

Urban Core: Plan to restrict development

Continued from Page A1

between a public wanting river views and private property owners wanting flexibility to develop.

The Urban Core runs along the waterfront between Second and 16th streets. The plan anticipates a mix of commercial, residential and water-dependent uses with denser development, while still providing river views.

Rosemary Johnson, a city planning consultant, recently refreshed the Astoria Planning Commission on the Urban Core in advance of a public hearing on Tuesday. Commissioners would recommend code changes to the City Council, which could hold public hearings starting in November, with potential adoption as soon as December.

The code changes would largely restrict new development over the water to the top of the riverbank, with numerous limitation zones over undeveloped piling fields and existing piers between buildings. The city met with property owners and purposely placed limitations on areas unlikely for further development, Johnson said.

“We discussed their plans, what was going on, so that we were trying to be conscious of the property owners, who had some rights, plus the citizens,” she said. “We have competing interests there, and we have to look at both.”

In between are nonlimitation areas — mostly existing buildings — where heights would be limited to 28 feet, or 35 feet if the building’s width is reduced. Buildings allowed over water would be limited to 4,000 square feet and the lesser of 150 feet wide or 60% of lot coverage. The city would require 40-foot view corridors in between buildings and some form of public access to the riverfront.

The height standards would be similar on land within 100 feet of the Astoria Riverwalk. Buildings elsewhere in Urban Core could rise to 45 feet if they include multifamily affordable housing and a plaza, courtyard or other public gathering spot. The codes would preserve an 80-foot-wide swath of land along the Riverwalk — 70 feet along street rights of way — and require at least a 10-foot setback for each



Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian
A new boutique hotel is being built on the Astoria Riverwalk between Eighth Street and Ninth Street amid potential code changes.

‘I’M GOING TO TRY AND HELP PEOPLE UNDERSTAND I WANT TO PRESERVE THE INTEGRITY OF THE TOWN. THOSE THAT HAVE THE RESPONSIBILITY OF TAKING CARE OF THE WATERFRONT NEED THE INCOME TO TAKE CARE OF IT.’

Steve Fick | owner of Fishhawk Fisheries and a historic building at the end of Fourth Street

additional building story. “It lets sunlight down,” Johnson said. “It gives an airier feeling than that tunnel effect.”

Last new hotel?

Some of the more controversial language comes in the limitation of uses for buildings over water, where new homes, bars, hotels, offices and medical facilities would be prohibited. Hotels and motels would be a conditional use over land elsewhere in the Urban Core.

A notable exception is the \$5.5 million, 39-room boutique hotel already approved and being built within a former fish-processing plant next to Buoy Beer. The project, tentatively named the Bowline Hotel, is a partnership between the brewery, Adrift Hotel and other investors. It could be the last new hotel approved on the central waterfront.

The political climate has changed since the upheaval over the Fairfield Inn & Suites, a project that

prompted the city to revise the Bridge Vista section of the Riverfront Vision Plan and further restrict development. “I have mixed feelings,”

Tiffany Turner, a co-owner of Adrift, said. “I respect and understand the need to grow wisely, and I think Astoria is really grappling with that in an authentic and good way.”

Other property owners, like Steve Fick, who owns a small seafood processing operation on a pier at the foot of Fourth Street, find the proposed restrictions in Urban Core too limiting. The code changes, he believes, could narrow options and hurt property values in a changing business environment.

Fick also owns a historic brick building at the foot of Fourth Street where he is building out a distillery.

“I want my flexibility to be maintained as it is,” he said. “And really at this point, anything else to me is unacceptable. I’ve paid my taxes for over 30 years on the potential to do different things at this place.”

Fick was part of the Planning Commission when the Riverfront Vision Plan first came up a decade ago and said commissioners at the time had a more balanced approach. He sees hypocrisy in the new hotel approved three blocks to the east while the city won’t allow him or other waterfront property owners the same right, or in the city not allowing uses like professional and medical offices that would provide the income to maintain waterfront buildings.

Fick plans to organize property owners to share their concerns during public hearings.

“I’m going to try and help people understand I want to preserve the integrity of the town,” he said. “Those that have the responsibility of taking care of the waterfront need the income to take care of it.”

‘Anywhere, USA’

Johnson understands the difficult balance. But one of the biggest assets of Astoria — economically and aesthetically — is the ability to see the Columbia River from land, unlike in many other cities, she said. It is an argument she said she has made with hoteliers wanting to build on the waterfront.

“Having development that respects our character, and respects that need for that view of the river, is what we’re looking for,” Johnson said. “Because if we lose who we are, we’re going to be Anywhere, USA.”

Mitchell: Wanted to donate since she learned about it as a teenager

Continued from Page A1

A couple of days before surgery, Mitchell learned one of the five people receiving a kidney out of the exchange was particularly difficult to match.

“I frankly am just very happy to know I not only helped give somebody their life back, but I helped give somebody’s child their dad back or their mom back, potentially for years and years to come,” she said. “And that means a whole lot to me.”

Although she recommends that people consider organ donation, she does not want to tell anybody it is an easy decision.

“There is a lot that you do have to go through psychologically to really get yourself to a point of where you’re OK with voluntarily going into surgery,” Mitchell said.

“If it is important to you to really leave something on the planet so that you know you made a difference, this is probably one of the few things you get that opportunity to do.”

Living organ donation is something Mitchell has wanted to do since she learned about it as a teenager. When she was in her late 20s, a close friend needed a kidney, but she was not a match.

When Mitchell was elected to the state House in 2018, she knew she would have time after her first legislative session this year to have the surgery and recover.

She also used the opportunity to draw attention to

living donation.

Mitchell, D-Astoria, was a chief sponsor, with state Sen. Sara Gelser, D-Corvallis, of a new state law that helps provide job security for organ donors by making it a procedure protected by the state’s Family Leave Act.

Although living organ donation is now protected, organ donors do not qualify for paid leave.

“They’re in the middle of the rule-making process. And so I’ve made that known to the people involved in that process that I would really love to see paid family medical leave available for living organ donation so that more people will have the ability to make this decision and not have to worry about how it would potentially impact their jobs or their ability to make rent just because they wanted to donate,” Mitchell said.

She said the risk of the surgery is low, especially since extensive testing is done on the front end to ensure a donor is a good candidate.

Mitchell said she is feeling good, aside from the expected pain that comes after surgery. She hopes by sharing her experience publicly people will explore the opportunity to make a living organ donation.

“If one in 10,000 people became altruistic kidney donors you could actually eliminate the waiting list in the United States for people who are waiting for kidneys,” she said. “That to me is a pretty incredible statistic.”



Edward Stratton/The Astorian
Pat and Jim Radich, owners of Peter Pan Market on Seventh Street and Niagara Avenue, have found a buyer for the grocery store and deli.

Peter Pan Market: One of few remaining independent markets in Astoria

Continued from Page A1

Peter Pan opened in 1939, replacing Beezley’s Store several years after it moved downtown, according to newspaper articles at the time. It is one of the few remaining independent markets in Astoria,

along with Astor Court Grocery owned by Flora and Gustavo Velazquez on Alameda Avenue, the Astoria Downtown Market owned by Sam McDaniel on Commercial Street and the Short Stop owned by Cheri Temple on Olney Avenue.

Fire chief: Ames steps up

Continued from Page A1

Ted Ames, a former Astoria fire chief, is filling in as interim fire chief while Warrenton recruits a permanent replacement. Ames had served as the Warrenton fire chief before leaving in 2013 for the Astoria post.

The Warrenton Fire

Department includes more than 20 volunteer firefighters, one paid firefighter and a training officer in addition to the fire chief. The department covers the city and provides services to Fort Stevens State Park, Camp Rilea Armed Forces Training Center and the Astoria Regional Airport.

Nurses: Thanked community for ‘overwhelming support’

Continued from Page A1

levels, inconsistent scheduling and low pay. The two sides brought in a federal mediator but hadn’t met since August.

Amber Cooper, a union representative, said nurses were preparing for a strike vote as a final measure, while the hospital’s administration was trying to find temporary nurses to fill in. The mediator brought the two sides together for a final negotiation Wednesday, she said.

“We could not have reached this deal without the overwhelming support of our community,” Kelsey Betts, a nurse in the family birthing center and chairwoman of the negotiating team, said in a news release. “This contract is a big step up. It helps ensure CMH will continue to be staffed with skilled nurses, especially as the hospital looks to grow in



Edward Stratton/The Astorian
Nurses marched in Astoria in September for a new contract.

the coming years.”

The tentative agreement, which nurses will vote on in the coming weeks, includes a 5% pay increase upon ratification, along with 3% in 2020 and 2021, according to a release from the union. The hours docked from a nurse’s schedule because of a low patient count would be capped at 20% of their

shifts per fiscal quarter. An official process would be put in place to review cases when the hours of part-time nurses are cut by more than 30% because of internal hospital decisions.

Nurses had pushed for the hospital to include a 2016 state staffing law in their contract. The Oregon Health Authority has one

complaint against the hospital for multiple alleged violations of the law.

The agreement includes additional steps to resolve staffing issues in-house before filing complaints with the state. It gives nurses the option of filing union grievances if the hospital does not agree to take a staffing issue to a vote of the hospital’s staffing committee, Cooper said.

“We are pleased to have reached an agreement with the” nurses union, Nicole Williams, the hospital’s chief operating officer, said in a news release. “Our nurses have consistently provided excellent care to our patients and are an integral part of the organization’s success. We would like to thank our caregivers and community for their continued support in helping CMH provide the highest quality health care in the region.”



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