

# Proposal to preserve Uniontown views could limit Port of Astoria

By EDWARD STRATTON  
*The Astorian*

The Astoria City Council on Monday approved the first reading of most of a master plan for the Uniontown neighborhood.

But the council left open the possibility of restricting development directly north of two dead-end streets, potentially limiting options for waterfront lots owned by the Port of Astoria.

Bay Street runs north from Marine Drive and ends at a grassy plot of land owned by the Port near Maritime Memorial Park. Basin Street runs north from Marine Drive and ends in a parking lot east of the West Mooring Basin.

The undeveloped land beyond Bay Street provides businesses like Workers Tavern, Columbia River Coffee Roasters and 3 Cups Coffee House a view of the Columbia River. But the Port leases the land to developer Mark Hollander, who has been trying to build Marriott franchise hotels in Astoria.

Diana Kirk, owner of the Workers Tavern, said she supports most of the Uniontown Reborn project but raised the concern that Hollander's development could block their views.

"If the Port comes through with some other plan that they want to do to that property, who is going to advocate for us?" Kirk asked the City Council.

The Bridge Vista portion of the Riverfront Vision Plan, meant to maintain



Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian  
**Steven Drawson sits at the bar facing the Columbia River in 3 Cups Coffee House in Uniontown.**

views of the bridge and the river, mandates 70-foot view corridors on north-south rights of way between West Marine Drive and the Columbia. But there is nothing mandating a view corridor north of Bay or Basin streets, City Manager Brett Estes said.

Rosemary Johnson, a city planning consultant, raised the possibility of extending the view corridors through properties north of the dead-end streets. She presented two options the City Council could choose from: require the extended view corridors outright, or provide the Port or developers an opportunity to encroach on them in consideration of other design elements.

City Attorney Blair Henningsgaard said the move would essentially condemn the Port's properties north of the dead-end streets.

"My concern is that you're affecting two different pieces of property, and there's been no previous notice," he said.

Mayor Bruce Jones and City Councilor Tom Brownson supported allowing developers to get City Council approval for exceptions to the view rules. Councilor Jessamyn West and Councilor Joan Herman supported requiring the view corridors outright. Councilor Roger Rocka said he would be comfortable with either option.

The City Council ultimately approved a first reading of the Uniontown Reborn plan, while reopening a public hearing specifically on the dead-end street views for more public testimony at its next meeting.

Port Commissioner Frank Spence, who attended the City Council meeting, tried to speak about the city's proposal Tuesday at a Port Commission meeting but was told not to by Dirk Rohne, the commission's president.

Rohne said Wednesday he disallowed Spence's comments because the city's proposal was not an agenda item. But he said that Will Isom, the Port's interim executive director, would speak with Estes about the issue.

Rohne called the city's proposal to extend view corridors past dead-end streets "NIMBYism on steroids."

"I do believe it could be a threat to the future prosperity of the Port," he said.

# Astoria weighs Mill Pond pier sale

By EDWARD STRATTON  
*The Astorian*

The Astoria City Council, weighing dueling offers to deplat or develop two piers in Mill Pond Village, continued the public hearing on a potential sale while asking the homeowners association to take the temperature of neighbors and answer whether the city would still be on the hook for association fees.

Famed Oregon developer Art DeMuro, who designed the Mill Pond neighborhood, donated two platted piers, each containing six buildable lots, to the city before his death in 2012. The city has received little interest on the properties and paid more than \$64,000 in fees to the homeowners association, with \$13,000 more budgeted for this fiscal year.

The City Council voted in July to market the piers at \$45,000 each.

After still receiving little interest, the council eventually engaged a group of neighbors wanting to donate \$11,500 to have the city decommission and make the lots into parkland. But John Dulcich, a former Astorian and Seattle-area developer, offered \$35,000 to buy the piers and develop them into townhouse-style condominiums.

A group of about 16 neighbors recently upped their offer on the lots to

\$40,000. But the city estimates decommissioning the lots could cost \$35,000, as well as eliminating any future property tax revenue. Also still up in the air is whether the city would have to continue paying fees even after decommissioning the piers.

Diane Spalding, the president of the homeowners association and the wife of Police Chief Geoff Spalding, asked the City Council Monday for a continuance of the public hearing and at least a month to survey neighbors.

She and other Mill Pond residents have approached the city concerned that deplating the lots would reduce the revenue from homeowners association fees, City Manager Brett Estes said. The city has no answer from the homeowners association about whether the homeowners would still assess fees on the deplatted piers, Estes said.

Even if the city didn't have to pay the fees, it would still lose money by taking the neighbors' offer, Mayor Bruce Jones said. He and others on the City Council unanimously supported a continuance of the public hearing on the sale.

Neighbors in favor of decommissioning the piers have argued that development would take away their views and harm the wildlife that uses the pond. They argue that decommissioning the piers would only slightly increase homeowners association fees for other residents.

Jones and City Councilor Tom Brownson doubted development of the piers would significantly affect wildlife. Councilor Roger Rocka said the city should get an expert opinion on the validity of the environmental impact.

The city has struggled to keep its parks department afloat and can't afford to take on more parkland and lose potential property tax revenue, Brownson said.

Councilor Jessamyn West and Councilor Joan Herman supported the neighbors' offer, but said whether the city would still be on the hook for homeowners association fees would be a deal-breaker in their decisions.

"Those lots have been for sale for a while," West said. "So I wish folks had been more proactive in acquiring them to prevent development, but that's not been the case."

# Push to make public records advocate independent

By CLAIRE WITHYCOMBE  
*Oregon Capital Bureau*

SALEM — A state council formed to improve Oregonians' access to government records has endorsed a slate of reforms to make the state's public records advocate more independent from political influence.

The council met Tuesday to hash out the proposed changes after the sudden resignation of Oregon's first public records advocate, Ginger McCall, who chairs the council.

McCall cited undue influence from the office of Gov. Kate Brown and called for more independence for the advocate going forward. Her last day is Oct. 11.

She and other open government advocates say more independence can help ensure public trust in the advocate's role advising the public, mediating disputes between requesters and government bodies, and advocating for policies to improve transparency in government.

The position of the advo-

cate was created by law in 2017.

Under the law, the governor appoints the advocate. The governor chooses from three candidates selected by the council and the state Senate votes to confirm that candidate.

The council proposed that it choose the advocate instead, and that the law state that the office of the public records advocate is independent.

Under the proposal, the advocate would no longer automatically be the chair of the council unless the council votes to name them chair. Many of the council members would still be appointed by the governor.

The proposal would set a four-year term for the advocate and allow for the advocate to be reappointed for additional terms. The council could remove the advocate for cause.

Current law says that the governor can remove the advocate for cause or give consent to the council to do so. The council's proposal removes those provisions.

The council has also proposed that it may sup-

port or oppose legislation relating to public records, and may ask that one or multiple legislators introduce bills relating to the state's public records law. That would be different from somewhat comparable agencies, such as the state ethics commission or liquor control commission, which must go through the governor's office to intro-

duce bills.

Council members want to put forth the changes in a legislative proposal for state lawmakers to consider early next year in the roughly monthlong legislative session.

*The Oregon Capital Bureau is a collaboration between EO Media Group, Pamplin Media Group and Salem Reporter.*



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