

Uniontown plan heads to City Council

Reconfigurations planned for Marine Drive

By EDWARD STRATTON
The Astorian

A master plan for the Uniontown neighborhood is headed to the Astoria City Council after planners ensured any on-street parking lost as the busy thoroughfare is reconfigured would be replaced.

The city began work in 2017 on Uniontown Reborn to improve traffic flow and pedestrian safety along Marine Drive, a busy four-lane road through which U.S. Highway 30 and U.S. Highway 101 both flow. The city convened an advisory stakeholder committee, including local businesses, to help guide the discussion.

The plan recommends cutting a westbound lane along Marine Drive; adding a turn lane between the Roundabout and Doughboy Monument; widening sidewalks; improving access for people with disabilities



Cars pass along Marine Drive outside of Three Cups Coffee in Uniontown.

and adding a median refuge for people crossing at Bay Street; and adding bike lanes, planting strips and lighting. It would create a new overlay zone to guide design and development in the neighborhood.

The City Council will hold a public hearing on the

plan Sept. 30, with a second reading and possible adoption in October, said planning consultant Rosemary Johnson.

Business owners worried about the loss of parking on the south side of Marine Drive that would result from the reconfigurations.

Another concern was the elimination of left turns at Bay Street, which provides access to several nearby buildings, to make room for an enhanced crosswalk and refuge for pedestrians crossing Marine Drive. The plan has been amended to allow left turns while adding a

pedestrian refuge.

“I believe all of our fears in Uniontown now have been taken care of, so thank you so much,” Diana Kirk, owner of the Workers Tavern and housing in Uniontown, told the Planning Commission on Tuesday.

Michael Duncan, a regional planner and grant manager with the state Department of Transportation, gave a formal written endorsement of the project from state transportation planners, albeit without any promise of money.

“We’re probably about six years out before funding would be identified for something like this, and actual design and construction would be more of that eight- to 12-year range,” he said.

Planning Commissioner Cindy Price said she hopes the master plan can be revised, considering how much Astoria has changed over the past decade and how much more it could by the time design begins. The plan is the best that could be put forward at this time,

with the understanding funding, travel patterns and other factors can change, Duncan said.

Duncan agreed to look sooner at the concern by Kirk and other business owners about the shaking caused by passing trucks hitting the perpendicular crosswalks and stop lines. Planning Commissioner Sean Fitzpatrick said he and other commissioners were taken on a tour and could feel the impact of the trucks in front of Workers Tavern and at the crosswalk near Under the Bridge Cigarettes. Kirk claims the vibrations have caused cracked windows in her property.

Fitzpatrick asked whether continental crosswalks, with bars parallel to traffic with cutouts for tires, could be painted in front of Hauer’s Lawn Care & Equipment instead of the perpendicular style. Those style of crosswalks are usually reserved for midblock crossings, but there are exceptions from a property damage or nuisance standpoint, Duncan said.

Buoy: Managing buoys is part of the Aids to Navigation

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“At the time it wasn’t working, so if you’re in a fog or a storm you might not be able to see it — it was of no use,” U.S. Coast Guard Petty Officer Steve Strohmaier said.

These types of buoys are the largest ones the Coast Guard maintains. The concrete sinker it connects to weighs 18,000 pounds.

Most of the time, buoys are only connected to the sinker by a chain, but because the water is so deep where this buoy sits, it is also connected by a nylon rope. Without the rope, the chain would cause the buoy to sit lower in the water or possibly submerge due to the weight of the chain.

The buoy is also unique because it has a whistle. If the light on top is not visible due to fog, the whistle is audible to mariners.

“All of these characteristics make servicing this navigation aid a unique evolution,” Strohmaier wrote in an email.

“When Coast Guard members service aids as large as this, safety is paramount. It is never a quick or easy task when a 35-foot, 18,500-pound object attached to (a) moving chain is placed on the deck of a buoy tender. There are a lot of moving parts. Then combine that with rolling waves or inclement weather.”

Usually, the Coast Guard cutter Elm, which is based in Astoria, would handle buoy work in the Pacific Northwest. But since the Elm was undergoing routine maintenance, the cutter Aspen, a 225-foot buoy tender from San Francisco, had to attend to the buoys on the Oregon Coast.

Although it is not ideal, ships can still detect buoys without the light or the radio beacon. The propeller-like object that spins on

top of ships is a radar that detects objects or land near the ship.

“Even if there were no light, no sound, no radio beacon, they can actually ping off of structures,” Strohmaier said.

“So on their radar, it would show up as an object. Most of the time they can identify, ‘OK, if we’re going at this trajectory, that object showing up should be that buoy.’ So out at sea, it has nothing to bounce off of, but when it’s close to land, it’s either going to bounce off land, or a buoy, or a structure or other boats.”

Buoys are usually replaced every three to five years after becoming weathered by conditions at sea. Older buoys are either refurbished or recycled.

“There are a lot more people out on deck, getting their hands dirty working with the buoys, making sure they are safe, operating and putting them back in,” Strohmaier said of the repair work. “And you can see you’re making a difference right away. You’re taking this old ... buoy and taking it out and putting a new one right back in and you can see that difference right away.”

The Coast Guard also relies on other mariners to let them know when there is an issue with buoys, Strohmaier said.

Managing buoys is part of Aids to Navigation — one of the missions of the Coast Guard oftentimes overlooked.

“Navigation aids are not one of the things people always think of when they come to the Coast Guard, but it’s still one of the missions that we serve the American public with,” Strohmaier said.

“A lot of the freighters and ships that are coming in and out still rely on these pieces of equipment out there on the water.”

Pond: ‘It’s also a gift back to the community’

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North Coast Auto Service would coincide with Astoria Regatta celebrations in August.

The museum has fielded several concerns — mostly expressed on social media — about the pond, including the fear that a motorist might careen off Marine Drive and crash into the water. Jones dismissed this particular worry.

“You would have to physically turn your wheel two revolutions,” he said, noting these kind of accidents have not happened at the site when it was an auto service. Landscaping along the perimeter will provide a visual barrier as well, he said.

Others have wondered if the pond will be abused by the community or become a place for people who are homeless to camp out.

One man who gave testimony during a public hearing on a proposed Grocery Outlet nearby joked about how the store could provide affordable toiletries to the homeless “after they’re done using the new bathing center at the maritime museum.”

Jones said the museum has purposefully minimized infrastructure that might allow people to hide or camp at the park. Museum staff will monitor the site and, like the museum’s other properties, the pond and park will be part of the Astoria Police Department’s Property Watch program.

Property Watch allows police to act on a property owner’s behalf to deal with issues after hours. The program was rebooted two years ago to address aggressive panhandling downtown and has primarily been used as a tool to curb issues tied to the homeless population.

Museum administrators hope the pond becomes a popular community hub.

“It’s for the museum campus, but it’s also a gift back to the community,” Jones said.

On Tuesday, the Planning Commission approved the final public step the pond



Construction of the pond continues outside the Columbia River Maritime Museum.

project needed to move forward: a variance to install a historic sign.

The sign, a 32-foot-long milled old growth timber with “Columbia River Mar-

itime Museum” spelled out in steel letters, was used when the maritime museum moved into its location on the waterfront in the 1980s.

A donation from one

of the board members at the time, the sign was first placed out in front of the main building on the west side but was later moved to a second site near the bar pilot boat, the Peacock, according to Sam Johnson, the museum’s executive director. Its new home will be up near the road in front of the pond.

“It’s moved steadily east,” Johnson said.

The pond and park are located near the museum’s Barbey Maritime Center, at the far end of a large parking lot some distance from the museum. Michelle Dieffenbach, of Rickenbach Construction, told the Planning Commission the sign could pull double duty as a sort of gateway to the community.

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Lawsuit: ‘I hope you will ensure the public is properly warned’

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“The environmental conditions causing my son’s death may never happen again,” Moore said in a letter to the city. “But if they do, I hope you will ensure the public is properly warned so that no other family suffers a similar tragedy.”

Attorney Rick Freud, representing Seaside, and City Manager Mark Winstanley declined to comment.

A lawsuit was filed over a drowning in Seaside in 2016.