

OPINION

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OUR VIEW

Astoria needs clearer waterfront vision

Developers willing to invest money in our city shouldn't have to guess what we want

Small towns define themselves in many ways. Design is one of them. Some towns muster the gumption to insist on architectural design that responds to the neighborhood for which a building is proposed. Other towns roll over and let anything happen.

When towns give developers carte blanche, they quickly become a monotonous version of national franchises you may observe in many other cities.

That choice lies at the heart of what Astoria's Historic Landmarks Commission and Design Review Committee accomplished on June 25. They denied an application for the proposed Fairfield Inn and Suites on the waterfront at Second Street.

The two panels said "no" for differing reasons, including its size and appearance. But the essence of the project's shortcomings was nicely expressed by Loretta Maxwell, owner of the Grandview Bed and Breakfast, who said: "This building could be anywhere." Online, critics referred to the hotel as a "box."

Astoria has a recent history of pushing national brands to do better. When a Holiday Inn Express was proposed near the Astoria Bridge, the Uniontown Historic District Association — led by the late Rae Goforth — insisted that the hotel respond to its surroundings. And the project's developer did. The same process played out with Kentucky Fried Chicken. The city also leaned on Safeway

to respond to its setting, and that company followed through.

There are many ways of describing architecture. Lack of personality in a building is what generated the community's judgment on the proposed hotel.

Good, innovative design is not necessarily expensive. The essential ingredient is corporate imagination and corporate will.

If you look at franchises in towns that really push developers — such as Carmel,

California, and Port Townsend, Washington — you see how the likes of McDonald's and Costco are capable of committing the resources to show imagination.

Astoria is a singular place — because of its history, its culture and its physical setting. Our leaders would be fools to demean that richness with architecture that is mediocre to bad. Astoria deserves better than what the two panels were given.

'A nebulous vision'

The problem going forward is that the community's voice is anything but clear. So we have standards. What are they?

A hotel is an outright allowed use in the area in which Hollander Hospitality wanted to build. The company has



Carleton Hart Architecture

Hollander Hospitality has appealed the city's rejection of a proposed four-story hotel on the Astoria waterfront.

appealed the rejection, saying the Design Review Committee "turned otherwise objective standards into subjective standards in violation of the express language" of the city's development code.

"The nature of the process is if we want more information, we need to go through an appeal," said Sam Mullen, vice president for Hollander Hospitality.

Mullen is right, in that developers willing to invest money in our city shouldn't have to guess what we want. Many community members were vocal in their criticisms of the company's plans, but that's not the same as rules in writing.

The timing of this is instructive, as the city has just commenced what is expected to be 10 months of discussions about the Urban Core, the final piece of the Riverfront Vision Plan that will guide

future development along the Columbia River from Second Street to 16th Street. The hotel is part of Bridge Vista, a section of the riverfront plan adopted in 2015 that covers Uniontown.

If we don't want ugly hotels that block the public's view of the river, we should find nonsubjective ways to codify that.

Elizabeth Menetrey, who served on the city's Riverfront Vision Plan committee, allowed that the hotel is allowed under city code. However, it was in opposition to an overall city goal of maintaining sweeping, open vistas along the water's edge in that area, she said.

For the Urban Core, the city has an opportunity to "make a nebulous vision firm," she said.

"I think here you have a chance to be a little conservative in what we allow."

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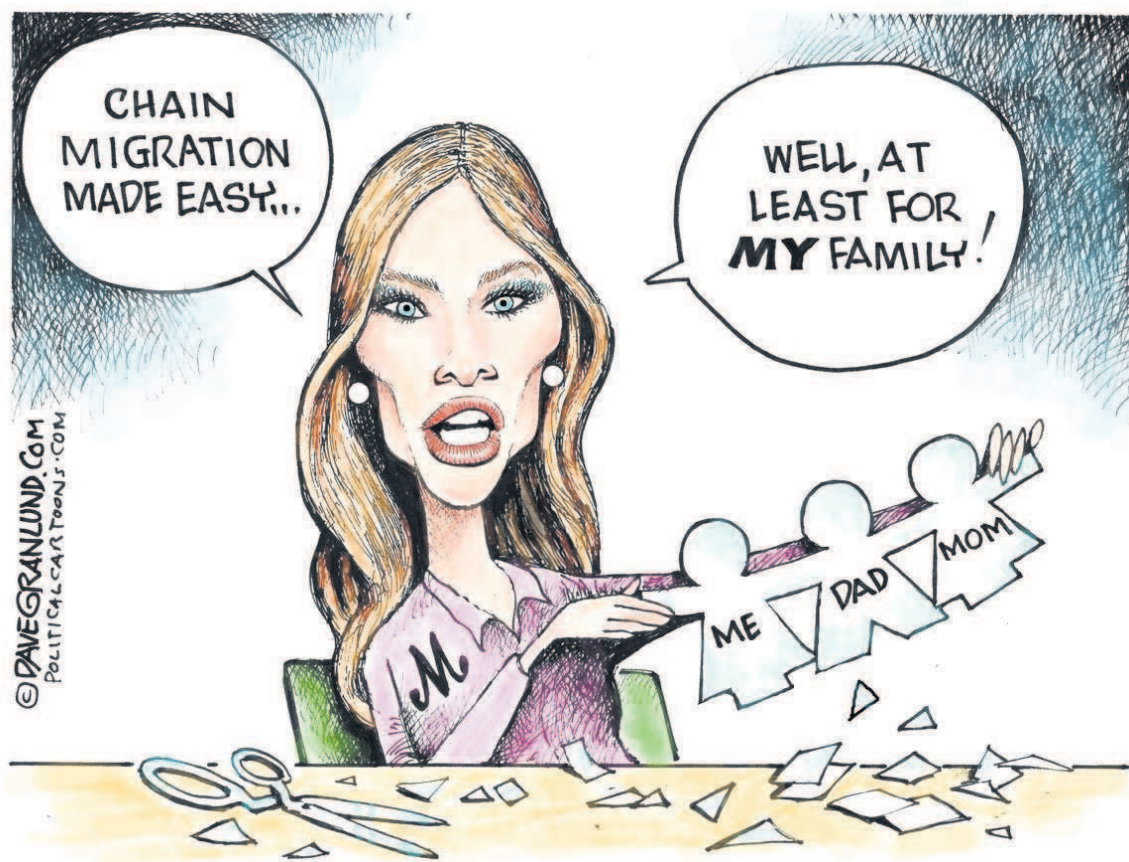
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WRITER'S NOTEBOOK

Buehler's real task is his party's rebirth

Candidate can become the voice of a new Oregon Republican Party

We may not like them, but political parties are central to our national dynamic. At their best, the parties evolve to something that more clearly represents our aspirations. At their worst, they ossify and become irrelevant to our real needs.

Ever since Oregon's last Republican governor, Victor Atiyeh — one of the state's best postwar chief executives — the Oregon GOP has languished in a religion-based miasma, in which abortion and homosexuality have been litmus tests.

Now state Republicans have nominated a credible candidate for governor, Knute Buehler. So this is a moment of promise, for the GOP and for our state's political well-being. That is because the state's Democratic party has become a Portland-centric value system that often is blind to the rest of the state. Because statewide Democratic candidates can roll up big majorities in Multnomah County, the party easily becomes smug and predictable, while being the captive and servant of the public employee unions.

It could be said that President Donald Trump complicates any attempt by the Oregon GOP to redefine itself. But Oregon history contains at least two scenarios that are relevant to the task in front of Buehler.

It is hard to imagine today, but prior to the mid-1950s, Oregon Democrats were the minority party — without a U.S.



Randy L. Rasmussen/The Oregonian

Republican gubernatorial candidate Knute Buehler gathered with supporters in Wilsonville during the May primary. Buehler, a doctor and state representative from Bend, will face Gov. Kate Brown in November.

senator since 1921 or a state legislative majority since 1878. That changed because of a liberal braintrust whose marquee name was Richard L. Neuberger — a state legislator and also one of America's most prolific magazine writers and liberal voices.

When Neuberger won an Oregon House seat in Multnomah County in 1941, he became one of 24 Democratic representatives, outnumbered by 39 Republicans. Elected to the state Senate in 1949, Neuberger was one of 10 Democrats, outnumbered by 20 Republicans.

In 1952, Neuberger wrote: "No aisle divides the two parties,

The state GOP was Oregon's progressive party for most of the 20th century.

for the nine Democrats are heavily outnumbered by the 21 Republicans."

One of Neuberger's contemporaries whom I interviewed for biographical research said the Oregon Democratic party of the 1940s was "inarticulate." And it was Neuberger who gave the party a voice. By 1959, Democrats had majorities in both the state House and Senate.

The second useful truth for Buehler is that for much of the 20th century, Republicans were Oregon's progressive party. Mark Hatfield, while a state representative, authored a Civil Rights Act in 1953. Statewide land use planning was authored by two Republican farmers — Stafford Hansell of Eastern Oregon and Hector MacPherson of the Willamette Valley. They were aided and abetted by a Republican governor, Tom McCall.

Political parties change their faces over the years. While today's Oregon Republican Party has been stymied by religion-based barriers for more than a decade, it's essential for today's Republicans to realize that their party was once the engine of progress in this state. So it's Buehler's moment. Like Neuberger some 60 years ago, Buehler can become the voice of a new Oregon Republican Party — laying out values that appeal to a broad swath of Oregonians, beyond the ideologically pure.

Steve Forrester, the former editor and publisher of *The Daily Astorian*, is the president and CEO of EO Media Group.



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