

Dispute: The two ports are on amicable terms

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“Fortunately, from the Port of Astoria’s perspective, we only agreed to pay for what was actually dredged,” Knight said.

The two sides, differing in their opinions over who was at fault, brought in a mediator to negotiate a settlement. Port commissioners from both sides also reached out to each other.

The Port had prepaid Ilwaco around \$130,000 to help cover the dredging costs, according to Knight,

and Ilwaco eventually reimbursed more than \$50,000. The two port commissions finalized a settlement late last year.

“It just didn’t quite get to the expectations,” said Port of Ilwaco Commissioner Butch Smith, who spoke with Port of Astoria Commission President Frank Spence and Commissioner Dirk Rohne seeking a solution. “Both ports left satisfied and in a good working relationship.”

Despite the failure of the partnership, Knight and Glenn both said the two

ports are on amicable terms. Astoria’s dredge, the Felkins, is often beset by its own mechanical issues, while dredging in-house leaves the agency’s limited maintenance staff stretched thin each winter and less able to work on land.

The Port is going out within the next two months for bids on dredging its central waterfront and the West Mooring Basin. “When that pricing comes back, that will give us some clarity on whether to do it in-house or use third-party contractors,” Knight said.



Edward Stratton/The Daily Astorian

More than a decade of no dredging has left many slips unusable at the Port of Astoria’s West Mooring Basin.

Chairwoman: Morrow was aware of the criticism

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The resignations capped two weeks of public scrutiny and internal unrest after the board placed Amy Baker, the executive director, on administrative leave in late December. Several managers and directors on the mental health agency’s leadership team were startled by how the board handled the situation, and county leaders complained about a lack of transparency.

Morrow was aware of the criticism, which was mostly directed at her role, but she said it did not influence her decision to resign.

“It is never easy as a board member to make decisions like this, especially when we believe so much in the mission of this agency, and we believe in the work, and we believe in the staff,” she said. “And, most importantly, it is such a needed service for our community. Both Greg and I remain hugely committed to the agency.”

But, she added, when “how an agency is performing, how a board is performing, doesn’t align with your core principles, your core values, your morals, your ethics, your integrity. That is when, as a board member, you have to make that difficult decision.”

Morrow is the executive officer of the Clatsop Association of Realtors and the chairwoman of the Warrenton-Hammond School Board. She has been active in a range of education and social service issues on the North Coast.

Monica Steele, the interim county manager, said the board resigna-

tions were concerning. The county has long contracted with Clatsop Behavioral Healthcare for mental health treatment, a critical responsibility, but county leaders have often been exasperated by the agency’s management difficulties.

“To me, it’s just more concerning in the sense that we just want to make sure that continuity of services are being provided,” Steele said.

With the board chairwoman resigning, there is a question about leadership stability. Lt. Kristen Hanthorn, who leads the Clatsop County Sheriff’s Office Parole and Probation Division, is the acting board chairwoman.

“I just want to make sure that everybody is able to do their work and that we can see things kind of resolve themselves in a positive manner,” Steele said.

Investigation complete
The reason behind Baker’s leave has not been publicly disclosed, but the board did order an investigation.

Steele also asked the Oregon Health Authority to look into an incident that happened at the crisis respite center in Warrenton in December after the mental health agency’s board declined to provide the county with information. The agency operates the respite center.

Hanthorn and the board told agency staff in a message Friday night that the board had concluded its investigation. Baker returned as executive director today.

“The current board is actively committed and engaged in extensive dis-

ussion about next steps for moving forward in an inclusive and positive manner,” the message said. “We value and appreciate your commitment to the agency and the clients you serve.”

Several of the agency’s top managers and directors had sent a letter to the board expressing their strong concern with how Baker’s leave was handled, along with a follow-up letter that raised questions about the process and the potential impact on the agency’s standing.

Clatsop Behavioral Healthcare, a private non-profit, has made strides toward improving its reputation after three top administrators resigned in 2016 amid management turmoil and legal problems.

A statement circulated among key staff, forwarded to The Daily Astorian, said Morrow’s actions were the reason for the agency’s instability.

“The staff at CBH have spent the last three years working to repair community relationships and reinstall faith in our ability to provide quality, organized and responsible care to our consumers,” the staff letter to the board said. “This disregard for the organizational structure and the lack of clear communication has resulted in fear within our staff, reignited community skepticism and created overall instability within the agency.”

Contracts expire
The timing of the board shake-up and management uncertainty is potentially damaging to Clatsop Behavioral Healthcare’s long-term future. The agency’s con-

tracts with the county expire in June.

The county has announced that it will seek bids for mental health and addiction treatment and for developmental disabilities. The partnership behind the crisis respite center may also put the contract to operate the facility up for bid.

Ben Paz, the agency’s crisis services manager, who was interim executive director in Baker’s absence, tried to reassure agency staff about the county’s decision to hear proposals from other providers.

“We’ve been doing the work. We know our strengths and the areas in which we have found great success,” he said in an email to staff last week. “Additionally, we are aware of the challenges faced by our organization and can address them with firsthand knowledge and boots-on-the-ground experience in our community.”

“We can address strategies that have worked as well as those that have not found success. Our experiences can give an honest assessment of what needs to happen in our RFP submission, which is an approach that I have found to be successful.”

Baker: ‘We are capable of doing great things’

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any details.

The episode caused unrest among management and staff at the agency and prompted the board chairwoman and another board member to resign.

“My board of directors has asked me to return to work,” Baker said in a statement. “I love this community, I love this organization, I love the privilege of watching our clients succeed. I am grateful for the outpouring of support. I look forward to continuing to build partnerships, developing programs and improving this organization. We are not perfect, nor are we likely to ever be.”

“As long as I am the executive director, we will strive to meet the needs of the community. For now, I want to publicly acknowledge my staff, who have worked under enormous pressure and uncertainty during the last two weeks. I am confident that with this staff and this community, we are capable of doing great things.”

The disruption has revived doubts in Clatsop County about Clatsop Behavioral Healthcare’s management capability and board oversight. The county contracts with the agency to provide mental health and addiction treatment and care for people with developmental disabilities.

The agency’s contracts expire in June, and the county plans to go out for bids to see if other providers are interested in competing for the work.

The agency’s board said in a statement today that Baker has been exonerated. “The circumstances which led to her being placed on administrative leave have been investigated thoroughly and Baker has been exonerated. The board is dedicated to ensuring more transparency in our decision-making from here forward.”

“CBH staff have experienced considerable turmoil. We respect the leadership and staff of our agency and appreciate their steadfastness during this situation.”



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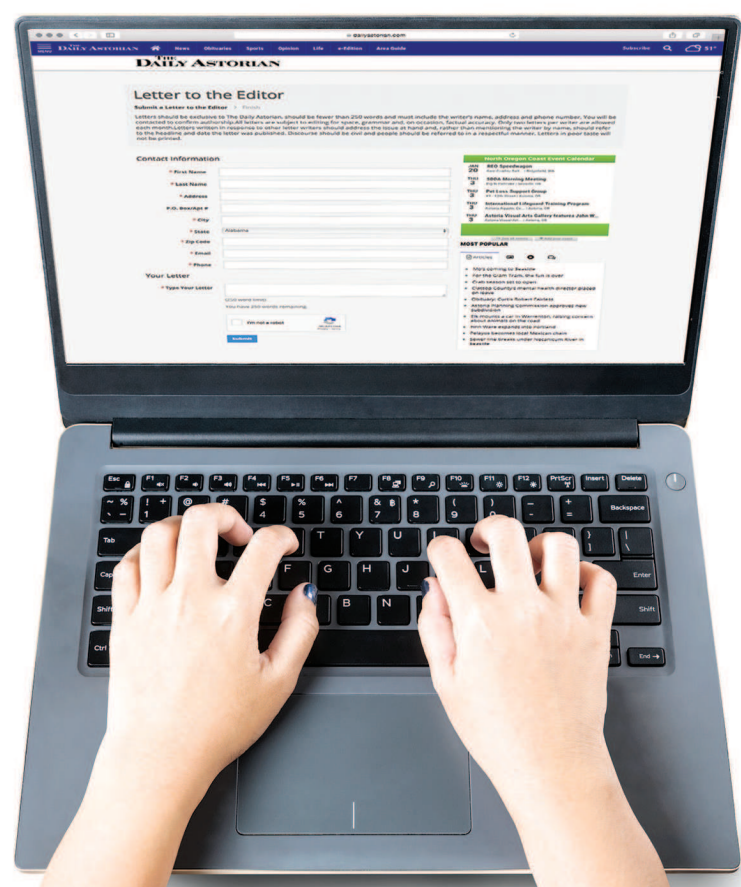


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