

Port: 'No cruise ship has threatened not to come'

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"One of the reasons we've been so successful with cruise ships is making sure tours are sold on board," Knight said. "This is how cruise companies make money."

Cruise ships rent the entirety of open space on Pier 1, meaning they have the right to control access while ships are at berth, Knight said.

Vinatieri recently testified before the Port Commission that the agency is creating a hostile environment in the name of protecting on-board cruise ship revenue.

"Port staff are systematically harassing local transport and tour providers," he said. "These local operators provide service to elderly and disabled cruise passengers."

Conner was recently exonerated by the Oregon Government Ethics Commission after being reported by Kulp for a possible conflict of interest. He's paid by the Port to market the North Coast as a day stop for cruise ships migrating north in the spring and south in the summer and fall.

Conner testified to the Ethics Commission that while he receives a benefit as a tour operator and helps strategically park buses based on tour departure times, he does not serve on any decision-making body at the Port or have any say in the agency's policies or which tours the cruise lines approve.

"I've been doing this for about 15, 16 years, and I'm very careful at keeping those separated," Conner said of his positions with the Port and



Edward Stratton/The Daily Astorian

The Port of Astoria restricts vehicle access on Pier 1 during cruise ship visits to tours preapproved with cruise lines, along with a bus by Sunset Empire Transportation District running between the docks and downtown.

Sundial Travel.

Some members of the Ethics Commission questioned whether Conner should declare a potential conflict of interest when working for the Port. But the commission found that he separated the two positions enough and voted 6-2 to dismiss Kulp's complaint against him.

A segment of passengers

Only 15 to 20 percent of

passengers on average take advantage of shoreside excursions, Conner said. Many depart the ship and either walk along the Astoria Riverwalk or take a bus route operated by Sunset Empire Transportation District in partnership with the volunteer Clatsop Cruise Hosts.

"I support more tour operators, but I like that the cruise lines control it," Conner said of tours being sold on board only. "It makes it organized."

Neither Kulp nor Vinatieri have signed the tour operator agreement, although Kulp has agreements with some cruise lines. Vinatieri claims the Port's policy, including a \$100 dock access fee for every cruise ship visit, disadvantages smaller tour operators in favor of larger, more established operations like Conner's. He has called on the Port to update policies for smaller-scale tour operators like his and make exceptions for

elderly passengers and people with disabilities.

Kulp, who declined to comment pending possible legal action, has previously called on the Port to replace Conner with an outsider not offering tours.

"It is true that the cruise lines want to make a high markup on shore excursions," Vinatieri said. "However, shutting out tour operators that don't advertise with the cruise lines is something special to

this port."

The Port was one of the first to require all tours be vetted and sold on board, which cruise lines love, Conner told the Ethics Commission during his testimony. But people buying cruises through the ship can't see whether they are from Sundial Travel or Lor's Tours, he said.

Michael Nerney, head of the Cruise the West association the Port belongs to and assistant deputy director of the Port of San Francisco, said a similar policy is in place there allowing only buses approved by cruise lines to pick up passengers on port property.

"Passengers can purchase tours on their own if they wish after exiting the terminals," Nerney said.

New policy

During a recent cruise ship conference in Florida, Knight said, cruise ships conveyed how much they like the Port's policy protecting their on-board revenue.

"No cruise ship has threatened to not come, but Conner has highlighted that's why we're doing so well," Knight said.

The cruise ship season is almost over, with only four ships left this month. Knight is looking to craft a new operator policy he said will be non-negotiable but as flexible as possible to accommodate newer tour operators. "It's going to be my role to wrestle with crafting a policy that will deal with the coming year that accommodates these other operators, and protecting the cruise ship business," Knight said.

Camping: Communities and agencies need to be flexible

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long letter outlining their concerns with the city's approach to dealing with the camps.

"What we do not want is to declare a political emergency and rush through changes to city code that do not really address the problem of being

homeless and seem more to be addressing the problem with homelessness," Moffett said, reading from the letter Monday at LaMear's request.

"Our desire is for Astoria to support all the people involved while finding longer-term solutions," she continued. "For example, instead

of telling people where they can't live, tell them where they can live, at least until there are better options."

They suggested marking areas where camping could be allowed, providing trash cans or dumpsters and portable bathroom facilities and involving the homeless in

the discussion of possible solutions.

LaMear also asked Elaine Bruce, executive director for Clatsop Community Action, to discuss the agency's work and a 10-year plan to end homelessness in Clatsop County first executed in 2011.

"Certainly plans can change over time," Bruce said. She believes they are achieving some of the goals outlined in the plan, like establishing relationships with private landlords to provide housing for people or working with cities and the county to change develop-

ment codes.

But homelessness is "incredibly, incredibly complex," she said. Communities and agencies need to be flexible. The camping that is happening in the woods is a new challenge. "We didn't have that five or six years ago," she said.

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