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Astoria considers waterfront changes

A push for narrower buildings

By **KATIE FRANKOWICZ**
The Astorian

Astoria planning commissioners shifted slightly on Tuesday night about how tall buildings should be along the riverfront.

Commissioners had considered limiting the height of new buildings in the Bridge Vista section of the city's Riverfront Vision Plan to 28 feet. They did not reach a consensus on what to allow, but have directed city planning consultant Rosemary Johnson to look at narrower, 35-foot-tall buildings.

Under current codes, new buildings in Bridge Vista, which runs from Portway Street to Second Street, can be up to 35 feet tall with a variance to 45 feet tall.

Some commissioners, including Cindy Price, had been pushing for a limit of 28 feet following the approval of a controversial four-story Marriott-brand hotel. Concerns lingered about how shorter buildings might still sprawl and block views, however.

On Tuesday, Commissioner Daryl Moore proposed a compromise of allowing slightly taller, but narrower buildings as a way to allow bulk but keep river views open. Buildings would be restricted in how much of the lot they could occupy and building widths along view corridors would be shorter.

Moore noted that not many people seem have a problem with Suomi Hall, a large, but compact, historic building under the Astoria Bridge. But many people don't like the look of the neighboring long and tall Holiday Inn Express & Suites or the sprawling, shorter Astoria Warehousing complex.

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Port budgets for ship fees, litigation

Lawsuit possible over fee

By **EDWARD STRATTON**
The Astorian

The Port of Astoria has defended the legitimacy of a \$300 fee on ships passing up the Columbia River as a way to keep Pier 1 in good condition as an emergency pullout and discounted the possibility of being sued over it.

But while the new fee is expected to bring in about \$450,000 a year in new revenue to maintain Pier 1, the Port's proposed budget for next fiscal year will also include \$75,000 to defend it in court.

Shortly after the Port announced its pursuit of the fee, the Columbia River Steamship Operators' Association, representing oceangoing vessels, voiced opposition. The association sees the fee as a precursor to other ports on the river charging fees, making the region less competitive to shipping interests.

"We are confident when we say that the river community does not support the Port's action," Kate Mickelson, the executive director of the association, wrote the Port recently. "The (association) will employ full resources to oppose this action if we cannot find an alternative."

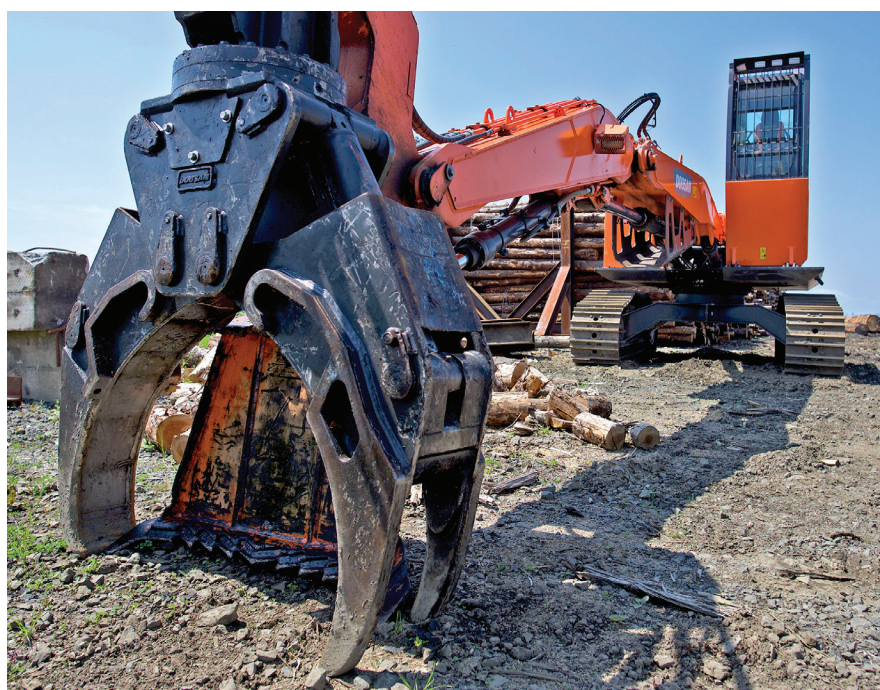
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Trade war chops off log revenue at Port



Photos by Colin Murphey/The Astorian

Heavy equipment is used to move logs at the Astoria Forest Products facility at the Port of Astoria.



Equipment for processing raw timber products sits idle at the Port of Astoria.



Logs sit waiting to be processed at Astoria Forest Products.

A potential casualty of clash with China

By **EDWARD STRATTON**
The Astorian

The trade war between the U.S. and China could chop about one-third of the Port of Astoria's projected pier revenue in the coming fiscal year.

The Port, finalizing its budget, estimates Astoria Forest Products will send out 6.5 log ships over the coming year. Chad Niedermeyer, the yard manager for Astoria Forest Products, said the company would usually expect to send out between eight and 10.

Port staff projected \$1.3 million in pier revenue, down more than 28 percent from this year and part of an estimated \$11 million in estimated operational revenues. The majority of the loss in pier revenue comes from the lack of regular log ships that make up the bulk of the Port's dockage, wharfage and other pier-related money.

"Right now, it's just up in the air," Niedermeyer said of how many ships will come. "It all depends on what happens with the tariffs."

The Chinese in March 2018 imposed a 5 percent tariff on hemlock, the most common species exported from Astoria, along with 5 percent on Douglas fir and 10 percent on spruce. When the trade war ratcheted up, the Chinese increased tariffs on spruce to 20 percent, but have so far left the other two species alone, Niedermeyer said.

With the decrease in ships, Astoria Forest Products has cut its workforce by 40 percent, Niedermeyer said. Chris Connaway, the president of the local longshore union, has reported members having to go far afield to find work.

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'THIS DECREASE WILL NECESSITATE A REORGANIZATION OF OUR STAFF TO ACCOUNT FOR REDUCED REVENUES. EXISTING STAFF WILL BE WEARING MULTIPLE HATS TO MAINTAIN QUALITY CUSTOMER SERVICE FOR OUR TENANTS AND CUSTOMERS.'

Jim Knight | Port of Astoria's executive director

