



Photos by Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

New developments in the Mill Pond subdivision could be built over the water.

## City to regulate homestay lodging

### Leaders have struggled to address illegal short-term rentals

By KATIE FRANKOWICZ  
*The Daily Astorian*

The Astoria City Council is moving forward to develop a license to regulate Airbnb-type vacation rentals in the city.

City councilors held the first reading of two ordinances Monday night — one to develop a homestay lodging license and another to update the city's transient room tax ordinance.

For the last few years, city leaders have struggled to address illegal short-term rentals in Astoria. City rules allow a type of homestay lodging, where a bedroom or two can be rented out of someone's home to tourists, but the renting out of entire houses on a short-term basis is not allowed. Still, such rentals flourish on websites like Airbnb.

City staff say a license would help them better monitor these type of rentals, enforce city rules and give people who want to operate legally in the city a straightforward process. Currently, the city struggles to identify illegal rentals and collect the required transient lodging tax.

The City Council has gone back and forth about the merits and dangers of allowing homestay lodging rentals in the city at all. Councilor Cindy Price has advocated for a cap on the number allowed, while Councilor Zetty Nemlowill suggested an outright ban; they worry short-term rentals take away housing options from residents and change the character of neighborhoods.

Mayor Arline LaMear and Councilor Tom Brownson have been more open to homestay lodging, saying these types of rentals are attractive to travelers and provide Astorians with the extra money that allows them to stay in and maintain costly historic homes.

On Monday, Brownson warned against the possible unintended consequences of the license. Some people who attended the meeting echoed these concerns.

"There's some good people here tonight who I like and I respect and I don't want to create any hardships on short-term rental businesses, but we need to protect our neighborhoods," Nemlowill said. "We need to provide as much housing stock as we can for Astorians."

Price, despite her own misgivings, felt the process outlined by staff reflected what "smart cities everywhere are doing to keep a lid on short term rentals."

LaMear noted that the license is "very definitely a compromise."

A second reading of the ordinance will occur in December and the city will be able to start issuing licenses once the ordinance is finalized. The proposal will require amendments to the development code, however, a process that can take around six months.

Under the proposal, a basic license will cost \$500 with a renewal cost of \$150. A fire, life and safety inspection, required with any initial license application and renewal, will cost \$300 — if the property owner decides to get the inspection through the city rather than hire an independent inspector.

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## Lots donated to the city in 2012

By KATIE FRANKOWICZ  
*The Daily Astorian*

Astoria leaders are working with a real estate agent to sell overwater property the city cannot afford to develop and which it has struggled to sell in the past.

The City Council approved a sales contract Monday night with Area Properties.

In recent years, discussions about selling city property have sparked community outcry. Last year, when the City Council discussed the possibility of selling underused parkland, groups and individuals sprang into action, organizing to adopt the parks and take over their care and maintenance rather than see them sold.

The possible sale of 12 overwater sites in Mill Pond Village has not been controversial at all.

Even Mill Pond homeowners who attended a meeting in August when the City Council last discussed the possibility of a sale said they were just as perplexed about how to "get rid of this issue."

The city has paid more than \$50,000 in homeowner association fees and other expenses since the lots were donated to the city in 2012. The last time city leaders tried to sell the properties was in 2013. They did not receive any offers.

On the City Council, opinion was divided about how to go about trying to sell the properties. Mayor Arline LaMear and City Councilor Cindy Price voted against the initial proposal in August, preferring to talk first with adjacent property owners in Mill Pond to gauge any interest in purchasing the lots.

On Monday, LaMear stuck to this approach.

Putting the lots up for sale to the general public does not make any sense to



Structural elements support a home built over the water in Mill Pond Village.

her, she said.

"I can't see why anyone would want to buy them except maybe the people in Mill Pond, to protect their view," she said.

Hers was the only dissenting view Monday, and she cast the only "nay" vote. City Councilor Tom Brownson summed up the majority view when, after listening to City Manager Brett Estes' briefing on the topic, he simply said, "It's OK with me."

One of the first conversations the realtor will have will be with the Mill Pond homeowners association, Estes said afterwards.

The city's Mill Pond property is based on two pier lots that stretch over Mill Pond. On each pier lot there are six lots or building sites. The City Council opted

for an agreement with Area Properties to try to sell each pier lot for \$45,000. It is less money than what the city could make if it tried to sell the building sites individually, but more realistic.

The pier lots are platted but not developed. Anyone looking to build on the sites would first have to build out an entire pier — a potential cost of more than \$3 million per pier, according to some estimates.

The property came to the city in 2012, when Portland developer Art DeMuro died of cancer. DeMuro was president of Venerable Group Inc. and his accomplishments included major renovation work in Portland as well as the creation of Mill Pond Village in Astoria.

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**'I CAN'T SEE WHY ANYONE WOULD WANT TO BUY THEM EXCEPT MAYBE THE PEOPLE IN MILL POND, TO PROTECT THEIR VIEW.'**

Arline LaMear | Astoria mayor

## Plan floated to return sea otters to the Oregon Coast

### Some fishermen are concerned

By TOM BANSE  
*Northwest News Network*

It's been more than a century since sea otters were hunted to near extinction along the West Coast. The cute animals were successfully reintroduced along the Washington state, British Columbia and California coasts, but an attempt to bring them back to Oregon in the early 1970s failed.

Now a new nonprofit has formed to try again.

"For about 110 years now,

there's been a big hole in our environment," said Peter Hatch, a Siletz tribal member living in Corvallis. "The sea otter has been missing from the Oregon Coast."

Hatch recently joined the board of a new nonprofit dedicated to bringing the sea otter back to Oregon waters. The group is named the Elakha Alliance — "elakha" is the Clatsop-Chinookan word for sea otter.

"We are very heartened by the idea that sea otters could be brought back to this part of the coast, brought back to make their range whole again and to make this place whole again," Hatch said in an interview at a

bluff overlooking the ocean in Newport.

He pointed out to sea toward Otter Rock, where a hunter killed one of the last wild Oregon sea otters for its fur more than a century ago, Hatch said. At one time, a soft, luxurious sea otter robe would have been among the most valuable possessions a Siletz person could own, he mused.

Hatch said other people are excited by the prospect of reintroducing the otters. Sea otters contribute to healthy kelp forests by eating sea urchins, and bring balance to the nearshore ecosystem. Hatch believes



Tom Banse/Northwest News Network

The only places to see sea otters in Oregon are at the Oregon Zoo and the Oregon Coast Aquarium, where this otter lives.

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