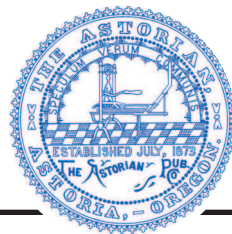


OPINION



THE DAILY ASTORIAN

editor@dailyastorian.com

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KARI BORGEN
Publisher

JIM VAN NOSTRAND
Editor

JEREMY FELDMAN
Circulation Manager

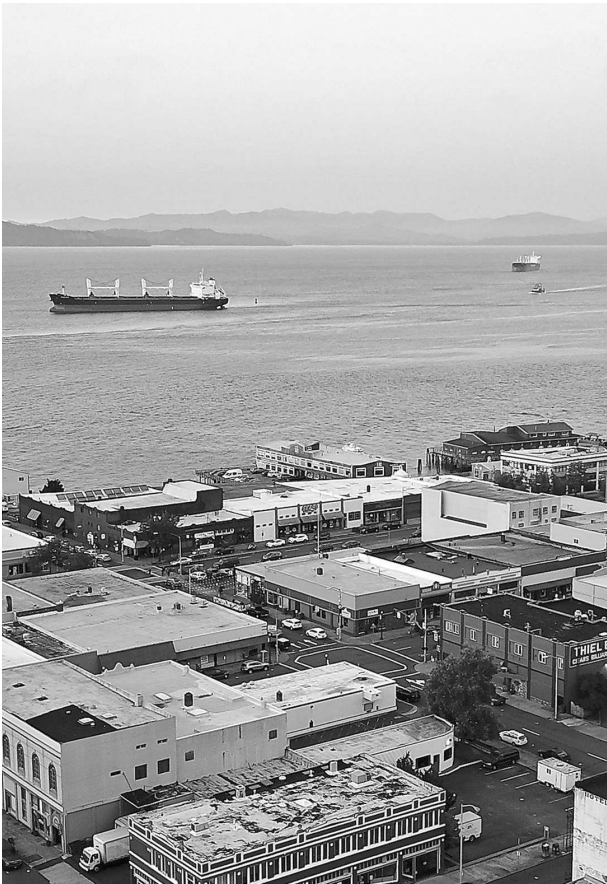
JOHN D. BRUIJN
Production Manager

CARL EARL
Systems Manager

OUR VIEW

Happy New Year: Let's work together to make it happen

Homes, jobs, preservation and community well-being are top priorities



Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

We need intense scrutiny of the building and zoning rules in Astoria's riverfront area.



Patrick Webb/For The Daily Astorian

Cooperation between housing advocates in Pacific County, the city of Long Beach and others helped move an affordable housing project forward.



Sheila Roley

Construction is underway at the new Seaside school campus.

We wish our readers a Happy New Year and welcome 2019 as an opportunity for a fresh start.

As this year wraps up, we believe the North Coast has some significant unfinished business that must be a priority for action.

Schools and housing

One unchanged goal is to attract quality, higher-wage, non-service sector, nonseasonal jobs. We believe that becomes a greater possibility when we are a more attractive prospect for potential employers.

The first things potential investors check as they view a community is schools and housing.

The prevalence of homelessness in America is a national disgrace. How can we as a society accept that for such a large proportion of the population the American dream is a nightmare? A disproportional number are veterans — the same citizens we almost deify on holidays two or three times a year, but cross the street to avoid the rest of the time.

We are still reporting high numbers of homeless students in Clatsop County. Those are two words that shouldn't even be contemplated in the same sentence.

Every child deserves the best education they can achieve in our public schools. Part of that is a secure living environment and food in their stomachs as they embrace science, math and history.

Seaside, Warrenton and Astoria schools are embarking on ambitious plans to enhance facilities, thanks to their communities' terrific support of recent bonds. Parallel to this effort must be a concerted outreach to ensure that all kids have a safe, stable home base.

Affordable options needed

Affordable housing is such a huge key to enhancing our community. We won't solve our shortage overnight, but government leaders need to create a climate in which private-sector developers can

invest with confidence.

A recent study commissioned by leaders from Clatsop County, Astoria, Warrenton, Seaside, Cannon Beach and Gearhart points the way.

Of course the beach and river are attractive places to live. But if every new house built carries a price tag of \$300,000 or higher, that's unlikely to help low- or even middle-income workers seeking accommodation.

Kevin Leahy, executive director of Clatsop Economic Development Resources, and Henry Balensifer, the perceptive mayor of Warrenton, are among those shaping a strategy.

The study's recommendations may cover potential regulatory, zoning and code changes for the county and our cities to consider; these likely will be shaped to serve as an incentive to developers. Planners say there are 11,800 acres of potentially buildable land in the county, although wetlands issues must be properly addressed. That signals considerable potential.

Across the river in Washington state there are a couple of excellent examples where government has helped housing options expand on the Long Beach Peninsula.

The city of Long Beach's support spurred housing advocates to move forward on a 28-unit complex of low-income apartments being built just north of downtown. And the city of Ilwaco looked favorably on an ambitious renovation of the long-empty Doupe Building at the heart of downtown, by permitting the new buyer to include more apartments than commercial zoning usually allows.

Rules overdue for scrutiny

Astoria faced a challenge 25 years ago when it started to reshape its appearance and community assets. Gains have been spectacular. Getting rid of those disgusting downtown bars in the mid-1990s was a remarkable achievement. The restoration of the Liberty Theatre and Hotel Elliott that followed was a superb catalyst and signaled the proper way to

preserve our historic character. The more recent freeing up of the Flavel buildings is something to celebrate, too.

But our waterfront remains a puzzle. Must it be developed? Who is it developed for? Of course, we want to encourage our tourism industry and provide rooms for visitors, especially during our sparkling summer festivals. But that must be balanced by making decisions that favor year-round residents. After all, hillside residents pay for lovely homes with spectacular views. The 3-2 vote by the Astoria City Council on the Marriott hotel reflects this divided thinking. We are long overdue for intense scrutiny on building and zoning rules to avoid a repetition of this controversy.

Economic balance

A three-way balance between fishing, timber and tourism fuels the economy of the North Coast, along with the stability of the Wauna Mill and expanding health services provided by our hospitals and clinics. Efforts to diversify our economy prove valuable, especially when one sector experiences a downturn.

The giant stores in Warrenton and Seaside provide employment for many plus attractive pricing for shoppers. But small, locally owned shops compete, offering personalized customer service and hard-to-find items while their owners invest in preserving our region's historic buildings and generously support youth activities and area nonprofits year-round. Let's express our gratitude through our patronage.

The Northwest's reliance on a natural resource economy has been balanced by enhanced awareness of the necessity to properly protect our environment. That must never change.

Declining fish stocks and changing regulations have driven many out of commercial fishing. The hardy folks who survived that roller coaster deserve considerable applause. It should always be

a significant part of the lifeblood of our community. Groundfishing quotas are improving, but efforts must continue to lessen restrictions on gillnetting on parts of the Columbia.

Caring for the vulnerable

Along with homelessness, our community must continue to find ways to properly care for the needs of those with substance abuse and mental health issues. Often these go hand in hand. The mark of a truly caring community is how it assists those who are most vulnerable. The recent closures of drug and alcohol treatment facilities puts pressure on those who remain.

The controversy over the Astoria Warming Center encapsulates this. It has struggled to recruit volunteers and raise money, and its location has drawn criticism. With no offense intended to those who work tirelessly on behalf of people who use the center, wouldn't we have a better society if there was no need for it? How do we get to that point?

Join the conversation

Looking into a crystal ball is rarely surprising. A TV weather forecaster can be correct 50 percent of the time by saying, "more of the same." So can prognosticators.

But we don't want just more of the same. The North Coast is the best place in the Northwest to live, with its spectacular waterfront attractions, its rich historical traditions, and residents who care about the quality of their Clatsop hometowns. But it needs some fine tuning.

A good newspaper has been described as a "community having a conversation with itself." We believe our community is long overdue for a wide-ranging conversation about our needs and priorities. And how, together, we can address them.

In the months ahead, we plan to lead that conversation on the topics mentioned here.

Join us.