

Port pulls back on new seafood landing fees



The Daily Astorian

Crabbing boats unload on the west side of Pier 2 in 2016. The Port of Astoria is proposing seafood landing fees on processors to help pay for the deferred maintenance on the decaying docks.

Staff will do more research

By EDWARD STRATTON
The Daily Astorian

The Port of Astoria has pulled back for now on seafood landing fees on Pier 2 processors, facing criticism from the seafood industry and uncertainty over how to measure or levy the fees.

The Port Commission had scheduled a vote in January on \$2 per ton worth of seafood landing fees for wharfage and other services, but canceled the vote shortly before the meeting.

The fees could have brought in an estimated \$150,000 a year to help maintain the deteriorating west side of Pier 2, where processors take in more than 100 million pounds of seafood each year.

Jim Knight, the Port's executive director, said he realized soon before the meeting that he was not prepared to answer the questions fishermen and processors had about the specifics and fairness of the fees.

"I know it's premature," he said. "We as a port are not ready to do this."

Port staff have estimated nearly \$7 million in deferred maintenance on Pier 2, where the majority of seafood processing takes place in Astoria. The agency has long struggled to find funding for more than basic operations.

The Port considered two fees: \$1 per ton to support wharfage, and another \$1 per ton for services Knight said are related to keeping the docks clean, sampling for stormwater, permitting with the state and general repairs.

"There's just a general wear and



Edward Stratton/The Daily Astorian

The fishing vessel Ocean Beaut unloaded its catch last month at Bornstein Seafoods' Pier 1 processing plant. Fishermen and seafood processors have decried landing fees being proposed by the Port of Astoria as another financial hit they can't afford.

tear for the dock itself," he said. "All of that cargo and the vessels tying up to it, and all the vehicles, they all cause wear and tear on the docks."

The Port, already in dire financial straits, faces the potential of declining log ship revenue during a protracted trade war between the U.S. and China, a primary buyer. The agency also recently lost a \$1.5 million state infrastructure grant originally secured to help fix the west side of Pier 2.

Industry objects

Fishermen and processors have bristled at the additional charges as the latest in a mountain of fees that threaten their thin margins and could lead some to leave the Port.

The most vocal has been Andrew Bornstein, co-owner of Bornstein Seafoods. The processor has spaces at the foot of Pier 1 and in the Pier 2 warehouse. At a recent Port Commission

meeting, Bornstein pointed out what he called the irony of federal tariffs damaging the Port's log business while the agency looks at additional fees that could damage fishing.

"Whatever analysis you're looking at that tariffs may bring X dollars, I can promise you it's going to be less," he said. "Fish will move, and your tenants can move."

The new fees would mark Astoria as unfriendly to the fishing industry and make it difficult for Bornstein Seafoods to attract boats, Bornstein said.

Chih Yuan Wang, president and CEO of Da Yang Seafood, said imposing the fees wouldn't be fair considering the money tenants already have to invest to improve their warehouses. Da Yang has paid for dock work and utilities in its portion of the Pier 2 seafood plant.

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Port loses out on a \$1.5 million state grant

By EDWARD STRATTON
The Daily Astorian

The Port of Astoria has returned a state infrastructure grant of more than \$1.5 million because of delays in proving winter storm damage from 2015.

The Port in 2016 received the state money to repair about 30,000 square feet of decrepit dock on the west side of Pier 2, where seafood processors handle much of the catch in Astoria. The grant would have required a one-third local match.

The agency attempted to use the state grant as a local match on a larger pool of relief money it has sought from the Federal Emergency Management Agency to cover significant damage to the central waterfront from the 2015 storms.

Jim Knight, the Port's executive director, blamed delays with FEMA for why he decided to return the state grant money.

"It was their strongest recommendation that we return the money and preserve the relationship," he said of the Connect Oregon grant program, run through the state Department of Transportation.

The Port has gone back and forth with FEMA, trying unsuccessfully to prove that issues under Pier 2 were caused by the storms.

As of last fall, FEMA was offering less than \$1.5 million overall, while the Port has estimated that between \$6 million and \$10 million is needed to repair storm damage. During the negotiations, the Port has repeatedly applied for extensions with the state to keep the 2016 grant available.

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Public records bill dropped by Boone

News media had objected

By EDWARD STRATTON
The Daily Astorian

A bill in the state Senate that would have toughened requirements for public records requests has been dropped after the legislation received more scrutiny than expected.

State Sen. Betsy Johnson, D-Scappoose, submitted Senate Bill 609 in January on behalf of recently retired state Rep. Deborah Boone, who called the legislation necessary to weed out fishing expeditions by journalists and others that take time and resources from state legislators.



Deborah Boone

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Mayor, council defend Drag Queen Story Hour

Some claim event is harmful to children

By KATIE FRANKOWICZ
The Daily Astorian

Astoria Mayor Bruce Jones and the City Council defended a Drag Queen Story Hour planned for the Astoria Library after two men from Warrenton said Monday they were concerned the event would be harmful to children.

The reading is scheduled for this weekend.

"It's good for all of us to

be exposed to people who are different from us, who we might not understand," City Councilor Joan Herman said.

There is nothing offensive about the reading — "unless you're offended by men dressing in a dress," she said.

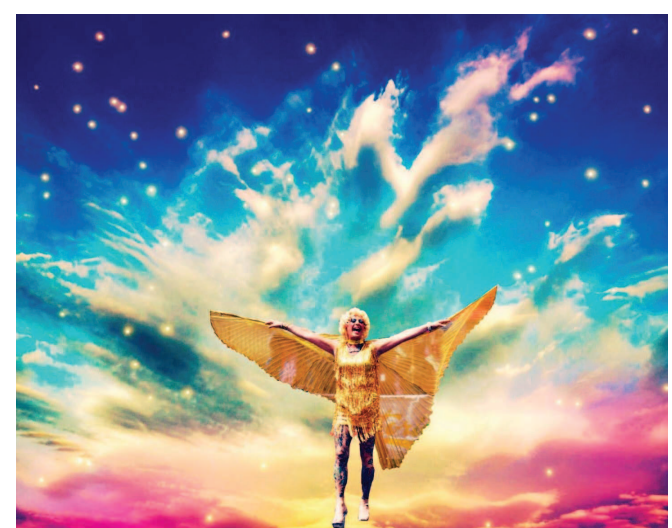
Herman pointed out that the event will be held in the library's Flag Room, a closed space away from the main part of the library. If parents don't want their children to participate, they can easily bypass the event and still use the library.

Drag queen story hours, where a man dressed as a

woman reads to children, have become popular at libraries across the country. But they have also been controversial. Many libraries have gone ahead with the readings despite protests.

Last year, a drag queen story hour was one of the Astoria Library's most popular and well-attended events.

Marco Davis, the performer who will be reading to children on Saturday, grew up in Astoria and is a dedicated community volunteer, Herman and other city councilors said.



A Drag Queen Story Hour is planned for the Astoria Library this weekend.

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