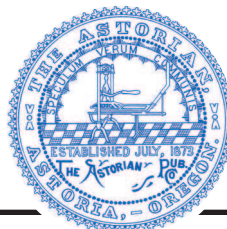


# OPINION



# the Astorian

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Founded in 1873

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## OUR VIEW

# Renaissance should be applauded

Ongoing facelift of Astoria's downtown sparks more hope

Over the past two and a half decades on this page we have celebrated the renaissance of Astoria.

That has taken the form of acknowledging that our singular community has many, many things that are rather special and worth preserving. Our historic downtown buildings and storefronts come immediately to mind.

We applauded when Roger Rocka and other like-minded citizens liaised with law enforcement in the mid-1990s to drive away some ugly bars blighting our downtown.

That action helped clear the stage for what has followed.

When the hardworking arts lovers on the Liberty Restoration board saved the derelict theater during the early 2000s, they ensured its bright future. We applauded then, commending the Astoria City Council for making a \$1.3 million grant to assist the purchase and begin the restoration.

Just about simultaneously, Chester Trabucco was restoring the splendid Hotel Elliott, a project that went hand-in-hand with the Liberty's rebirth.

Since those home-run milestones, we have been delighted to offer more applause to those caring individuals and groups who have had a vision, opened their pocketbooks, and made their dreams a reality.

We have repeatedly said that absentee landlords are often the bane of small towns. When they lack pride in the city, it shows in their buildings, regrettably in a big way. That happened most spectacularly with the Flavel — fortunately that ugly chapter of Astoria's history appears behind us as careful work continues at Ninth and Commercial streets.

The successes are numerous. Ask Astoria architectural historian



People walk by the J.C. Penney building on Commercial Street before it closed in 2017.

The Astorian

*'... IT IS CLEAR THAT ASTORIA IS ON THE RIGHT PATH. IT IS ONLY FITTING WE PAUSE AND CELEBRATE THOSE ENERGETIC, COMMUNITY-MINDED PEOPLE WHO ARE MAKING IT HAPPEN.'*

John Goodenberger for a list and he'll rattle off 27 building names before even pausing for breath. The Lovell and Fort George buildings have enjoyed a rebirth. Rose Marie Paavola restored the Wieveseik Building once — then again after that terrible fire. The Sanborn building also gained new life after a fire.

The River Pilots, the First National and Astoria National banks, the Commodore Hotel and others come to mind. Even the Fisher Bros' building at 12th and Marine Drive — which pretended to be our Daily Astorian news offices in the 2005 movie "The Ring II" — has seen major improvements.

The work has been assisted in large part by a concerted effort to get property owners to apply for financial incentives. Members of the Lower Columbia Preservation Society, the Astoria Downtown Historic District Association and city staff all actively promote the restoration of downtown.

Property owners have received

facade improvement grants from the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and applied for special assessment through a 10-year freeze on the assessed value in exchange for a plan to renovate or restore the building. Property owners also apply for federal tax credits.

In fact, probably only Portland has benefited more than Astoria among Oregon cities who have taken advantage of this help in the last 15 years.

The latest efforts to renovate the J.C. Penney building on Astoria's Commercial Street offer an opportunity for potential celebration.

When it closed in 2017, it was bought by local apartment complex owner Sean Fitzpatrick. He has partnered with Baked Alaska chef and co-owner Christopher Holen to create the Astoria Oregon Marketplace, a taproom on the building's main showroom floor anchoring a food court.

The Astoria Downtown Historic District Association won a

grant of \$148,880 from the Oregon Main Street Revitalization program, boosted by a \$103,640 local match, to restore the Duane Street facade of the old department store.

The grant will help with disabled access and open up the facade to its historic look, with large display windows topped by transoms, similar to our other storefronts. It will delay the completion, but we expect it will be worth the wait.

Sarah Lu Heath, executive director of the downtown association, has been among those leading the charge to keep everything looking bright. Her group recently awarded a contract for a mural in the 13th Street Alley between Commercial and Duane streets. It's a fun project. Although there are occasional controversies, we believe outdoor art of many kinds makes it more pleasant for people walking through any downtown.

That Oregon Main Street program was created in 2015 to help communities exactly like ours, so it is pleasing to see its early conceptual discussions turned into reality.

The fund uses lottery-backed bonds to encourage economic development. When the lottery began, many were quite reasonably skeptical, viewing it with some justification as a potentially erratic revenue source. Here's some proof it can offer significant advantages for one-time projects

Heath has secured \$100,000 to help turn the former Waldorf Hotel into workforce housing and \$53,000 to restore the Riviera Building.

There will likely never be a time when we sit back and say, "Astoria's downtown is done." Communities evolve. Older buildings inevitably deteriorate. Sometimes the least-worst decision is that they need to be replaced rather than repaired.

But it is clear that Astoria is on the right path. It is only fitting we pause and celebrate those energetic, community-minded people who are making it happen.

## LETTERS

### Thanks for fixing road

Around the month of March our community suffered from a rather large landslide on U.S. Highway 30 near mile marker 95. For many days this portion of road had limited access. One lane was shut down during rush hours due to the sediment slide covering half the road.

This is a recurring issue in this portion of the highway. We, as a community, have seen several slides within the last few years. Although they are common, they seem to have become more frequent. I would like to say thanks to all the people for their hard work in making our highway fully accessible once again, and much less dangerous.

LILY ROBERTS  
Astoria

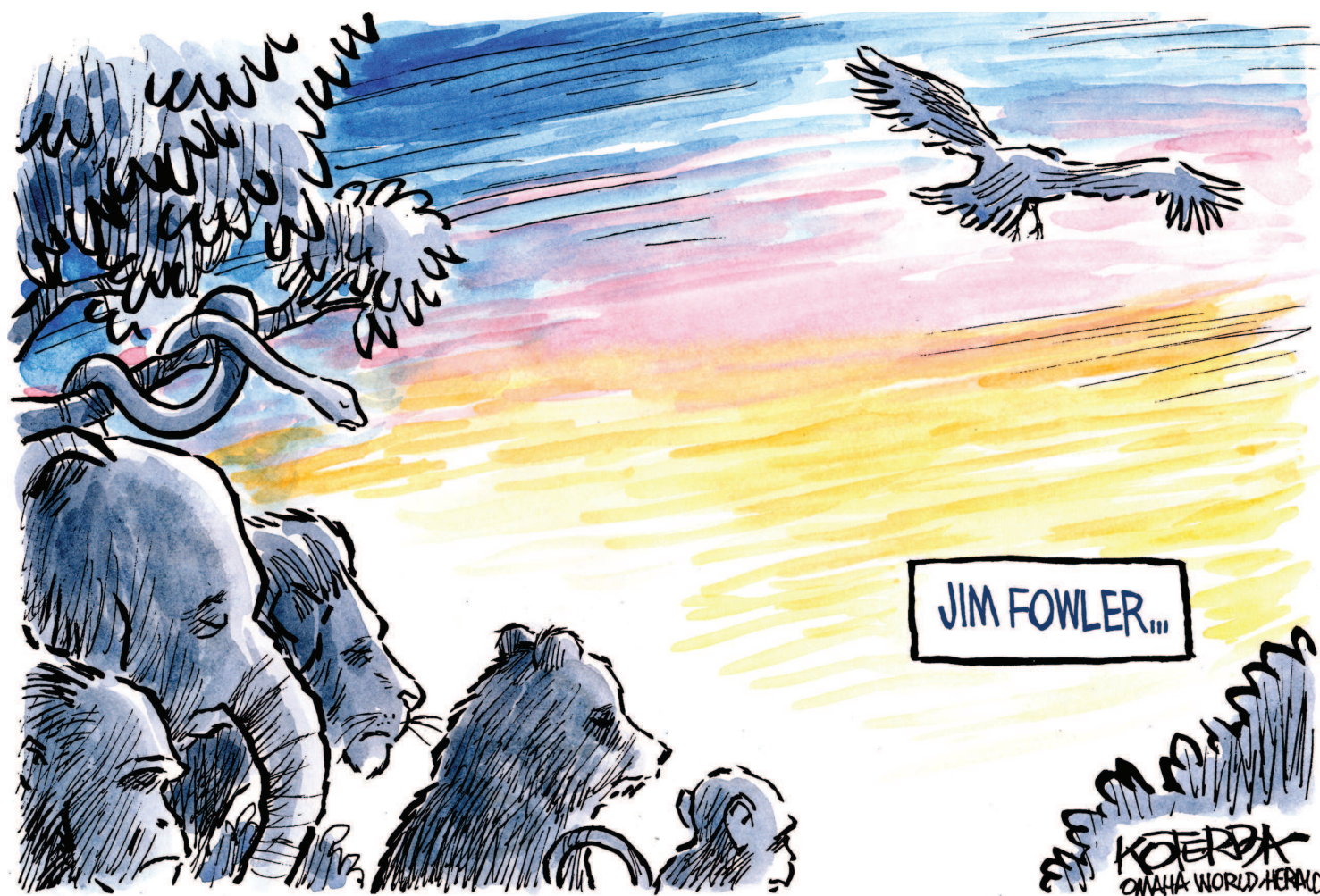
### Teaching important lessons

Recently, my wife and I enjoyed the annual talent show at Astor Elementary School, which our granddaughters attend. What a wonderful experience.

A diverse group of kindergartners through second graders conquered butterflies in their stomachs and stepped up to the mike. It took courage to stand up in front of the crowd of students and parents and do whatever little part of the show they could.

Kudos to Principal Kate Gohr and the Astor staff, especially counselor Meche Brownlow, for teaching the important lessons in life and self-confidence that are not limited to books.

Public schools and good teachers are producing the future citizens of our country and indeed our world. Thanks for



doing a great job.

TED MESSING  
Astoria

### Plans for tomorrow

Astoria is economically driven by the tourists who visit our area. But over the past couple of years our town has been seeing a large increase in the harass-

ment of tourists. There are people who carry all of their possessions with them along the Riverwalk and downtown Astoria panhandling visitors. This may set off many of the people who come to our town. Many may even tell their friends not to come here.

It is understandable that many of these people are without homes, but there needs to be a better solution. The problem is continuously getting worse, and children

have even been known to be living in tents in the woods and other hidden areas.

I am in no way trying to attack these people, but does the problem need to get worse before we find a solution? It would be a shame to see Astoria lose its good reputation, for the kids to grow up in these conditions and for the adults to not get help.

NATHAN HOIKKA  
Astoria