

# OPINION



# the Astorian

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Founded in 1873

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## GUEST COLUMN

# Does Astoria really need more hotels?

Astoria has had more than a few pivotal moments in its nearly 200-year history, and we're embarking on yet another, involving renewed interest in development. A bunch of us are following the arm wrestling over the future of our cherished waterfront now playing out at the Planning Commission hearings, soon to go to the City Council.

For better or worse, this seems to be characterized as waterfront property owners versus homeowners and area residents. Local officials are trying to find a way to balance needs, interests and the long-term health of Astoria.



**JAN MITCHELL**

I've had good experiences with many of those business and property owners, often sitting together at the back of the council chambers. One of them refinished the fir floors at our 1890 house. Another fixed our plumbing. I enjoyed buying fresh tuna loins by the 20-pound bag from another.

I'm glad that the Elliot was restored, as well as the Astor Hotel, using skilled and expensive local crafts workers. They all make this an easy and rewarding place to make our home. Staff is proposing conditions that could help facilitate housing and water-dependent uses for these local owners.

Some may wonder why some Astoria residents are so opinionated about our town.

I've been here 25 years, and I've seen citizens:

- restoring the Liberty Theatre, the Armory, the trolley, the space now known as the Riverwalk, and the ferry.
- volunteering as cruise ship helpers, SMART readers, CASAs, lunch buddies, trolley conductors and hospice workers.
- meeting cruise ships in all sorts of weather.
- serving on boards and baking pies for fundraisers.
- creating bowls to raise money for victims of domestic violence.
- fending off two massive and nasty liquefied natural gas terminals.



Colin Murphey/The Astorian

Development along the Astoria waterfront remains a divisive topic.

- supporting local farmers.
- taking late-night crisis calls.
- creating art walks and the Sunday Market.
- supporting high school bands and sports.
- putting up Christmas flags and Halloween witches.
- sustaining our downtown Halloween.

We are a community of volunteers. It is a wonderful place full of people who will help. It is a community whose citizens are heavily invested in this place. This is the reason why people show up at public meetings and voice their opinions.

We locals benefit from the array of restaurants, coffee shops, and owner shops which out-of-town visitors help to support. Yes, tourism is a fortunate fact of our lives now. It was not always so. But we can absorb only so many visitors without changing from the working town which has been our brand. Local government has stretched its workforce to provide the best service with existing resources, and has done its best to manage this historically significant place.

We are attractive not only to weekend and summer visitors, but to those whose

corporate businesses make money off of attractive locations. There are more examples of cities which have lost their views of the mountains, river, shore — you name it — than those who have had the guts and mechanisms to retain what made them what they were.

So, here we are, with something like 700 hotel rooms plus B&Bs, and another 100 or so approved. Astoria's population is likely to stay around the 10,000 mark. Our streets, water and sewer systems have limited capacities. Extensive growth could compromise what we residents have paid and are paying for. New development is not required to contribute to systems paid for by residents over time, beyond current rates. Room taxes bring a portion back to local governments, but do not significantly alter Astoria's reality of limited resources.

We hear of a potential for three more hotel proposals in the coming year. How does Astoria really benefit from more hotels?

We need to consider seriously what we have to lose, unless we place significant value on our waterfront front yard. We need to fashion a plan that speaks

to today's realities and the community's needs, such as workforce housing. Our waterfront could have been significantly altered in 2009-2012, had the financial industry not tanked. The Riverfront Vision Plan still contains much that was then the thinking of a council influenced by many long-term property owners and stakeholders who hoped to build condos over the river, converting or tearing down what existed. We dodged a bullet.

Public hearings are not for the faint of heart. But our comprehensive plan recognizes the right of citizens to participate and to be heard. We brought a petition to the City Council with more than 400 signatures in support of waterfront protection. We could gather another 400 signatures if that would make a difference.

Despite the thinly disguised threats and outright condescension of attorneys hired by out-of-town developers, we can keep control of our future. If the existing plan no longer fits the circumstances now facing our town, it can be updated. Staff is able to work through a balance between allowing an appropriate use for long-standing property owners and keeping us from becoming a theme park or Disney-ized version of Astoria.

The health of our economic development is driven by our environment, and it is worth our collective efforts to plan for our best future and that of our natural setting. Staff has crafted ways to help both long-term owners and the Port to find appropriate uses for their waterfront land without lining the waterfront with hotels. We residents need to make our voices heard.

In 2006, a month or so after the five-day National Lewis and Clark Bicentennial event in Astoria, I saw a woman with a stack of addressed Fort Clatsop postcards and asked her about her visit. It turned out that she was a journalist from England following the "Trail." She then said "So much of America now looks the same. Astoria has kept its sense of place. Whatever you do, don't lose it!" Then she got onto the bus for PDX and was gone. If we lose it now, we won't get it back.

Jan Mitchell is a former Astoria planning commissioner.

## LETTERS

### Port needs change

It is easier to sit back and criticize than to step up and lead.

I have been regularly attending the Port of Astoria Commission meetings since December 2018, and one commissioner repeatedly tears down the Port, and rips up the Port director. Meeting after meeting.

While serving on the Port for 12 years — yes, 12 years — this commissioner acts as if he has nothing to do with the current problems at the Port. Bill Hunsinger knows financial challenges and serious maintenance needs did not pop up overnight, they have been building up over the last decade. Yet this commissioner acts as if none of this happened on his watch.

Tearing down an institution and ripping up the leadership does not solve problems. Suggesting solutions, and working to build consensus, is the hard work of problem solving. For the first time in a long time, we have a choice for Port commissioner Position 3.

Scott McClaine will bring fresh eyes to the Port and will work respectfully with both staff and fellow commissioners. A vote for McClaine is a vote for civility and positive leadership at the Port. Please take time to vote and turn in your ballot by May 21.

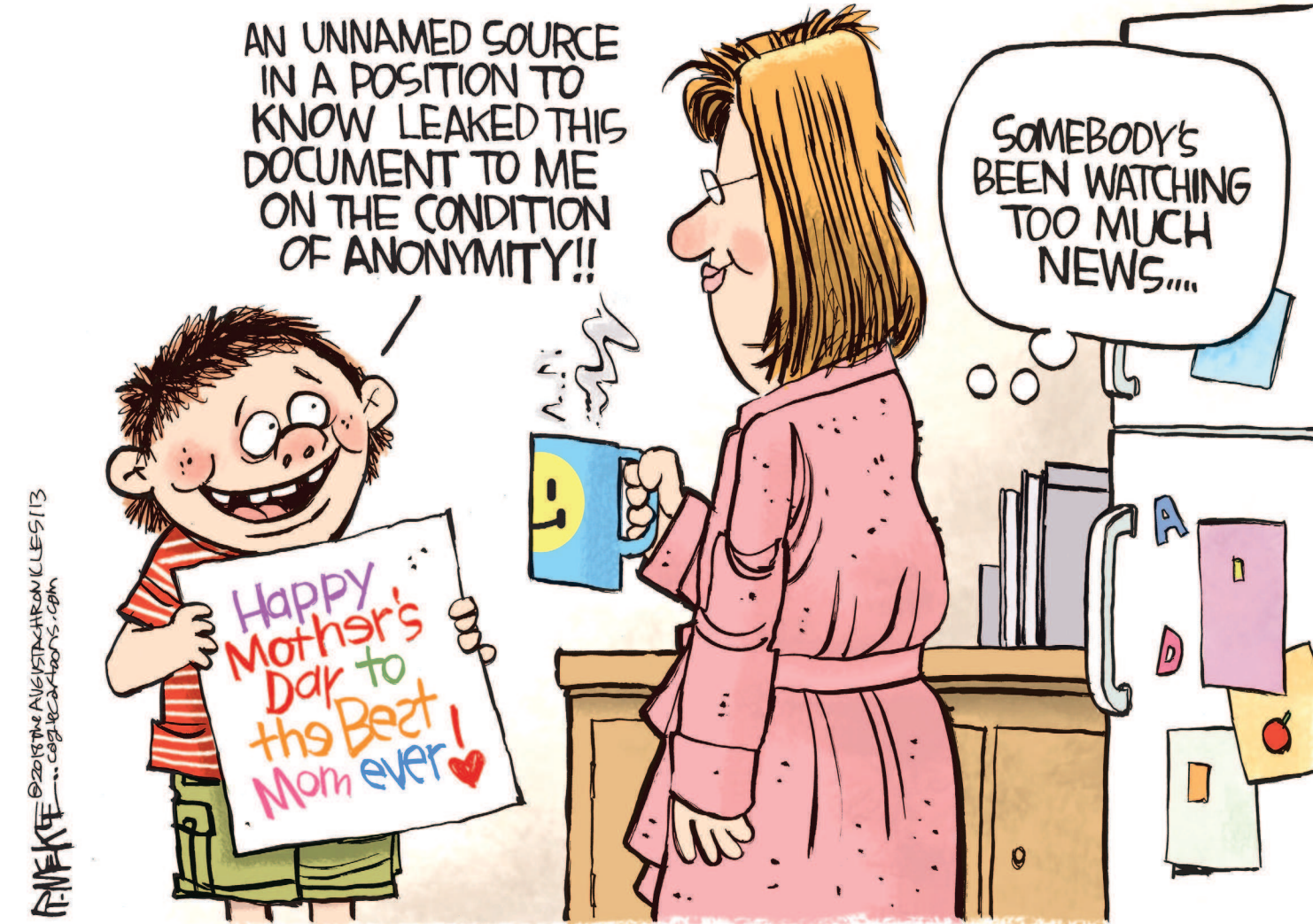
CHERYL JOHNSON  
Astoria

### Impeach President Trump

I am writing to call for the impeachment of President Donald Trump. We are watching our constitutional due process, and the rule of law, being dismantled by a president interested only in expanding his own power and personal wealth.

We are like the frog in a pot being gradually boiled to death with every new falsehood, every new insult to our intelligence, every conflict of interest, every obstruction of justice in plain sight. Each time, we hear a few voices of protest, soon drowned out by the next scandal-du-jour.

With the release of the Mueller report, the executive branch of our government has now finished investigating itself, and Trump's appointee has told us that it says "no collusion, no obstruction of justice." This is clearly not true, and now it is time to start impeachment proceedings. It's the only way to remove a president, and only



Congress can do it.

We are frogs in a cauldron, it's getting really hot, and our politicians are thinking, "If I do something about this now, it might affect my reelection chances."

Should Trump be voted out in 2020, according to Michael Cohen, his lawyer for 10 years, "There will never be a peaceful transition of power." President Trump says, "I have the tough people, but they don't play it tough — until they go to a certain point, and then it would be very bad, very bad."

Citizens, legislators, newspaper editors: Now is the time to demand impeachment.

JOSEPH STEVENSON  
Astoria

### Aphids stressing trees

We are seeing hundreds of mature Sitka spruce along the coast showing signs of stress and significant needle loss. These symptoms do not necessarily mean your tree is dying, and are almost

certainly caused by spruce aphids.

Spruce aphid infestations typically occur on a three-year cycle. A hard frost kills them and minimum tree mortality occurs, however that has not been the case on the North Oregon and Southwestern Washington coast. Repeated years of spruce aphid infestation have left our trees stressed, and unable to properly defend against the aphids.

Additionally, three years of drought summers have severely weakened the trees, and recovery may not be possible for some trees, which are in severe decline. The spruce aphid is a destructive insect, especially for Sitka spruce.

Damage to the needles becomes apparent in April, May or June. When damage becomes severe enough to demand attention, aphid numbers are much lower than they were during the early season, and most of the damage has been done. Exact reasons for aphid decline in late spring are not known.

This year is by far the worst we have seen in decades. We are still urging many homeowners not to cut down trees which

look brown, may be losing needles, or appear dead. At this point your trees may still be preservable. We always encourage homeowners to preserve any tree which can be saved.

LUKE COLVIN  
International Society of Arboriculture  
certified arborist, certified master arborist  
Astoria

### Gabel for Sunset Empire

Please join me in retaining Lylla Gabel for Sunset Empire Transportation District Board Position 7.

Lylla has the experience and dedication to continue serving us as a representative on our transportation board.

Lylla previously served as a commissioner on the Warrenton City Commission, and then served as our Clatsop County Commissioner.

When Lylla serves, she is totally committed.

CRAIG YAMASAKI  
Hammond