

Apartments: Several large development applications in Warrenton have languished

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“The biggest challenge in general right now in the industry ... is getting help,” Barnes said.

Barnes finished an almost identical project to the 5th Street Flats in Lincoln City in 2016. The costs for the Astoria project have gone up 34 percent by comparison, he said, in part because of a shortage of workers and more expensive materials. He also pointed to the Federal Reserve’s recent decision to increase interest rates for borrowers as a damper on investment in new housing.

Kevin Cronin, the community development director in Warrenton, said the slow progress on large multifamily projects is partially because of the lack of local contractors big enough to move such developments forward.

“It’s labor shortage and the bandwidth of the local contracting community,” Cronin said. “That’s the biggest stumbling block to our housing crisis.”

Jared Rickenbach, a local contractor and board member with the North Coast Building Industry Association, said that of the approximately 500 general contractors on the North Coast, maybe one or two are big enough to take on large apartment complexes.

“There is a significant shortage of construction laborers, carpenters and foremen in the local labor pool,” he said. “It would be challenging if not impossible to hire locally enough labor to perform those larger multifamily projects.”



Edward Stratton/The Daily Astorian

Residents recently started moving into the first 34 units of the Pacific Rim Apartments in Warrenton.

Cronin’s office has several applications for large developments around Warrenton that have so far languished.

Growth in Warrenton

Local contractor Jason Palmberg received conditional use approval in March for a 66-unit complex across U.S. Highway 101 from Ocean Crest Chevrolet, but has yet to begin groundwork. The delay is largely because he’s already been busy helping to build Barnes’ apartments, Palmberg said.

He hopes to begin construction on his complex in the spring, with plans to bring the apartments online in 2020, hopefully as other complexes fill up and demand stays high.

“You don’t want to have all that stuff come online at the same,” he said.

Fort Pointe, the largest potential multifamily project in Clatsop County, has been been trudging along in starts and stops since Texas-based builder 210 Development

Group purchased the property in 2006. The project promises about 300 housing units, including 130 apartments, 50 single-family homes and more than 100 smaller-lot homes in a higher-density new urbanist model similar to the Mill Pond neighborhood in Astoria.

“We try to sensitively design a project and set aside a tremendous amount of open space,” said Mark Tolley, a principal in 210 Development Group. “That type of master planning takes time.”

Labor and materials have gone up because of shortages, he said, but the demand for multifamily housing on the North Coast remains strong, and people should expect some fairly substantial announcements regarding Fort Pointe in the near future, Tolley said.

Strong demand

Local hotelier and developer Antoine Simmons scrapped his plans for the

37-unit Skipanon River Apartments near downtown Warrenton more than a year ago, citing construction costs. But the property recently changed hands, and local developer Randy Stemper said he is pursuing the same project, meeting with the new owners in the coming weeks on how to proceed.

Builders Cary and Stan Johnson were recently approved for a 120-unit multifamily complex on 22 lots near Tongue Point Job Corps Center. The project is expected to be built out in 2020.

Developers said they see plenty of opportunity for more multifamily housing in the region, albeit with the usual challenges of working through permitting and finding workers.

After hiring consultants for a housing needs analysis, Krueger said, there are at least two more possibilities for multifamily projects. “There’s definitely more opportunities for growth in Warrenton,” he said.

Myers: Known for his ‘Blueprint for Success’ plan in Portland

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“Those were some of the best times of my career. I like working with community members ... writing consequence plans,” he said in an interview. “I think I can really help the community of Cannon Beach.”

While Myers saw the job in Cannon Beach when it was first posted six months ago, it “didn’t feel like the right time” to apply, he said. After being enamored with the beauty of the Oregon Coast, he and his wife decided a couple of months ago to buy a home in Gearhart. A few weeks later, he checked to see if the position was still open, found that it was, and submitted an application.

He was offered the job earlier this week.

Myers said Cannon Beach, like many coastal towns, faces “sizable challenges related to potential natural disasters. I’m looking forward to helping the community build resilient and sustainable plans to protect residents and visitors alike.”

The timing, however, raised some eyebrows in Portland. Myers announced his resignation the day after his new boss, Commissioner Jo Ann Hardesty, was sworn into office.

Myers said the move has nothing to do with Hardesty, and the timing was a coincidence.

“It has nothing to do with her. She’s going to be awesome for the bureau,” he said. “It’s all about life-

style change. It’s such a unique opportunity. There are not a lot of emergency management opportunities on the coast.”

Myers was known for his “Blueprint for Success” plan in Portland, which aimed to equip the city’s firefighters with more skills to respond effectively to health emergencies like overdoses and mental health crises — calls that have become increasingly more common.

He was also recognized for hiring the department’s first equity manager and for doing a complete revision to the employee discipline process.

Cannon Beach created the full-time emergency manager position to restructure the way the city approaches emergency planning. The city had previously contracted with consultant Stacy Burr for emergency planning.

“He’s extremely qualified and he’s excited about what we’re trying to do, and that’s to develop an emergency management program that involves everyone in the city,” City Manager Bruce St. Denis said.

His first day will be Feb. 1.

“I think Cannon Beach needs a comprehensive plan, and that starts with me meeting with the community and seeing what the needs are,” Myers said. “My ultimate goal is for Cannon Beach to be the gold standard for coastal community resiliency. I think we can do that.”

Capitol: Report said leaders should have seen how women were vulnerable

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law when it came to harassment of those working in the Capitol for legislators and their committees.

The detailed allegations will cast a political pall as the 2019 Legislature convenes in less than two weeks, with leaders still in place who Avakian’s office said were responsible for the culture investigators found.

“Our hope is that the report would be the genesis for the development of a harassment-free workplace and that meaningful sanctions for future harassment cases can be put into place,” House Republicans said Thursday night in a statement.

During the interim, the Legislature employs about 350. That doubles during the session, and nearly every class of employee had victims of what the report described as a hostile workplace.

Avakian’s staff had to fight its way through the investigation as legislative leaders tried to erect legal roadblocks to information. They relented and produced internal records when ordered to do so by a state court.

Investigators encountered a history of silence by victims.

One legislative employee signed a declaration in November that other workers “have disclosed to me that they have been subjected to sexually harassing conduct at the state Capitol,” the report said. The employee said the others didn’t want to speak out “due to fear that doing so will result in harm to their career opportunities.”

The report said the evidence “reflects that people reporting issues were told to not speak about their complaints and some were warned about the possibility of defamation or retaliation claims for doing so.”

In his statement accompanying the report, Avakian said that “nobody should have to endure harassment at work or in a public place, and if there were ever a place a person should be guaranteed fairness and justice, it is in the Oregon State Capitol.”

Avakian turns over his office Monday to Val Hoyle.

Hoyle said Thursday afternoon she hadn’t read the report and wouldn’t comment on how she intended to proceed after taking over the office.

“I feel very strongly there is only one commissioner at a time,

and I’m not commissioner until Monday,” Hoyle said.

Details about Kruse

The report recounts in detail the reported sexual harassment by former state Sen. Jeff Kruse chronicled in earlier investigations. The latest report found Kruse, a Republican from Roseburg, was inappropriate toward several women — Sen. Sara Gelsler and Sen. Elizabeth Steiner Hayward, a lobbyist and two law students working in the Capitol.

Kruse, who resigned last year, could not immediately be reached for comment Thursday.

State investigators said they found evidence that Democrats ignored Kruse’s behavior because he was a powerful Republican ally.

Steiner Hayward said Thursday that she disagreed with investigators’ conclusion that Courtney and Kotek allowed a hostile work environment and should have known about the issues after the complaints in 2016.

“It’s not the presiding officers’ fault that Kruse couldn’t comply and I didn’t choose to complain again until November 2017,” she said. “I believe they took the situation very seriously.”

Courtney said in a statement Thursday that he never knowingly let harassment take place.

“I have taken severe actions beyond my authority to stop it. I will continue to work as hard as I can to create a workplace free of harassment,” he said.

Courtney did pull Kruse off legislative committees in October 2017, days after allegations against Kruse became public.

The scandal unfolded in the Capitol as the #MeToo movement took hold across the nation. At the center was Gelsler, who finally went public with her complaints against Kruse and touched off a maelstrom at the Capitol. She proved a key witness for state investigators, sharing details about her own harassment and what she had heard about other such conduct.

Thursday, Gelsler declined to comment, writing in a text message that she was out of the country and couldn’t study the report.

The report found that the Legislature’s chief attorney, Dexter Johnson, and Lore Christopher, its human resources director, advised at least one lawmaker not to go public with a complaint against Kruse.

Gelsler asked Steiner Hayward in a November 2017 text message

why she was keeping secret her complaint against Kruse, according to the report.

“Not my choice,” Steiner Hayward replied. “Dexter and Lore’s based on official process.”

Christopher didn’t return email and voicemail messages seeking comment.

In a message to the Oregon Capital Bureau Thursday, Steiner Hayward said investigators took the text message out of context.

“Johnson and Christopher merely asked me not to release my statement until the investigation was formally started,” Steiner Hayward wrote.

Steiner Hayward said she was not questioned as part of the labor bureau’s investigation.

“All he has is his and others’ interpretations of my situation,” she said.

Avakian is a Democrat, and it’s rare for a leader to go after others in the same party as aggressively as he has. Avakian has often declined to be interviewed about the complaint. He has been characterized as a lone wolf within the Democratic Party. He ran for secretary of state in 2016, but lost to Dennis Richardson. In 2017, he said he would not seek another term as labor commissioner.

The report found Kruse’s conduct was so well-known through the Capitol that there was a running joke that he was out smoking a cigarette during sexual harassment training. Ironically, Kruse was known to smoke inside the building despite prohibitions against doing so.

“The record suggests that respondents, at least initially, took more serious steps to curb former Senator Kruse’s smoking than they did to curb his sexual harassment,” the report concluded.

The report found that when legislative leaders did act, they often did so in private, treating complaints informally rather than documenting them. A lawyer hired by the Legislature to investigate allegations against Kruse left two student interns believing they weren’t entitled to sue the Legislature because they weren’t paid employees. While the report found there was no intent to mislead them, it did note that such a response would discourage people from complaining.

The report said leaders should have seen how women like the interns were vulnerable to Kruse’s advances but failed to act “due to an acceptance of unwelcome conduct that is erroneously thought

to not rise to the level of sexual harassment.”

The report referenced inappropriate hugs by Kruse, and quoted Courtney’s chief of staff, Betsy Imholt, saying she wouldn’t have complained about such behavior.

Others named

The misconduct also extended beyond Kruse, the report said. In 2017, a report surfaced that Rep. Diego Hernandez, D-Portland, had a list ranking lobbyists on attractiveness. Gelsler told investigators that after she heard a complaint had been made about that, Christopher told lobbyists it would go nowhere because Hernandez was an up-and-comer who would have a lot of power.

A legislative investigation into the matter in 2017 ended with no one acknowledging such a list existed, the report said.

The more recent investigation uncovered handwritten notes taken by a human resources employee at the Legislature relating to an incident observed by a person whose name was redacted. That source reportedly witnessed state Rep. Bill Post, R-Keizer, holding a female staff member’s chin while out having drinks at a bar and “saying something about her being cute,” the report said.

The report said the notes indicated the female staffer shared with a witness text messages from Post while they were at the bar.

“Post mentioned at least 5 times that his wife was out of town,” according to the notes quoted in the report.

Post said an investigation in 2017 “found nothing happened.” He said he didn’t learn who complained and was told by legislative administrators not to discuss the matter.

Included in the 100,000 pages of materials the Legislature turned over to investigators were handwritten notes from Kotek discussing informal complaints about Rep. David Gomberg, D-Otis, alleging inappropriate touching, telling a young woman to get ready for “birthday spankings” and saying an intern was a stripper.

The report said the notes appear to be from 2013, and indicate Gomberg was told to stop his behavior.

The note went on: “Not helpful for you if you discuss this conversation w/people in this building.”

“At that time I had a very serious conversation with the speaker, and she informed me that I had done some things that made people uncomfortable,” Gomberg said in an interview Thursday.

Gomberg said he was horrified

his actions caused someone pain, and started seeing a counselor. He apologized to the public and his colleagues in 2017.

When asked what his experience taught him about the culture in the Capitol, Gomberg said “that (the report of his conduct) was treated very seriously and I responded to it with equal seriousness.”

The report also recounts how a woman employed in the Capitol in 2015 complained to Imholt about Robin Maxey, Courtney’s spokesman. The worker said Maxey stood inappropriately close to her at an event and offered to buy her a beer. The next day, the employee said, Maxey sent her sexually explicit lyrics to a popular song.

According to the report, Johnson, the legislative counsel, told the employee that he was brokering an informal settlement and she wasn’t to have contact with Maxey. Legislative leaders later denied a settlement was in the works, according to the report.

Gelsler told investigators that she was surprised by the allegations, but heard from younger people in the building that Maxey had that reputation.

Maxey didn’t respond to requests for comment.

Courtney disagrees with many of the report’s findings.

Kotek was equally firm in her rebuttal.

“While I am still carefully reviewing the commissioner’s determination, my initial reaction is disappointment and frustration,” she said in a statement. “It’s just not OK that anyone who has worked in the Capitol has experienced harassment or inappropriate behavior. But it is utterly false to conclude that I have knowingly allowed people to be harassed in the Capitol.”

Avakian suggested in a memo that working conditions for women at the Capitol could be improved with training in harassment law and handling sexual harassment complaints, using an outside organization to process complaints and a fund to compensate victims.

In the wake of Kruse’s resignation, Kotek and Courtney asked the Oregon Law Commission to recommend improvements to legislature’s harassment policies and laws.

A work group concluded that in order to prevent sexual harassment, the Capitol needed to undergo a profound culture change. The group also recommended that the Legislature create a new Equity Office to investigate harassment complaints and lead training aimed at preventing harassment.