

# Hotel: New design complicated the appeals process, discussions

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compatibility, the developer appealed to the City Council.

In the appeal, Hollander questioned the criteria the Historic Landmarks Commission used to reach a denial, saying the criteria didn't apply since there are no adjacent historic buildings to evaluate new construction against. The commission's review was triggered by the presence of a historic boiler, pilings and ballast in the Columbia River.

The majority of the City Council agreed, but it was one of the rare moments Thursday when Hollander's representatives directly addressed their arguments for appealing the city boards' decisions. Instead, they focused most on a new design for the hotel, submitted to city staff that morning.

The new design had not been reviewed by the city. The redesign shows a large hotel, still four stories tall, but minus The Ship Inn. In plans the city boards rejected, Hollander had planned to incorporate the restaurant.

The overall appearance of the hotel has also changed to reflect the cannery buildings that once existed along the waterfront, architects for Hollander told city councilors. The new design gained tentative admiration from some councilors and a few people in the audience.

But the new design also complicated the appeals process and City Council discussions, with councilors trying to determine what they would be approving, denying or sending back for fur-



Carleton Hart Architecture

The new design for the hotel will go before the city's Design Review Committee.

**'I'm just really hoping that we can figure this out soon ... because I think it's a legitimate proposal, a legitimate plan, and I think the town actually, in a sense, needs this.'**

**Mark Hollander**

owner of Hollander Hospitality

ther review — the old plans Hollander championed in the appeal, the old plans with the new plans attached, or the new plans alone.

"Can we not do what we came here to do?" City Councilor Cindy Price exclaimed at one point.

### Objections

People who came to testify against Hollander's old plans

questioned whether the City Council should even hear the company's presentation. Several people argued the new plans should first go through the city's review process and evaluation by the Design Review Committee and the Historic Landmarks Commission. Price and City Councilor Zetty Nemlowill agreed.

"This is an issue that a lot of people care about and have

commented on and are here to comment on tonight," Nemlowill said. "And the council is not prepared to make a decision on this, the citizens are not prepared to provide input and staff has not done a technical analysis."

"We were supposed to be looking at an appeal of a design that's much different than what we've been presented with today," she added.

"And what we've been presented with might be a better design, but it's brand new."

After listening to the company's presentation of the new design, Jan Faber, a resident, thanked Hollander for making some accommodations to issues and concerns raised at past hearings and meetings on the project. But, he maintained, the new design should go back for review.

"As far as I can see, this is a withdrawal of the appeal that was originally presented to you," he told the council. "It's not an appeal anymore, it's a new proposal and if they want to bring modifications to the Design Review Committee, then that's where it should go."

Under the rules of Thursday's appeal hearing, people were able to submit new information, City Manager Brett Estes said.

### 'Land the plane'

Steven Hultberg, an attorney representing Hollander Hospitality, said he didn't expect the City Council to come to a decision on the redesign Thursday night.

"We certainly want everyone to have an opportunity to take a look at these materials," he said.

But, he added, they were looking for direction from councilors about how city criteria applied or didn't apply to the project. The company has struggled to understand the best way to interpret city code.

"I want to try and land the plane in this town and create a hotel," Mark Hollander, the company's owner, said. "I'm just really hoping that we can

figure this out soon, right, because I think it's a legitimate proposal, a legitimate plan, and I think the town actually, in a sense, needs this."

The City Council ultimately separated the Historic Landmarks Commission part of the appeal from the Design Review Committee portion. They voted unanimously to send the new design back to the Design Review Committee. They voted 3-2 to tentatively reverse the Historic Landmarks Commission's denial of the old design.

"The (commission) had a difficult challenge in front of them to try to apply their criteria to this particular case and they did the best they could and within that they found some reason for denial," City Councilor Tom Brownson said. Mayor Arline LaMear and City Councilor Bruce Jones agreed.

Price and Nemlowill voted "no," arguing that the Historic Landmarks Commission should have a chance to review the new design. There was no chance for anyone at the meeting Thursday to comment on whether they thought the new design was historically compatible, they said.

If the commission had made a different case, Brownson said he might have been convinced, but he agreed with Hollander that the criteria was not clear and did not seem to apply to the hotel.

"We're not done with this type of situation," Brownson said of historic landmarks criteria. "This is going to come up again and again and again. So I think this is going to help inform everybody."

# Uniontown: Helping Hands plans to host open house on Sept. 29

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Teresa Sims, the housing authority's deputy director, included Helping Hands in a list of complaints against housing authority director Todd Johnston and the agency. Sims has been on administrative leave since May pending the results of an investigation after other employees lodged complaints against her.

In a claim Sims filed with the state Bureau of Labor and Industries, she alleges Helping Hands interfered with her duties as supervisor of the Section 8 housing program. She was also concerned that Helping Hands and the housing authority were misusing federal funds, she said.

Scott Lee, the chairman of the housing authority board and the county commission, calls Sims' claims "baseless."

Evans said her accusations have not hindered Helping Hands, but the nonprofit is steering clear of the drama.

"We don't understand any of the complaints," Evans said, adding that Helping Hands has always been transparent about what it does and what it provides. He emphasized that the organization's relationship with the housing authority has always been professional.

The Uniontown project comes at a time when Astoria and other cities in Clatsop County struggle with how to address a growing homeless population, scant resources to address mental health and addiction issues for people

with little or no income, and a shortage of affordable housing.

Helping Hands is not the only group hoping to fill the gaps. Bill Van Nostran, pastor at Astoria's First Presbyterian Church, hopes to soon provide workforce housing to people like those graduating from Helping Hands' outreach in Astoria.

Van Nostran thinks of the city's housing issues in terms of levels. People living on the streets are at level zero; people who find occasional overnight shelter at the Astoria Warming Center in bad weather are at level one; people going through re-entry programs at Helping Hands would be at level two. His church could provide level three.

"And there seems to be a gap in Astoria right now and that's a niche we hope to fill," Van Nostran said.

First Presbyterian is looking for a vacant building downtown to create affordable and low-income housing. Van Nostran says it is a logical progression in the church's ministry. The church already provides an emergency food pantry. Van Nostran serves on the warming center's board and the church supports the emergency shelter with financial contributions and volunteer hours.

A housing project would fall in line with "our quest to continue doing ministry outside the walls of the church," he said.

Helping Hands' leaders pride themselves on the relationships they have developed



Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

Sailer Galusha-McRobbie, left, and Hunter Bedortha clean up a kitchen in one of the units at the former boarding house.

with landlords and housing programs to place graduates from re-entry programs into permanent housing. Evans and Raven Brown, the nonprofit's development director, are con-

fident they will be able to continue placing people in Astoria after the Uniontown building comes online.

But, they said, they are glad people like Van Nostran are

trying to come up with creative solutions to increase affordable housing options.

U.S. Rep. Suzanne Bonamici visited the Uniontown project in July. The Ore-

gon Democrat asked Evans how she could help and he stressed the importance of advocacy.

The nonprofit does not receive federal funding. Because its facilities do not qualify as emergency shelters or low-income housing, it does not meet the data processing criteria from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Evans said.

"We don't fit neatly in one category," Evans said. "The criteria has to change a little bit for us to be able to do this. It's so far out of the focus of what we do."

Nonetheless, the congresswoman seemed impressed with the project.

"This looks like it was made for what you're doing," Bonamici said. "This place is huge."

Helping Hands plans to host a community open house at the Uniontown building on Sept. 29 so people can see the work that's been done and learn more about the programs offered.

Jack Heffernan contributed to this report.

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