

OPINION

editor@dailyastorian.com



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KARI BORGEN
Publisher

JIM VAN NOSTRAND
Editor

JEREMY FELDMAN
Circulation Manager

DEBRA BLOOM
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CARL EARL
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SOUTHERN EXPOSURE

Can illegal fireworks be deterred?

It's not too early to prepared for Independence Day 2019 — a celebration of our nation's 243rd birthday.

With July 4 falling on a Thursday, Seaside will brace for a four-day weekend blast that could have some unintended consequences.

After the 2018 celebration, Seaside resident Cindy Daly described the "outlandish use of illegal fireworks in the Cove, in the dunes and on the beach. Cove resident Bill Basiliko called Seaside a "war zone."



R.J. MARX

"You couldn't even tell when the official fireworks started," he told city councilors in July. Almost a century ago sailors and townspeople "engaged in a mix-up" on Broadway, when the Signal reported on July 5, 1923, "a citizen strenuously objected to a sailor's shooting off torpedoes under his feet." Today, residents and officials say, the problem is worse than ever.

In Gearhart, two young people were hospitalized after illegal fireworks exploded.

In Seaside, a visitor threw lit mortar fireworks into random fire pits before police were notified and the man was arrested and charged.

But enforcement remains at least as complex as it did in 1999, when the Signal reported "the problem of illegal fireworks is an ongoing concern for authorities."

Fewer shows

The annual show — a tradition launched decades ago and one of the largest in the Pacific Northwest — draws thousands to Seaside and presents one of the most remarkable displays anywhere.

Engineered by Larry Kriegshauser, the show benefits businesses and restaurants throughout the community and caps off a day of festivities, from the downtown parade to the Seaside Museum's Ice Cream Social.

One problem for Seaside is the lack of fireworks shows on the coast and throughout the region. Cannon Beach gave up its fireworks show years ago. Vancouver and Tigard have opted out.

Fire bans on the South Coast limit events. Pacific City, Neskowin and Manzanita, each in Tillamook County, each abandoned their fireworks shows this year.

As a result, Seaside draws an ever-larger crowd.

And, according to longtime Seaside Chamber of Commerce volunteer Doug Barker, the crowd "has changed dramatically. We have these few who are really causing problems."

Parks patrol

Beach enforcement falls under the aegis of Oregon State Parks, but patrols are limited, State Parks District Manager Teri Wing said at a Sept. 11 Seaside City Council workshop on illegal fireworks.

"We're more than willing to help, but there's a limit to the enforcement rules," she said.

State Parks is responsible for management of the ocean shore from low tide up to what's referred to as the statutory vegetation line.

According to Park Ranger Justin Parker of the Fort Stevens Management Unit, parks employees emphasize prevention related to camping, litter and fireworks.

"We know around the holiday, the popularity of the beach and use of fireworks creates problems," Parker said.

Two beach rangers with training in special event management, permit compliance and ocean shore rule enforcement work out of Fort Stevens and Nehalem Bay, along with about 30 staff members who either directly patrol the beach or provide support along the North Coast.

State Parks has a contract with the Clatsop



Fireworks display in Seaside in 2017.

Photos by R.J. Marx/The Daily Astorian



Officials at a workshop on illegal fireworks. From left, seated with pad, Seth Morrisey, Jason Elkins, Teri Wing, Jay Barber, Dave Ham and Joey Daniels.



Officials at a workshop on illegal fireworks. From left, Tita Montero, Jason Elkins, Teri Wing, Jay Barber and Dave Ham.

County Sheriff's Office and recently the Oregon State Police to provide funding for additional services, including overtime and reserve coverage, in place to provide additional resources through the peak tourist season, not just the Fourth of July.

"A lot of people think the state has huge pockets, but we don't," Wing said. "We do what we can in that respect."

A matter of personnel

Seaside ordinances prohibit all fireworks on the beach, Seaside Police Chief Dave Ham said, in line with the state prohibition which does not allow any fireworks on the ocean shores without permit.

Any possession or use of any firework — even legally purchased fireworks in Oregon — is prohibited year-round on the

beach in Seaside.

About half of the city's 19 police officers are not on duty at night because they've been on duty during the day or on an extra assignment.

"That takes them out of the equation at 7, 8 p.m.," Ham said. "It becomes a safety issue when people are working long hours without breaks and they're working seven days in a row."

All fireworks are illegal on the beach, including sparklers, he said, as well as bottle rockets, Roman candles and mortars. Some explosive devices confiscated by police are bigger than the commercial devices used for Kriegshauser's professional show.

Most violators simply run off at the first sign of police. "They watch, drive by and they go out again," Ham said. "It gets

worse at night."

To win a successful prosecution, complainants must be willing to file a report and follow through with an investigation. Evidence is needed to prove "who threw that particular projectile," Ham said.

Like Seaside Police and State Parks, firefighters are equally short-staffed. The city only has four professional firefighters; the rest are volunteers, according to Fire Chief Joey Daniels.

Their day starts on the Fourth at 7 a.m. and continues to the early hours of July 5, Daniels said. This year, one firefighter logged 22 hours straight.

Throughout the evening, firefighters confiscated what he described as "a U-Haul size load of fireworks."

Light it up?

The Sept. 11 workshop presented an abundance of ideas from officials and residents alike.

Putting notices in hotels and short-term rentals "would make a lot of difference," Daly said.

Russ Vandenberg, general manager of the Seaside Civic and Convention Center, proposed lighting up the Prom after the city's official fireworks show's conclusion.

"What about bright light fixtures during the Prom and light the beach up after the main fireworks is over?" Vandenberg asked. "Light it like it's daylight out there and people might be less able to find enjoyment with these fireworks."

Seaside's Matthew Stolberg urged a greater education component for visitors, an idea seconded by Councilor Steve Wright.

Ham urged residents to follow through when they make a complaint. "If you're one of those people who call in, tell me where it's happening, identify the person and be willing to sign a complaint," he said.

City Councilor Tita Montero suggested a texting hotline to identify violators. "Take a picture of a person and text it to the hotline," she said. "Then we know who that person is."

Mayor Jay Barber suggested forming a task force to sort through available options.

"We need to put together a strategic plan with incremental steps that we can actually pull off in a way that helps to progressively deal with the issue that doesn't put a damper on the celebration but helps to deal with illegal fireworks," Barber said. "This will take citizen involvement."

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 Taylor for Astoria mayor

I'm voting for Dulcye Taylor to be our next mayor of Astoria due to her vast experience as a consensus builder in this community.

I have been a resident for over 35 years, and a leader of volunteers for over 30. I understand the challenges and necessity of consensus building. I have learned from experience it does not take one person to resolve problems, but many working together to fix issues that affect the whole.

For over 10 years, in many different settings and situations, I always found her to be an authentic, open, responsive, caring and effective leader. I've participated with Dulcye as she successfully led our downtown into becoming a thriving, vibrant place to live and work.

She has a distinctive ability to bring everyone to the table from all walks of life with different needs and dreams to accomplish shared goals. She listens to all ideas and concerns, and can empower groups to build positive accord in a timely manner for the betterment of our whole community.

I'm confident Dulcye is just what our city needs now to lead us through upcoming difficult issues facing our beautiful community through her vast local understanding, her distinctive inclusive leadership style and her skills as a peacemaker.

Dulcye can, and will guide Astoria into a future we all can continue to live, work, and play in. I hope you will join me and vote for Dulcye Taylor for mayor.

JUDITH P. NILAND
Astoria

Vote 'yes' on Measure 106

A recent letter to this forum, "Vote 'no' on Measure 106" (The Daily Astorian, Sept. 27), displays a common fallacy by concluding, "there is no problem."

When a beating heart is stopped, in the name of convenience, there is a problem.

Forcing me to pay for that killing is a problem.

Mocking those who dare to take a moral stand in defense of life is a problem.

If the writer thinks prohibiting tax-funded

abortions is unfair to the poor, I suggest that forcing law-abiding taxpayers to fund this immorality is unjust. Fairness is subjective; justice is objective.

Yes, there most certainly is a problem, and Measure 106 addresses it.

ROBERT JOHNSTONE
Astoria

Limit or ban Astoria waterfront development

From the bench on Pier 3 to Pier 39, the Riverwalk has become a primary feature of Astoria. Our estuary's green forested shores, highlighted by wildlife, the bridge and ships at anchor, define our community.

The most valuable land in Manhattan, between Fifth and Park avenues, is next to Central Park, whose operation costs exceed Yosemite's. Nobody proposes to divide it into high-rise lots. In Vancouver, Canada, Stanley Park occupies the second-most valuable land in the world. How much of it could they urbanize without creating a privatized slum?

During the madness of the 2007 sub-prime bubble, frenzied real estate over-capitalization elicited some 17 proposals upon Astoria's waterfront. At one memorable hearing, the incredulous term "view corridors" was used, like Malibu, where corridors between wall-to-wall buildings offer waterfront views as enjoyable as glimpsing a movie through a keyhole.

How many condominiums would it take to turn our riverfront into a Malibu?

Unrestricted or even measured substantial development of the riverfront essentially privatizes the very element that imparts value to our community. The irreparable loss for the city would be far greater than any private gain for speculators. Building condos in Central Park, like eating Aesop's golden goose, or reckless riverfront building, could cost developers their illusive treasure.

At least consider severely limiting the development of Astoria's waterfront, if not a comprehensive moratorium on development there altogether.

TED THOMAS
Astoria