

Port: Focused on regaining financial stability

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The Port should look at nonfinancial considerations when deciding whether to sell the hotel, Isom said.

“But with the current state of affairs, I do think having that influx of cash, and giving us the ability to leverage these funds into some of the projects that are in need of getting done is going to be important,” he said.

The Port is completing a five-year strategic business plan focused on regaining financial stability and trust at the local and state levels. The plan is required to secure more state financing the Port needs to fix its crumbling docks — namely Pier 2, where seafood processors employ hundreds during fishing seasons. The Port faces weight restrictions and a sinking western face of the pier. The hope is to leverage a property sale into a larger grant or loan to fund the rehabilitation.

Port commissioners agreed Tuesday to have Isom engage a commercial agent to create a listing.

The Port Commission also approved the formation of a permanent advisory finance committee. An ad-hoc committee of banking, accounting and other financial professionals recently recommended a

host of changes at the Port to better track finances and review the viability of its properties. Among the committee’s recommendations was possibly selling some buildings, such as the Riverwalk Inn, Chinook Building and former Seafare Restaurant around the West Mooring Basin.

Commissioners approved a contract with the Special Districts Association of Oregon to help the agency search for a permanent executive director to replace Jim Knight, who resigned in June under pressure from the Port Commission and stakeholders.

Dirk Rohne, the president of the Port Commission, said the contract is necessary in part because the Port could hire internally. Isom, who has been lauded by the Port Commission but previously said he did not want the permanent job, declined to comment on his current level of interest. The Port also recently rehired Matt McGrath, the former director of operations who resigned in April over managerial differences with Knight, to his old position.

Port commissioners also voted to limit their \$50 reimbursement per meeting to Port Commission meetings and other preapproved gatherings.

Riverfront: ‘We’re trying to create code that somehow deals with this unknown’

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Previously, the Planning Commission had reached a consensus to cap building heights at 28 feet, but reversed course in July.

It was time to send something off to the City Council to wrestle over, the commissioners concluded. They voted 6-1 in favor of allowing buildings up to 35 feet, but with a floor area ratio plan that means the higher a building rises, the narrower it must be to maintain views.

The proposal also included two plan districts for the Port of Astoria and Astoria Warehousing. If approved by the city, these plans would potentially provide relief from restrictions outlined in Bridge Vista.

But City Councilor Tom Brownson said he thinks the parameters for the Port’s plan district are more restrictive than those that would be placed on Astoria Warehousing. The Port’s success benefits the wider community, he argued.

Given the Port’s tenuous financial position and leadership uncertainty, he proposed giving the Port even more flexibility in Bridge Vista.

Councilor Joan Herman took the opposite view and said she has major concerns about the plan districts.

The Port and Astoria Warehousing own around 80% of the land in Bridge Vista. If the City Council allows major exemptions through the plan districts, she said she was left wondering, “Why did we bother (with the Bridge Vista codes)?”

Until individual master plans are approved by the city for the plan districts, the Bridge Vista codes will apply to all the property within the overlay zone. The Port and Astoria Warehousing will have five years to develop these master plans once the Bridge Vista code amendments are finalized.

Herman also suggested reducing the total square footage from 30,000 square feet to 20,000 square feet.

City Councilor Roger Rocka had some concerns about what kind of flexi-

bility the city might grant through tools like plan districts, especially since no one knows what might be developed along the riverfront in the future.

“We’re dealing with the unknown and we’re trying to create code that somehow deals with this unknown,” he said.

Councilor Jessamyn West said people’s fears seem to be less about the difference between 28-foot and 35-foot buildings and more about the types of development that could come to Bridge Vista, such as national chains or more large hotels.

She asked the City Council to consider a moratorium on new building permits in Bridge Vista and another section of the riverfront plan, the Urban Core, until the city’s community development director position is filled.

“We actually have quite an array of perspectives here,” Brownson said.

Originally, the purpose of the code amendments was to address gaps and inconsistencies that came to light when city boards and planning staff were evaluating an application by Hollander Hospitality to build a four-story Marriott-brand hotel — the Fairfield Inn and Suites — off Second Street.

City planning consultant Rosemary Johnson said Monday that she believed the staff’s concerns regarding the clarity and consistency of the codes was addressed in a series of amendments that passed relatively easily earlier this year.

The sticking points continue to be questions of building height and size.

At the direction of the City Council in February, staff and the Planning Commission were asked to consider changes to height and mass allowed in Bridge Vista. City code allows a maximum height of 45 feet, but Rocka — supported by Herman and West — had suggested a limit of 28 feet. This cap has since become a rallying point for people looking for stricter water-

Nurses: Claim hospital is stockpiling profits

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a fair contract which allows for recruitment of high-quality nurses and continues to provide the best care for our community,” Nicole Williams, the hospital’s chief operating officer, said in a statement. “We heard nurses’ concerns over our initial proposals regarding shift lengths and time worked, and have made significant concessions to ensure that they have more consistent hours and paychecks.”

Nurses claim the hospital is stockpiling profits for a new hospital amid dangerous staffing levels and low pay, making it difficult to attract new workers. They point to the hospital’s nearly 12% operating margin, the third-highest among small, rural hospitals in the state.

Nurses take particular issue with the hospital’s ability to send them home early for low patient counts, and the variability in hours for part-timers. They want a 2016 nurse staffing law enshrined in their contract. The Oregon Health Authority has received one nursing complaint against Columbia Memorial over staffing violations since the law went into effect.

“We have folks who have lost 60% of their pay-



Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

Dozens of nurses marched along Marine Drive, calling for a new contract.

‘WE HAVE FOLKS WHO HAVE LOST 60% OF THEIR PAYCHECKS OVER THE LAST SIX MONTHS.’

Amber Cooper | union representative

checks over the last six months,” said Amber Cooper, a union representative.

Nicholas Bowling, a nurse in the hospital’s post-anesthesia care unit, said there are staffing shortages in most of the hospital’s units.

“It’s highly documented that there’s an increased

risk of mortality and morbidity with increased patient ratios, and the hospital obviously doesn’t care about the ratio,” he said.

The pickets are intended to ratchet up the pressure on the hospital’s administration. Nurses delivered a petition in June to the hospital’s CEO, Erik Thorsen,

for better pay, benefits, staffing and training. The union also recently distributed flyers pointing out that Thorsen makes more than \$645,000 in pay and benefits and has seen double-digit pay increases over the past few years.

The standoff echoes past labor disputes. In 2002, nurses picketed and threatened to strike before reaching an agreement with the hospital. Hundreds of hospital employees covered by the Service Employees International Union Local 49 have also picketed and threatened to strike in the past.

Infections: ‘Nobody wants to be an addicted drug user’

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“The trouble with chlamydia is it’s so prevalent right now in the population that when we get a case we really don’t have the staff and effort to do partner notification, generally because there are so many partners,” McNickle said.

“This project is going to try to turn that around, so that after the two years if we can drop them down far enough, it will become

a maintenance issue, not an acute issue.”

The goal is to reduce sexually transmitted infections by also looking at drug use during infection treatment, McNickle said.

An example would be when someone with syphilis is identified, staff will help treat the infection, but during the process ask about substance abuse. If the person has a substance abuse issue, staff will let them know about harm

reduction and offer help in receiving treatment and other resources.

“That’s how we’re going to get around this,” McNickle said. “That’s where the nexus is.”

County public health staff will also continue to park their vans in different parts of the county on Thursdays and offer needle exchange and other outreach with Jordan’s Hope for Recovery.

Getting to know the peo-

ple who seek help is crucial.

“The only way we’re going to connect with them and build trust and get them into treatment is to have those conversations,” McNickle said.

“Nobody wants to be an addicted drug user. Not a single person out there says they want to do it ... But those who are willing and have finally met the bottom of the barrel, we can get them in to help.”

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