

OPINION

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editor@dailyastorian.com

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KARI BORGEN
Publisher

DERRICK DePLEDGE
Editor

JEREMY FELDMAN
Circulation Manager

JOHN D. BRUIJN
Production Manager

CARL EARL
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OUR VIEW

Port’s strategic plan should be transparent

The Port of Astoria’s strategic business plan should tell the unvarnished truth about the agency’s troubled past. We understand that some Port commissioners might think it is self-defeating to detail financial and management blunders in a document meant to set the agency’s trajectory over the next few years. It isn’t. The Port plays in front of two audiences: the people of Clatsop County, and the government leaders who control state spending in Salem. Both audiences are well aware of the Port’s mistakes. No artfully worded, aspirational finance-speak can paper over the agency’s track record. As Edward Stratton reported last week, Mary McArthur, the executive director of the Columbia-Pacific Economic Development District, who is helping the Port to update the strategic business plan, has taken a hard line on acknowledging the past. Her update largely focuses on returning the Port to financial sustainability and public credibility. Port commissioners should follow McArthur’s lead. While it may ease the sting for some in Astoria, leaving out messy facts, like the misuse of state grants meant for Pier 2, will not help convince anyone the Port has turned a corner. Dave Harlan, the ports manager



Edward Stratton/The Astorian

Port commissioners should be honest about the agency’s past.

for Business Oregon, and a former marketing manager for the Port of Astoria, knows better. State Sen. Betsy Johnson, D-Scappoose, and the co-chair of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means, knows better. Dirk Rohne, the Port Commission’s president, had it right when he said: “We want to put ourselves in a position where we can regain a relationship with the state of Oregon. So I’m all in favor of keeping the good, the bad and the ugly in this plan.” The strategic business plan should reference the most recent challenges at the Port and the most pressing financial issues the agency needs to resolve. But it would not hurt for all of us to take a moment to remember how

we got here over the past decade. Jim Knight stumbled as executive director because the Port needed a manager, not an economic development czar. Knight should be credited with trying to confront some of the accounting mishaps when he took over in 2014 and for hiring competent staff. But his decision-making, particularly on the Astoria Riverwalk Inn, was questionable. People might forget that Knight was brought to Astoria as a change agent. “Jim Knight is the right person to help the Port improve its credibility and its standing in the community,” John Raichl, who led the Port Commission, said at the time. Knight arrived after a trio of

short-term directors — Herb Florer, Hank Bynaker, Michael Weston — managed the agency after Jack Crider’s departure in 2012. Crider’s four-year tenure as director was a relatively stable respite after Peter Gearin’s spectacular implosion. Before the aura around Gearin’s entrepreneurial acumen was punctured, he engineered a covert lease of Port land on the Skipanon Peninsula in Warrenton for a liquefied natural gas project and dangerously leveraged the agency’s assets with loans to spur economic development. Gearin, who led the Port for eight years, eventually pleaded guilty to a felony violation of the federal Clean Water Act for breaking the terms of a federal dredging permit. “As a result of both real and perceived mistakes made in the past, many within our community have lost confidence in the ability of the Port to carry out its mission in a responsible manner,” Port Commission President Don McDaniel said on the day Gearin was fired in 2007. “It is the hope of the commissioners that the Port can once again gain the trust and support of the community.” Sound familiar? If Port commissioners are serious about restoring the agency’s credibility, they should not shrink from being honest about the past in the strategic business plan.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Hope

The weather was hot in Richmond, Virginia. Stinging hot 95 degrees, with matching humidity. I made the unnecessary observation to a local, “Sure is hot here.” The reply, “Son, it’s been hot before. Hotter than this. And we’re still here.” Wise words for these troubled times. We’ve had hard times before, harder than this. And we’re still here. JIM HALLAUX
Astoria

Wrong side of history

I am writing in support of Rep. Tiffany Mitchell. The recall effort started is not forward-thinking. The chief petitioner is Darren Mead of Action Sign Works at Miles Crossing, a Republican trying to take down a Democrat. His company has printed many of the #TimberUnity stickers. Rep. Mitchell has not broken the law, or done any malfeasance in her position representing Clatsop County. If all the #TimberUnity people would try to understand what is needed to address greenhouse gases, climate change and the threat to the world ecosystems, they would see they are on the wrong side of history. Please check out a National Geographic documentary “Paris to Pittsburgh,” which reveals the truths about climate change and its effects on communities across the country. Let’s support Rep. Mitchell, and be on the right side of taking care of our environment. She was duly elected, and is doing what local residents want. Climate change is harming our health: Heart and lung diseases associated with air pollution and wildfires; heat-related health dangers; the spread of infectious disease; and floods and extreme weather-related physical and mental health problems. HB 2020 is the bill that seemed to set off some people. It would put a cap on most of the state’s greenhouse gas emissions. Major polluters would have to pay to pollute by purchasing credits. I think Clatsop County residents want clean air to breathe, no massive forest fires and no catastrophic storms. The ocean is warming, water is rising, and what are we going to do about it? Recalling an elected official who is trying to do good by Clatsop County citizens is not the answer. Don’t sign any recall petitions, and don’t give Action Sign Works business. JAN COUGHLIN
Astoria

Deep trouble

I’m retired, so I have Medicare and a supplemental insurance. I pay \$300 a month, and when I need services they are covered, with the exception of dental care. It is a secure feeling that sickness will not put me in bankruptcy. I can keep myself healthy with sensible medical attention. That is democratic socialism with a for-profit insurance policy add on. I have a 23-year-old acquaintance who has a job, but no insurance. She has no general doctor, and had to go to urgent care when an infection went really bad, ended up in the hospital, and has big debt she cannot pay. Then she took a fall, rupturing discs, and has no money to go to a doctor. What kind of society are we that turns away from its citizens? Urgent care, emergency room service, is no way to have a healthy population. Besides, it is outlandishly expensive. We are the only nation that now puts the dollar above a person. Those who claim that socialism is bad must be super rich. I attribute my ability to have a small Social Security benefit with Medicare — as a result of working and paying into a retirement program — as good democratic socialism. Please know that democratic socialism means that the whole agree to combine resources to insure we all have schools, roads, protection and health care. Democratic capitalism is profit, competition and growth within governed rules for companies. We need both. Please quit denying all the great benefits derived from the economics of socialism. When 1% of our population has more than 50% of this country’s wealth, both economic systems are in deep trouble. SARA MEYER
Astoria

Alternative opportunities

I enjoyed R.J. Marx’s article referencing statements by Gearhart’s City Administrator Chad Sweet concerning possible future opportunities for the city’s elementary school (“Gearhart, Sunset Rec eye Seaside school properties,” The Astorian, Sept. 19). The article, however, neglects to mention more telling statements by Sweet, wherein he noted that the school was a million-dollar tear down ... due in part to a mold problem. Sweet has never referenced, that I am aware of, the existence of a formal mold survey, nor has he ever announced that a demolition bid was for-



mally requested. It is problematic to imagine the school district would ignore or withhold from Gearhart residents the issue of mold. Additionally, one interested developer ran through his economic numbers with me, using a much lower demolition number. Couple this example with past Sweet comments, made to me that our existing fire station won’t work for the new station, because of rock fill. Or how about the rumored public statement that rebuilding the existing location would be potentially the most expensive option, because the city would be required to build a new facility to house fire equipment during construction. Both examples, at best, are disingenuous. Sweet’s ongoing bent to only confirm that information which serves his goals forecloses the potential of new and alternative opportunities which have been expressed by many in Gearhart, but not acknowledged by our city leaders. Seaside and Cannon Beach see the value in old schools, but with Sweet’s bias to the new fire station, Gearhart’s alternative opportunities are limited, at best. JACK ZIMMERMAN
Gearhart

No exception

I want to comment on the nontransparency of the election donation to Deborah Boone from John Helm (“In Oregon campaign investigations, ‘I did not’ is all it

takes,” The Astorian, Sept. 17), along with an additional comment about Gov. Kate Brown’s office seeking to control all Freedom of Information Act requests when they disagree with the legal government office appointed to process these requests (“Oregon’s first public records advocate quits,” The Astorian, Sept. 9). It seems these days that government seeks to operate any way they choose to, and to conceal from the public what they are doing. I do not believe that Boone was seeking to go behind the backs of the public with her decision to forward a donation on behalf of someone else. I do not like any politician forwarding money to other politicians under any circumstances. If a politician is not going to use the donation themselves, they should be required to either return the money to the donor or to the Department of Revenue as a donation to the state of Oregon, not some politician they want to help finance a campaign for. In my opinion, government has lost almost all credibility in being honest with the public, and it has to stop. The law needs to be clearer, and punishment for forwarding donations in the manner done by Boone must stop. Also, the governor’s office needs to stay out of Freedom of Information Act requests, no exception. If the governor does not like the truth getting out to the public, too bad. SCOTT WIDDICOMBE
Warrenton