

Port: Who operates the inn has a domino effect on properties

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The Port, Param and Hospitality Ventures have since been negotiating the transfer of equipment, accounts, reservations and the approximately 30 people who work at the hotel.

Jim Knight, the Port’s executive director, did not respond to requests for comment regarding negotiations. Ganesh Sonpatki, manager of Param, also declined to comment.

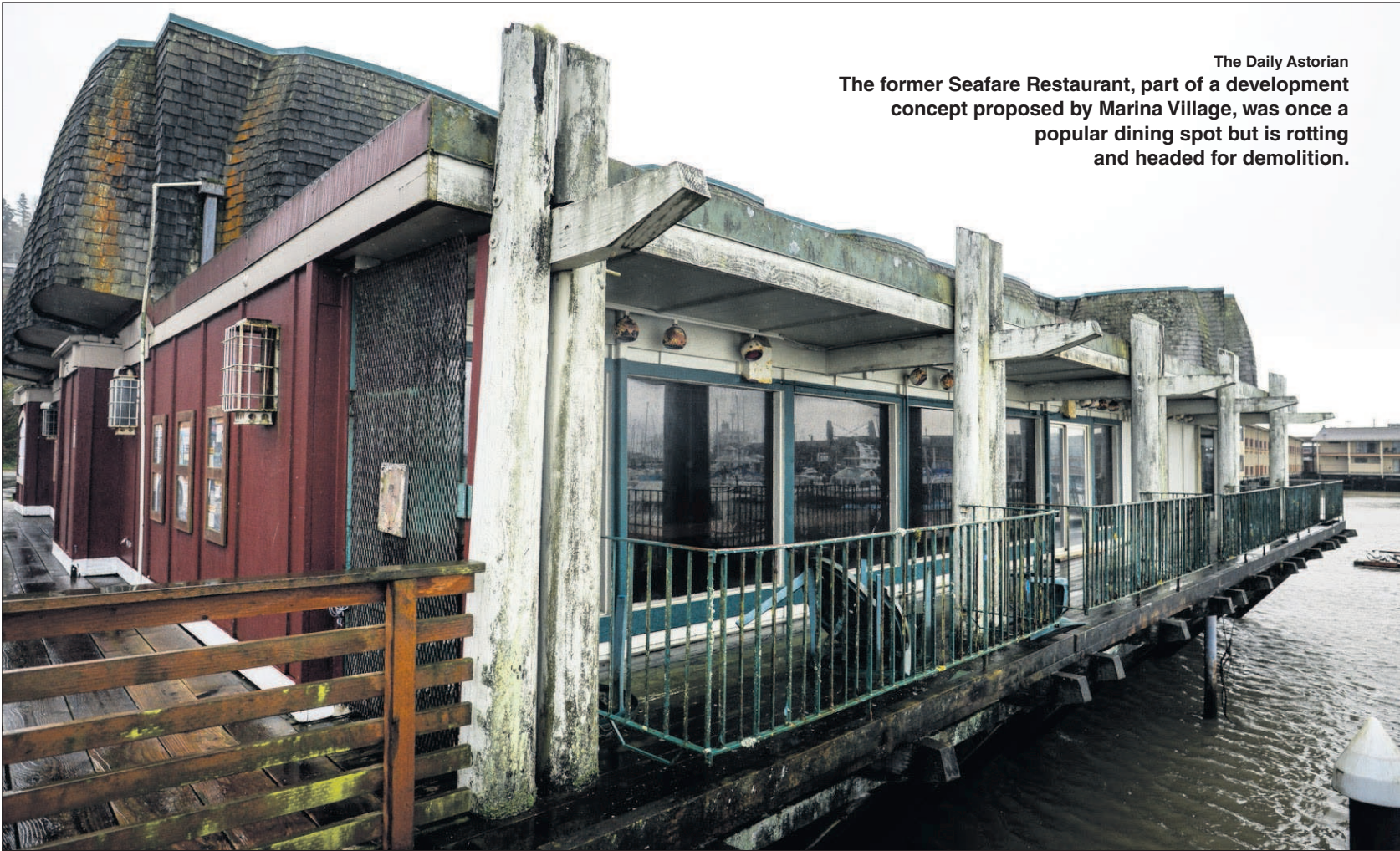
Earlier this month, the Port sent a notice of termination of Hospitality Ventures’ lease. In an email to the Port, Orr, an attorney and president of a Seattle-area seafood processor, indicated the firm will cooperate with the handoff to Param, but later suggested it could pursue legal action to recoup its investment.

In the email, Orr detailed an annual revenue increase at the hotel from \$1.1 million to \$2.4 million a year, equating to at least an extra \$100,000 for the Port and \$130,000 to the city annually during Hospitality Ventures’ operation. The hotel’s payroll has also increased by almost 50 percent to more than \$700,000, he wrote.

The Port continuing to appeal the verdict was critical for Hospitality Ventures to make the hotel work and be fairly compensated for its investment, he wrote. “If not, we will need to consider our alternatives for relief.”

“I just want a fair deal, and I think we’ll get one,” Orr said Wednesday.

Who operates the Riverwalk Inn has a domino effect on the adjacent Chinook Building,



The Daily Astorian
The former Seafare Restaurant, part of a development concept proposed by Marina Village, was once a popular dining spot but is rotting and headed for demolition.

an aging commercial structure hosting a seafood market, bait shop, fishing charters and professional offices. It also effects the former Seafare Restaurant, a once-popular venue featured in the movie “Kindergarten Cop” but now rotting and headed for demolition.

Orr and Trabucco — a developer who has restored several local properties, including the Hotel Elliott — formed Marina Village to create a destination around the mooring

basin. Their vision included the Riverwalk Inn; the Chinook Building as a shopping and conference center to help lure guests in the slow seasons; and the Seafare Restaurant as a fine dining option.

The Port Commission granted Orr and Trabucco a lease of the Chinook Building late last year. But Marina Village terminated the lease in December after learning Param won the hotel lawsuit. Orr, the primary financial backer of the partnership, also transferred ownership of Marina Village entirely to Trabucco.

According to Knight, Marina Village has since fallen more than \$30,000 behind in rent. Trabucco claims Marina Village has been paying a revised level of rent based on more than \$500,000 in needed upgrades to the building, and the untenability of running a conference center without control of the hotel.

In the original lease, Marina Village agreed to pay the Port \$6,311 a month, along with taxes, insurance and utilities. After sending the termination letter, Marina Village adjusted the rents to equal revenues from the Chinook Building, currently at less than \$4,800 a month, Trabucco said.

“We’ve been operating it as a pass-through for the Port,” he said.

Trabucco recently sent terms for a new lease to the Port, asking that the reduced

rent be kept in place until December 2019, or until ownership of the hotel is determined, after which the rent would revert to the original rate. The amended lease would also give Trabucco the right to purchase the Chinook Building within the first five years.

As for the former Seafare Restaurant, Trabucco said, “the owner of that has to be the operator of the hotel to make it work.”

Land: Tech companies would join a slew of other businesses

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Data centers, while offering economic diversity, have also driven up housing costs in rural communities. Concerns have been raised about how the project could impact the county, which is already grappling with affordable housing woes.

The technology companies would join a slew of other businesses that have moved into Warrenton, including Walmart earlier this year.

Sernande did not provide details about how many companies may move into the Mavrik property or how much it would cost to build. After a due diligence period, the company will seek to overcome wetland mitigation hurdles before leasing or selling parts of the property,



Joshua Bessex/The Daily Astorian

Tech companies have shown interest in the North Coast Business Park in Warrenton.

though an exact timeline was also not specified.

The company did, however, promise to give 10 percent of its profits to local non-profit organizations.

Sernande is also part of a development group led by Floyd Holcom, the owner of

Pier 39, which has proposed floating homes, a cruise ship terminal and a promenade at the East Mooring Basin in Astoria.

“My hope is that these companies do what they say they’re going to do,” Lee said.

Steele: New commission will decide who to hire permanently

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had been trying to find a clear short- or long-term replacement since his hiring, adding that the recent revolving door of managers did not play a factor.

Prior to Moore’s retirement announcement, Steele, who has become a more visible face in the county over the past year, hoped to assume the assistant manager position on a full-time basis by 2020.

Though it was solely a promotion to the assistant manager position that had been cut years earlier due to an economic recession, county officials expressed concerns at the time that Moore may have been inappropriately choosing his successor. The county charter gives commissioners the sole responsibility

to hire a manager.

Commissioner Lianne Thompson said at the time that the move was an example of what the board had “devolved to,” questioning whether the move was within Moore’s “scope of authority.”

Nonetheless, the new commission will decide who to hire permanently.

Though they voted in favor of her appointment, Thompson and Commissioner Kathleen Sullivan called for an open, thorough search.

“For myself, I would have liked to have had a chance to interview you and talk to you about what your goals and values are, but that is not something that has come about,” Sullivan said to Steele. “I’m sure you’ll also be able to put your name in there for the new county manager, but what I’m interested in is the process of doing that as we go forward.”

Commissioner Sarah Nebeker responded with support for Steele.

Steele started working in the budget and finance office in 2010 as the assistant director before being promoted to lead the department in 2014. The office has earned awards for its budget presentation each year since.

“I cannot imagine anyone would know this county, this board, staff, the operations any better,” Nebeker said.

Commissioners on Wednesday also appointed Paul Williams, chief deputy of the Clatsop County Sheriff’s Office, as interim manager pro tem, which will temporarily place him second in the line of succession.

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