

Astoria seeks applicants for east side council seat

Jones will become mayor

By KATIE FRANKOWICZ
The Daily Astorian

Astoria City Councilor Bruce Jones won't be going far when he becomes mayor in January — he'll just move over a couple of seats behind the council table.

But his election to the post means his Ward 4 seat, representing the city's eastern edge, will be empty.

It is a vacancy Jones, City Councilor Tom Brownson and incoming councilors Joan Herman and Roger Rocka plan to fill as soon as possible by asking people to apply for the position. They hope to be able to appoint a replacement in January to carry out the rest of Jones' term, which expires after 2020.

Under the city charter, city councilors could have opted to hold a special election, but Jones said they worried about leaving the seat empty for months.

"The four of us all felt that calling for a special election would be very time-consuming," Jones said.

Also, if the person who was elected was interested in running for council after the par-

tial term ends, she or he would have to be willing to tackle two election campaigns in a relatively short period of time — something Jones and the others did not think many people would be interested in doing.

The city will solicit applications from interested residents in Ward 4 over the next few weeks. City councilors will consider the applicants in January and vote on who they think should take Jones' council seat.

Anyone who is a registered voter in Ward 4 can apply. Forms will be available online at the city's website and at the city manager's office on the third floor of City Hall.

Nobody has approached Jones with an interest in the empty council seat yet, he said.

"I think we want someone who is analytical, who is able to look at all sides of an issue and debate in a collegial manner," he said.

Jones particularly appreciates how no one on the current City Council seems to take other councilors' opinions personally or hold their viewpoints against them, he said. It is an approach he hopes will continue with whoever takes over Ward 4.

"Even though we've had many 3-2 votes, after the meeting's over, the meeting's over," he said.



Bruce Jones, right, reacts as election results are announced in November.

Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

License: Fire, life and safety inspections required with applications, renewals

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will cost \$500. Licenses will be good for two years and renewals will cost \$150. The city will also require a fire, life and safety inspection with any initial license application and renewal. The inspection will cost \$300 if the property owner decides to get the inspection through the city rather than hire an independent inspector.

After hearing from concerned hosts who say they have been following all the city's homestay lodging rules, the City Council agreed to a suggestion by Councilor Tom Brownson to grandfather in existing, compliant homestay lodging businesses and only charge them the renewal fee instead of the full license fee.

"I'm a single person living in a house," said Richard Bracke, who, like several other homestay lodging hosts who spoke Monday, brought a guest book filled with testimonials praising the room he offers. "If I have to continue to pay more and more taxes, more and more inspection fees, I am barely making it as it is."

Outside the meeting, Bracke said he is not making a huge profit off of his Airbnb. Changes to his living situation mean he now has to shoulder costs he had not antici-



Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

Astoria will require a new license for homestay lodging.

pated. He increasingly relies on the money he earns from his rental.

"It all goes to my mortgage," he said.

Money also must go to extra gas for heating the room where guests stay, as well as coffee and some food for guests.

Bracke says he often lives month to month. Other hosts estimated that their profits are small, but they offer rooms because the money helps and they simply enjoy the experience of hosting. They are not interested in offering a room or sharing their home with

long-term renters — a point LaMear has made multiple times.

"I don't think we should pursue this with the purpose of increasing permanent housing," agreed City Councilor Bruce Jones, who will take over as mayor in January. "I

think it has very little, or marginal at best, effect on this."

Dwight Caswell, another homestay lodging host, argued that the city has not been able to enforce the existing ordinance.

"You have actually so noted that it's impossible,

financially, for you to do it," he said. "So all you're doing with these regulations is penalizing the people who are abiding by your law right now. The people who are going under the radar are going to stay that way if you don't enforce it."

At a presentation in May, City Planner Nancy Ferber noted that, like much in the city code, issues with legal and illegal homestay lodgings are complaint-driven.

While the Community Development Department is doing more enforcement now than it did a decade ago, there is no capacity to take on more of that work, City Manager Brett Estes added.

Ferber dealt with an illegal rental last month.

However, city staff say the new license provides a straightforward process for people who want to operate a legal homestay and the license will help the city better monitor for illegal operations.

Under the new rules, homestay lodging hosts will be required to post their city license number on advertising platforms like Airbnb or VRBO where they market their rooms. Hosts will also be required to give the city their advertising platform number. Hosts advertising without a valid license could face city enforcement.

Garbage: Next rate review set for 2020

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"We didn't really know enough to forecast impacts of recycling," Peters said Monday. "We didn't want to do what everybody else did, which was jump out and panic right off the bat. We wanted to wait until we kind of understood how things were going to be and figured that out."

The increase in garbage collection rates, he emphasized, is still a fraction of what some communities are now charging.

Astorians have had to deal with a number of fee increases over the last year, said City Councilor Tom Brownson, but he understood the need to keep up with costs and he believed

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Tom Brownson | city councilor

the increase was necessary.

"I for one at least try to look at it as an incentive to create less garbage," he said, adding, "It is the tax we pay for the packaging that we, in this country, use."

The next rate review

between Recology and the city will occur in 2020. In the meantime, Recology plans to renew education and outreach efforts to make sure people understand what they are able to recycle or compost.

Knappa: 'We thought it was a good investment'

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and gas stations in Astoria, Seaside and Vernonia, along with Washington state locations in Chinook and Long Beach.

"We thought it was a good investment, and that we could do something good for the community," Sundee Sandhu

said of the new property.

Along with a possible RV park or laundromat, the family is looking into whether the Knappa School District could have use for the property, or whether it could be something else the community doesn't already offer, he said.

The county has received no

new applications for the property. Almost any use in the rural commercial and industrial zone is conditional on county approval, said Julie Decker, the county planning manager. A laundromat would require a public notice, while an RV park would require a public hearing.

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