

Hotel: Parking will be primary issue for developers

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Eighth and Ninth streets. It could include as many as 40 guest rooms, as well as a small restaurant.

The building, along with another, taller companion across the Astoria Riverfront Trolley tracks, was last used to process anchovies before the fishery declined. The processing equipment was sold at auction last year and the plant has been vacant.

Developers plan to use the existing building over the river for the hotel and will not construct additional floors, said Tiffany Turner, the CEO of Adrift Hotels Social Purpose Corp. in Long Beach, Washington. They also plan to open up public access to the river from the base of Ninth Street, which is now blocked by a fence.

“Astoria is an amazing community and people want to come here,” said Turner, who, with her husband, Brady, operates the Adrift Hotel and the Inn at Discovery Coast in Long Beach, the Shelburne Hotel in Seaside and the Ashore Hotel in Seaside. “I think bringing in the right people that the community wants, to do work that the community can be proud of, is something that hopefully will set us apart from other projects.”

Luke Colvin, one of the founders of Buoy Beer, said they plan to enhance the building’s unique character, preserving the tall ceilings, wood



Luke Colvin and Tiffany Turner look over a building they want to convert into a hotel in Astoria. Colin Murphy/The Daily Astorian

floors and beams, and honoring the history of the riverfront and the building itself. He points to similar work accomplished at Buoy Beer, another former seafood processing facility.

“I think the same applies here,” he said. “Throughout all of the discussions it’s always been we’re going to embrace the culture and what the building is offering. We got out of the way of the (Buoy) building and let that building tell us what it wanted ultimately to be.”

David Kroening and Andrew Bornstein, the other founders of Buoy Beer, are also

involved with the hotel project.

Parking

Parking will be the primary issue the developers will need to address to satisfy city code, said Rosemary Johnson, a former city planner who is reviewing the project for the city’s Community Development Department. The developers plan to use valet parking in a lot tied to the opposite building to address some parking concerns. They are looking at leasing additional parking spaces, too.

But that’s just from the

city’s side of things.

“The concept of an additional hotel over the water and the public support or non-support of that concept is going to be a challenge,” Johnson said.

New development, especially hotels or condominiums over the water, has been at the heart of debates on the Riverfront Vision Plan over the past decade. The issue has resurfaced this year as developers eye the river for projects, and as the city hears input on what people want for the Urban Core.

City boards twice shot

down a proposal by Hollander Hospitality to build a four-story Marriott-brand hotel, the Fairfield Inn and Suites, near the river off Second Street, despite an effort by the Bellingham, Washington, developer to redesign the hotel to echo historic cannery buildings. The project is in the Bridge Vista section of the Riverfront Vision Plan adopted in 2015 and hotels are an outright use where Hollander wants to build.

Politics

Several candidates for City Council have said they chose to run this year because they worry about further hotel development along the river. Some said they will push for zoning changes so that hotels are no longer considered an outright use in certain waterfront areas.

At a debate earlier this month, the candidates for mayor questioned the need for more hotels. Dulcye Taylor, the owner of Old Town Framing Co. and president of the Astoria Downtown Historic District Association, said she was disappointed with the “Fairfield discussion,” saying she felt the developers should have done their due diligence a long time ago. City Councillor Bruce Jones referenced a fledgling proposal to build a 90-plus room hotel off Youngs Bay and said Astorians need housing on the South Slope more than they need hotels.

The building Buoy and

Adrift want to turn into a boutique hotel is located in the city’s Aquatic 2 zone, an area that calls for water-dependent uses but envisions mixed-use redevelopment.

Colvin and Kroening say there are few options when it comes to repurposing this type of facility. To Kroening, it was clear the building would not be profitable for seafood processing after multiple groups came through last year and opted to buy the equipment at auction rather than start up another plant.

Hotels that provide significant visual access to the waterfront are allowed as a conditional use in the Aquatic 2 zone if the project can meet the criteria in city code. “So when a planning commissioner looks at this they have to review the criteria, not whether or not you want something there,” Johnson said.

The building is not designated as historic and will not fall under review by the Historic Landmarks Commission.

City staff continue to process applications like the one from Buoy and Adrift under current city code while the Urban Core is being drafted.

“If an application comes in for some sort of development or project then we would process it just like we would any other application,” City Manager Brett Estes said. “There’s not any difference or any nuance — we work within the laws of Astoria presently.”

Warrenton: City poised to take over Hammond Marina

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Balensifer, who chairs the housing study’s technical advisory committee. Rather, there’s a lack of houses that first-time home buyers or younger families can afford.

Balensifer says the housing study will provide valuable insight into how city leaders can go about encouraging development of the housing Warrenton needs.

But Washington thinks the city could be doing more to encourage low-income housing, perhaps through tax incentives.

“They need to take care of what’s in front of them and figure out how we can get our hands on property to promote low-income housing,” he said. Some of the bigger stores that have set up shop in Warrenton in recent years do not offer high-paying jobs, he added. Families are making do on minimum wage.

Experience

Both men have referenced experience in their bids for mayor.

Balensifer, 29, who grew up in Warrenton, highlights his many years of experience. Besides his service as an elected official and his involvement with the county housing study, he is involved with the Warrenton High School Fisheries Program — he founded a non-

profit to rebuild the program — as well as various regional economic development and tourism and business promotion organizations.

Washington, 54, on the other hand, points to his lack of political experience as a selling point. He comes to the role of mayor with no agenda, he said. Washington, who moved to Hammond 19 years ago, has spent the campaign going door to door. The job of the mayor is to be the voice of the people, he said. If elected, he plans to continue going door to door to listen to people’s concerns.

Balensifer disputes Washington’s claim that city leaders don’t listen to citizens. He has held several town hall-style meetings since his appointment to mayor and hosts “coffee with the mayor” events each Monday. As the city pursues an economic development strategy, he has purposefully held meetings in both Warrenton and Hammond.

The city is also in the middle of updating a number of plans that Balensifer believes will guide the city into the future. He pushed for an update to the city’s vision plan, a document that would require a high degree of public input. A vision plan provides an “overarching, balcony view of what you want your town to look like,” Balensifer said.

“In city government, if it

isn’t in the plan, you can’t invest in it,” he noted.

For Balensifer, housing issues and quality of life questions fall under an even bigger category: Growth management.

As the area experiences rapid development, the city has had to weather numerous growing pains. City staffing levels remain relatively the same even as demands for service increase. Intersections have become busier and more fraught. Housing projects bloom in neighborhoods. The City Commission has spent much of the last two years discussing ways to encourage development that does not compromise residents’ quality of life.

But Washington believes some of the city’s plans may make life for people in Hammond more difficult.

Hammond Marina

The city is poised to take over ownership of the Hammond Marina from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, something Balensifer has been involved with as well. City ownership of the marina is key for Hammond’s future development, he said.

“Hammond’s downtown has always been tied to that marina,” Balensifer said. The marina gets heavy use during the summer salmon fishing season, but is not nearly as bustling as it once was. The city has two down-

towns, one in Warrenton and one in Hammond, Balensifer said. Both have unique characters and characteristics. With the marina under city ownership and the construction of a \$1.6 million water line to Hammond, Balensifer sees the possibility for more in what has been a sleepy and often underserved area.

Washington disagrees. He

believes greater development around the marina, rather than serving as an economic engine for the area, would create parking problems and traffic congestion in neighborhoods. Hammond would be better served with basic street improvements and the installation of streetlights and sidewalks, he said.

Both men emphasize that, if elected, they would be part of a

team with the four City Commissioners, just one vote out of five. It is here where Balensifer sees an advantage over his opponent.

“I have a vision for this city that the City Commission also shares,” he said.

And, both men note, if the mayor can’t get along with fellow commissioners, it doesn’t work out well.

Seaside: Mayor Barber ‘was all for it’

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“We were going to do them back to back, so people could watch the presentation and right after, at 7, do the debate,” Barnes said.

The public safety association, a nonpartisan group which includes all nonmanagement police, fire and dispatch employees, prepared a list of public safety and commerce-oriented questions.

“I told him (Barber) the idea was to give each candidate three minutes, three questions, a week ahead of time, because we wanted educated answers, not ones that were off the cuff,” Barnes said.

A “surprise” question would be presented to each candidate, along with opportunity for a three-minute closing statement.

Barnes said he received a commitment from both candidates, although Barber asked that the debate time be pushed to 7:30 p.m. to avoid a conflict with a City Council work session earlier in the evening.

“Jay told me it sounded great,” Barnes said. “He was all for it. I later heard from Chapman and he committed.”

Last Friday, Barber sent Barnes the email withdrawing. Later that afternoon, Barnes was contacted by Owen, who said that the chamber was unable to participate as a co-sponsor because of a lack of policy guidance.

“The reason that we declined is because we don’t have a policy that clearly states how we handle these debates,” Owen explained. “Not having a clear policy on political engagement, I felt it best to pass on this invite to co-host a debate and create a clear political activity policy.”

Barnes said he and other association members were “hugely” disappointed by Barber’s decision.

Previous events, including a September forum presented by the American Association of University Women and The Daily Astorian, covered many issues but left others remaining.

“We have a whole association who feels there are questions not answered by these candidates,” Barnes said.

“We want to know what their two-, five-, 10- and 20-year plans are for the city of Seaside. We want to know what they are going to do about affordable housing in Seaside. Good, working families who want their kids in the Seaside School District cannot afford to buy a house.”

Barnes said association members sought candidates’ views on improving traffic flow, future business growth and whether they regarded the city as a “sleepy little beach town or a big community.”

Barnes disagrees with Barber’s assessment that the debate was too late in the election cycle to make a meaningful difference, he said.

“No. 1, voters historically wait until the last moment,” Barnes said. “No. 2, I think this is something that would motivate a lot of people who are not going to vote to get out and vote.”

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