

# OPINION

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# THE DAILY ASTORIAN

Founded in 1873

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## SOUTHERN EXPOSURE

# Bridge needs trump all others in Seaside

Geologist Tom Horning delivered a 90-minute presentation to councilors on the topic of substandard bridges in 2007. At the end of his talk, a councilor summed up: "Now let's get on to more important things."

"That made me so mad," Horning says today.

He intends to remedy that.

"Ultimately, I want to identify the nature of the hazard, its proximity — how soon it will strike — and I'm going to try to justify using room taxes to build bridges," he said.

New, resilient bridges, he hopes, will help residents and visitors survive the wave from an even medium-sized tsunami, a Cascadia Subduction Zone event in which thousands may perish.



**R.J. MARX**

### The threat

The city's history of tsunamis is carved in the land. Stretches of sand have been washed over by rock thrown by waves, and trees pulled from the ground like toothpicks clogged waterways. All this formed moats, meadows and other features we take for granted. Former marshes are filled with sediment from the Necanicum River and now serve as land for homes. Springs near Avenue N drain and flood houses in a nearby depression. Shoals of round rock or cobbles were carried, swept and deposited in a north-easterly surge corridor.

"The town gets overtopped easily," Horning said in a tsunami history tour in late July. "What's done in the past is likely to occur in the future."

There is no "gentle" Cascadia Subduction Zone earthquake and tsunami, Horning said.

While a tsunami originating near Alaska or Japan might cause tidal activity here, it's nothing like the big one.

"We're out at the very leading edge of a seriously massive block of tectonic plate that extends all the way to the Atlantic Ridge."

More than four-fifths of the buildings in Seaside are expected to be inundated by a medium-sized tsunami wave.

"We can't afford to be wrong and we don't have much time," he said.

But the city's bridges haven't kept up with the threat. Substandard bridges will collapse during the first earthquake, making them useless in the 20 to 30 minutes we have to get to high ground before the tsunami hits. Bridges at Avenues S, U and G all were originally built to the standards of the early 1960s.

The extra minutes to find another bridge — there are none considered able to withstand the impacts of a predicted 9.0 Cascadia earthquake south of Broadway



Tom Horning

Repairs on the 12th Avenue bridge undertaken in the late 1990s.



Rebecca Herren

Tom Horning holds a sprig of edible Salicornia (pickleweed) on a tour of Neawanna Point marsh in Gearhart.

— could be a matter of life and death.

"If we fix the bridges, we reduce the fatality rate from a high number to a low number," Horning said. "That's the bottom line."

According to the city's 2011 Transportation System Plan, the bridge over the Neawanna Creek between the two intersections lies inside the 100-year floodplain, requires a seismic retrofit and has "deficient facilities" for pedestrians and bicycles.

Other bridges, built decades ago, are equally vulnerable. The city had applications out for grants and Oregon Department of Transportation funding to rebuild its most vulnerable bridges.

But Seaside "often falls through the cracks" when applying for grant money, City Manager Winstanley told the Signal's Brenna Visser in a July interview. The city is either too small to compete for projects or has too healthy of a budget to qualify

for need-based grants intended for smaller, rural communities.

Applications, reports and projections from researchers, the city, state and federal government remain on a back shelf of the library or city offices, or more likely, in a forgotten PDF file on a computer hard drive.

### Who will pay?

When I rented a car this summer on my vacation in New Mexico, I got hit with a vehicle license fee and an energy recovery fee and a shocking 11.25 percent "customer facility" charge.

It shows you that there is always one more surcharge that can be added to unsuspecting tourists who have little to no leverage.

At 10 percent, Seaside doesn't levy the highest lodging tax in the state or even the county — Bend's stands at 10.4 percent; Astoria 11 percent. Portland's city and

county room taxes reach 11.5 percent.

In 2012, Horning asked hotels and motels to establish a voluntary user fee of \$1 or \$2, giving guests an opportunity to help cover the cost of emergency preparations. The money raised would fund replacement of bridges in Seaside designed as escape routes.

Horning believes that between \$18 million and \$35 million today could make a big difference in improving the city's most at-risk bridges.

Horning has modified his "\$1 a head" plan from 2012, but still targets visitors as the best way to go about it. With a room tax increase, lodging owners aren't bearing the costs — tourists are.

Councilors agree it needs to be done; the days of disputing tsunami science are over.

But at the city's July workshop, they showed little appetite for passing the costs along to visitors.

While the council has authority to raise room tax on its own, if they decide not to, voters could initiate a room tax hike without council backing, City Manager Mark Winstanley said early this month. "But it would certainly be unusual," he said.

And while it's tempting to spend other people's money, I agree with Terry Bichsel — owner of Best Western Plus Ocean View Resort and Rivertides Suites — this should be a shared responsibility.

Raising the lodging tax is "always easy," Bichsel said at the workshop. "Something like this should be shared, because it does affect our community, not just the businesses and the tourists."

A more likely and less controversial source of funding could come from urban renewal funds intended to improve the Avenue S corridor between the Highway and Wahanna, Winstanley added.

Approved in 2017, funds of up to \$62.4 million — more if matched by state funds or grants — could help build bridges, add traffic enhancements and provide infrastructure needs for Seaside School District's new campus.

"I would think that would be an area the urban renewal agency would be very interested in doing work," Winstanley said this month. "That's right in the middle of the urban renewal district."

Another pathway could come through a road levy, initiated by residents or members of the City Council, he added.

For concerned residents and visitors, is there a Plan B?

If necessary, Horning is ready to "wait a while and try again," he said. "There are fees you can generate, road levies — but then you have to go through the political process of convincing people to support it."

R.J. Marx is The Daily Astorian's South County reporter and editor of the Seaside Signal and Cannon Beach Gazette.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Vote Herman for Astoria City Council

I am writing in support of Joan Herman to represent Ward 3 on the Astoria City Council. While I live in Ward 1, I run a business downtown in Ward 3, and believe Joan would make an excellent representative.

I have had the pleasure of working with her on the Coast Community Radio Board, and I'm repeatedly impressed with her skills both to run an organization (she is the current chairwoman of the board), and relate to people.

Years ago, she helped start and run Bikes and Beyond, and understands not only the ins and outs of business ownership, but how far Astoria has come, and how much more potential remains. Joan gets how important it is that Astoria retain its small-town livability, while carefully managing the inevitable changes it will see in the coming years.

Please join me in supporting her candidacy and voting for her this November.

JACK HARRIS  
Astoria

### Collusion versus conspiracy?

I have been trying to get my head around the difference between collusion and conspiracy, so I consulted two dictionaries. The unabridged edition of an older (circa 1970s) Random House Dictionary of the English Language defines those two words this way: collusion — a secret agreement for fraudulent or treacherous purposes; conspiracy; collude — act together in a secret agreement; and conspiracy — fraud.

The other Dictionary I looked at was the Little Oxford Dictionary. Because it's the meanings, the definitions are shorter but you get the meanings. Collude means conspire, and conspire means to combine secretly for unlawful or harmful purpose.

In each of these dictionaries there are also secondary definitions but they expand on the primary words. These two words obviously

mean illegal activity, no matter how you cut it, unless these dictionaries are so out of date the meanings are no longer valid.

RUSSELL THOMPSON  
Astoria

### Regatta festival was a huge success

The 124th Astoria Regatta Festival was once again a wonderful celebration and reminder of our community's special history and traditions, and gave us an opportunity to come together to experience and enjoy who we are.

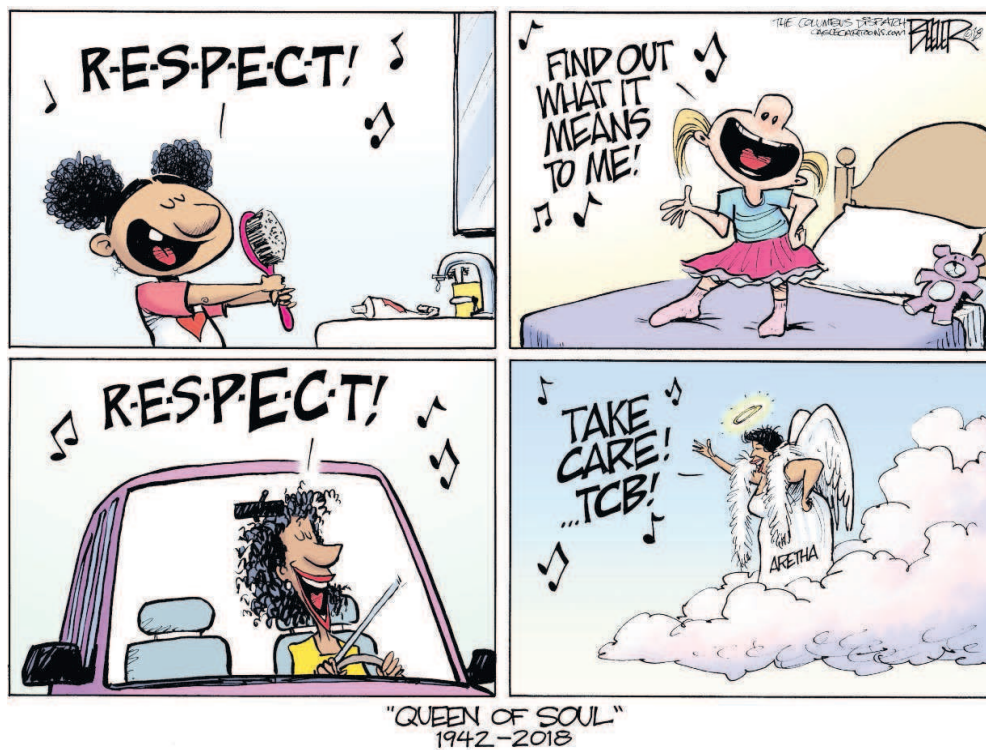
This year's festival had a new sponsor for the "Regatta Square," Columbia Memorial Hospital and its CEO, Erik Thorsen. They created a venue that became a festive, fun, family event. Bounce houses reflected our nautical theme, including a pirate and Titanic ship with awesome slides. They also had an enormous climbing wall tower. The menu was absolutely scrumptious. The live entertainment was exceptional, and vendors did a superb job contributing healthy choices. Well done, CMH and Erik Thorsen. You outdid yourselves.

As a past eight-year chairwoman of this event, I believe you really do deserve the "Best in West" award. Thank you all for your hard work and effort. It clearly was a huge success.

Though I've not been involved with Regatta for three years, due to a leave of absence, I was pleased that our overall festival is doing well. However, I have become concerned after observing the diminished number of events and participation. I can't emphasize enough how crucial it is for our community to step up not only financially, but as active participants.

I encourage everyone to be a Regatta Association member. Let us continue to celebrate the fact that Astoria has the "Oldest Festival West of the Rockies," and reflect on what our future community would be like without our beloved Regatta.

NANCY KENNEL  
Astoria



"QUEEN OF SOUL" 1942-2018

### Don't restrict water sports on Sunset Lake

The Oregon State Marine Board wants to restrict towed water sports on Sunset (Neacoxie) Lake. The proposed amended rule would restrict towed water sports on all Clatsop County bodies of water where there is a 10 mph speed restriction. The current rule, 250-020-004, limits the speed to 10 mph.

I know many of you (like me) tow tubes on Sunset Lake without incident. The lake has little motorized boat activity, and is very well self-regulated.

The south end of the lake has plenty of room to pull our kids and grandkids around without boater conflict or endangering public safety. We view the lake every day, and boat traffic is limited to an occasional kayak, fishing boat or tube being towed.

The restriction removes an activity that

many homeowners in the area have enjoyed for years.

Losing it also removes a valued amenity attached to the homes and property in the area.

Please join me in opposition to this ruling. In the Oregon State Marine Board's own words, "The towed water sport restriction is needed to support the current regulations, enhance safety and assist in the reduction of boater conflict in light of changing boating use and We do not need this restriction on Sunset (Neacoxie) Lake and I do not want to lose the valued activity."

Written comments can be sent by Sept. 30 by mail to June LeTarte, Rules Coordinator, Oregon State Marine Board, 435 Commercial St. N.E., Salem, OR 97301; by fax to 503-378-4597, or by email to osmb.rulemaking@oregon.gov

PATRICK DUHACHEK  
Warrenton