He influenced me and others so much that I thought it would be a nice tribute to him to donate to the kids that are starting out in a culinary program."

After Bourdain died, his picture was hung on the Buoy

Beer kitchen door with the words, "rest in peace Anthony." Jenkins said almost everyone at the waterfront restaurant, after hearing the news, was upset.

"I think that in our industry, chefs can have this bravado, this sense of how they portray themselves," Jenkins said. "Weakness usually doesn't play into that. It's hidden a lot. It's a high stress job with lots of hours. It takes its toll on people sometimes. So reach out to people if you need help."

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