

OPINION

editor@dailyastorian.com



THE DAILY ASTORIAN

Founded in 1873

KARI BORGEN
Publisher

JIM VAN NOSTRAND
Editor

JEREMY FELDMAN
Circulation Manager

DEBRA BLOOM
Business Manager

JOHN D. BRUIJN
Production Manager

CARL EARL
Systems Manager

OUR VIEW

Local bonds: Yes, yes, yes and no

Clatsop County taxpayers have a lot on their plate to consider in the Nov. 6 election.

Public officials are asking their constituents to make big investments in bond proposals for Astoria and Warrenton schools, a new county jail and expanded Sunset Empire recreation facilities.

We believe public safety and good schools are the most important services that local governments can deliver. They are crucial investments in our community's future. The recreation facilities are more optional.

School bonds: Yes

The bond measures for the Astoria and Warrenton school districts — \$70 million and \$38.5 million, respectively — are both worthy of your “yes” vote.

Both proposals address critical needs and have been carefully vetted, with considerable public involvement in their development.

In Warrenton, for example, instead of asking for a massive bond to move all of the district's schools to higher ground out of the tsunami inundation zone — as Seaside did — officials chose a phased approach. The \$38.5 million will purchase a master campus and build a new middle school to relieve chronic overcrowding at the grade school. It would raise property taxes by an estimated \$2.03 per \$1,000 of assessed value, or \$507 on a home valued at \$250,000.

Future bonds will move the rest of Warrenton's schools, as the city's fast-growing population and increasing home prices gradually lower the per capita tax burden on voters over time.

The decision to go after smaller bonds in a phased approach was based on public input from residents who said they support moving the schools but are on fixed incomes, said Debbie Morrow, the Warrenton-Hammond School Board chairwoman.

“We couldn't morally go out for a bond that our residents could not afford,” she said.



Architect Tom Bates queried students at Astoria Middle School about what they like and don't like about their learning spaces.

Astoria's bond would pay for \$45 million in modernization and security improvements at Astoria Middle School, \$20 million at Astoria High School and \$9 million at John Jacob Astor Elementary School. Lewis and Clark Elementary School and Capt. Robert Gray School would receive smaller improvements.

Astoria voters last approved \$21.4 million in bonds in 2000 to build Lewis and Clark and improve the high school. The bonds have decreased in cost through refinancing and increases in property values, and are now estimated to cost \$1.83 per \$1,000 of assessed value. The new bonds would begin after the older ones expire in 2020, raising taxes to \$2.83 per \$1,000 of assessed property value, or \$707 on a home worth \$250,000.

Consultants identified more than \$80 million in needs for Astoria schools, but a facilities committee — including 30 community and district staff members — prioritized projects and whittled the recommended ask down to \$70 million.

We have toured both the Warrenton and Astoria facilities. We believe the

requests are reasonable and sorely needed, particularly the safety modifications in light of recent mass school shootings around the country.

New county jail: Yes

The \$20 million bond for a new county jail, with an estimated tax rate of 21 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value — \$53 on a \$250,000 home — is a bargain compared to the school bonds.

While the timing is unfortunate, this shouldn't be a “schools versus jail” decision.

The real decision is public safety. Is it important to you? Inmates released early from our chronically overcrowded jail have killed people. That's not hyperbole. It's fact.

Our jail, with only 60 beds, is hardly a deterrent for criminals in our county, who know they won't have to serve time behind bars.

We believe the former Oregon Youth Authority facility in Warrenton presents an historic opportunity to expand to 148 beds at half the cost of building new. It would be shortsighted not to take advantage of that opportunity.

The project would utilize the existing youth facility for staff offices, intake space, food service and 20 inmate beds, while placing 128 beds in a new adjoining section with a more efficient, and safer, layout. Separate space would be available to hold inmates with behavioral issues and contagious illnesses.

Sunset Empire bond: No

It sounds like a great idea — to bring additional preschool and recreational facilities to members of the Sunset Empire Park and Recreation District.

The recreation district is presenting a 20-year, \$20 million bond plan to add a second-floor walking track, indoor racket courts and fitness areas, and reconfigure administrative areas, classrooms and storage space, among other upgrades.

The timing couldn't be worse.

Seaside taxpayers are still reeling from the big hit their property taxes took by the passage of the \$99.7 million school bond in 2016. With a county bond for a much-needed and long-overdue jail facility in Warrenton, residents are being asked to bear too much too soon.

In addition, there remain too many open-ended questions about the proposed facility to make this a good bet in any economic environment.

With the neighboring Broadway Middle School slated for sale by the Seaside School District, the recreation district may yet consider some sort of deal with the school district or potential buyers to redevelop part of the existing structure, classroom or recreation space.

Revenue projections for the proposed facility fail to show how the project could break even, much less show a profit, and ongoing expenses for a larger facility — both in personnel and operation costs — could deliver hidden costs to come.

We'd like to see upgrades at the facility honed and communication with patrons improved. That won't come by throwing money at a big new building without a much broader base of support.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Vote 'yes' for Astoria school bond

Since my first day of school, 13 years ago, I have looked up to my teachers. Admiring with eager eyes, and imagining myself one day being just like them. I still look at my teachers with awe, but now that I'm older, I realize that their life isn't as magical as my 5-year-old self would like to believe. They don't, in fact, live in their classrooms, and are actually facing an ever-increasing risk of being put in danger.

I never thought of school as being a dangerous place until recently, but I feel as though I'm constantly hearing about school shootings or threats that have been put against schools, including Astoria High School.

Now I go to school with a sense of fear that I will become part of one of the next tragic news stories. I fear that one of the lockdown drills will not be a drill, something I don't think children should ever experience in the place that they go to learn.

The Astoria School Bond is now addressing the fact that the schools are not as safe as they should be. I hope the community votes “yes” to Astoria kids, for the approximately 2,000 kids who don't have a voice in this election.

One day I hope that I can pursue my dream of teaching, and that it is in a safe environment that holds the same magic I saw 13 years ago.

NIKAYLA LIPPY
Astoria

Vote Barber for Seaside mayor

Although I don't live inside the city limits, I am proudly displaying a “Jay Barber for Mayor” lawn sign on my property. As difficult as it must have been to be dropped suddenly into the role of mayor mid-term, and expected to replace someone as wonderful as my good Swedish friend, Mayor Don Larson, Jay did it with class. He has earned the respect of the people of Seaside, and of his colleagues around the state. He is a good listener, the result of being a pastor for many years.

Jay has been an active mayor from his first day on the job. He leads in a way that he believes best for his constituents. He interacts regularly, and in person, with the state Legislature and the governor, as well as with our federal delegation. He is compassionate and kind, and he takes his many volunteer roles seriously.

In the emergency preparedness sector, Seaside leaders started a local program called “Map Your Neighborhood” before Jay became mayor. Jay worked with other coastal communities, and continued those activities, allowing Seaside to remain in the forefront as a model of proven practices. That small project was eventually included in the Oregon Resilience Plan, and has become a go-to action that any community can practice.

If I lived in Seaside, you can be assured that I would be voting for Jay Barber for mayor. Please vote by Nov. 6.

DEBORAH BOONE
Cannon Beach

Vote Mitchell for state representative

As our state representative, Tiffany Mitchell will work hard to keep the North Coast a great place to live and raise our children and grandchildren. Tiffany is committed to protect-

ing clean air and healthy drinking water.

Tiffany wants to end our dependence on dirty fossil fuels. This means investing in clean energy infrastructure locally, and also making sure our coast and river aren't used to export fossil fuels.

Tiffany wants to do more to encourage sustainability in forestry, especially when it comes to protecting watersheds. All North Coast Oregonians deserve pristine drinking water as a right — not as a luxury.

Lastly, Tiffany Mitchell is concerned about climate change. Our communities are especially vulnerable to erratic weather, flooding and rising sea levels. Tiffany will work to be part of the solution to better prepare us for the effects of climate change.

Please vote Tiffany Mitchell for House District 32.

CHERYL JOHNSON
Astoria

Hoof rot not a reason to cull elk

There has been conflicting information regarding hoof disease in elk stated in the newspaper, and on Facebook recently. Wanting to know the truth, I called the Tillamook office of the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Department. The gentleman I spoke with was patient and informative.

As I understand it, there is a potential precursor to hoof rot disease that is called slipper foot disease. This is apparently found in less than 1 percent of any herd, and has many possible causes. He stated that this is not worrisome, and is regarded as fairly normal, i.e. not something that requires intervention.

Hoof rot disease is a different entity. It is thought to be caused by a treponeme bacteria. To their knowledge, hoof rot disease is not found in the Clatsop County herds, obviously including the elk in Gearhart. Consequently, this would not constitute a reason to cull or destroy elk in Clatsop County.

SHARON KLOEPFER
Gearhart

Protect our most precious and vulnerable citizens

As a mother, I often say a little prayer each day as my children go off to school, that they will be safe. It is terrifying, hearing about the rampant school shootings in our country. There's an opportunity to protect our schools from this threat, and I'm all for it. Please, join me in voting yes for the Astoria school bond.

As a city councilor, I realize there's not much the city of Astoria can do to make schools more safe. The city has the best police force on the planet, and they are trained to respond to mass shootings, but how could we, as a community, ever let it come to this? We must do everything in our power to protect our most precious and vulnerable citizens, our children.

There is a lot the Astoria School District could do to make our schools secure by creating secure entrances. This will take a significant investment, and it can only be done with money from a voter-approved bond.

We don't have to sit back and be victims as the national debate continues over gun reform. We can take action right here, right now, in our town, to keep our kids safe by voting “yes” on the Astoria School District bond.

ZETTY NEMLOWILL
Astoria

LETTERS WELCOME

Letters should be exclusive to The Daily Astorian.

Letters should be fewer than 250 words and must include the writer's name, address and phone number. You will be contacted to confirm authorship.

All letters are subject to editing for space, grammar, and, on occasion, factual accuracy. Only two letters per writer are allowed each month.

Letters written in response to other letter writers should address the issue

at hand and, rather than mentioning the writer by name, should refer to the headline and date the letter was published. Discourse should be civil and people should be referred to in a respectful manner. Letters in poor taste will not be printed.

Send via email to editor@dailyastorian.com, online at dailyastorian.com/submit_letters, in person at 949 Exchange St. in Astoria or 1555 North Roosevelt in Seaside, or mail to Letters to the Editor, P.O. Box 210, Astoria, OR 97103.