

Bunkhouse: ‘The goal is to make this a nice place to live’

Continued from Page A1

The seafood processor hopes to put in 88 beds. Elizabeth Bingold, associate general counsel for Pacific Seafood, said the company would only have one bed per worker, as opposed to different shifts sharing the same bed, known as “hot racking.”

The dorms would include one bathroom and shower area for each six residents, a kitchen, a lounge, a badminton court and an outdoor seating area overlooking the Warrenton Waterfront Trail and Columbia River. The fabrication shop will continue to operate in the eastern portion of the complex.

“The goal is to make this a nice place to live, and to have people enjoy working for Pacific and being here,” Bingold said.

Good neighbor

Gil Gramson, a former mayor and city manager in Warrenton, lives next to Pacific Seafood’s property at the end of 17th Place. He secured a zone change in the early 2000s from industrial water-dependent shorelands to pave the way for housing.

“The number of people they’re going to be putting there is excessive,” Gramson said. “You’re looking right at 100 people.



Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

The bunkhouse has several rooms and will be able to hold nearly 100 employees.

This is an industrial area next to us, and no one ever anticipated there would be that many people living in one area.”

A good-neighbor agreement approved by the Planning Commission in September requires Pacific Seafood to shuttle residents to work and shopping to limit traffic, install signs to limit noise, perform background checks and promptly remove trouble employees.

The company would be required to erect fencing around the dorm property. Residents have signed

a petition asking the Planning Commission to nix a requirement for the company to build a buffer of trees and shrubs at least 10 feet high around the property, arguing it would take away their views of the river and hurt property values.

“Why would you want to disturb the view of everyone surrounding it?” asked Barbara Balensifer, a former mayor who has lived for more than 50 years on the southern flank of the fabrication shop. “We bought homes with what we’re looking at now.”

The good-neighbor agreement asks that workers avoid using surrounding side streets. Neighbors want the company to provide direct access to the Waterfront Trail, rather than them using a walkway from 17th Place.

“We’ll request them to not block our views, and to install a gate and passage directly to the riverwalk,” said Scott Widdicombe, who lives on the eastern edge of the property.

To appease neighbor concerns, Kevin Cronin, the city’s community development director, said

he is recommending a performance standard that would limit the number of beds in the dorms to 70 for the first year.

“If there are no major issues (in the first year), then they get to go up to 90 beds,” he said. “I’m giving them the incentive to do the right thing. And if all goes well, they’ll operate a 90-bed facility.”

Housing workers

Pacific Seafood’s project is the most extensive among several efforts by employers to cope with the housing market. It could set a precedent for other employee housing projects.

Bornstein Seafoods recently purchased an apartment complex near its Warrenton Deep Sea Market, offering units at a competitive rate to its employees. Andrew Bornstein, co-owner of the processor, said the units are occupied by an equal mix of employees and existing tenants, who the company didn’t want to displace.

“I’d say they have had a small, positive tangible impact,” he said. “It’s a hard one to measure, but I think there are certainly people within the company that are greatly appreciative of having a lower cost option for housing in a market that is fairly expensive for apartments.”

Columbia Memorial Hospital in Astoria has long provided rentals for visiting physicians. Pelican Brewing provides apartments for employees at its brewery in Cannon Beach, along with a house in Manzanita.

Developer Randy Stemper is overseeing the construction of the 37-unit Skipanon View Apartments slated to open in the spring, walking distance from Pacific Seafood’s Warrenton plant. Stemper said he approached the company about leasing the property but was turned down.

Company representatives were not immediately available for comment on why they didn’t pursue the offer. Cronin’s assumption was that they determined it would cost less to refurbish the fabrication shop than invest in new apartments.

Cronin and King chalk much of neighbors’ concerns up to the fear of the unknown. But the company has signed on to the good-neighbor agreement and will screen employees working at the plant and staying at the dorm.

“We’ve been part of this community for 37 years, and we want to be here for a long time. We want to make sure we’re putting our best foot forward and doing the right thing,” King said.

Donation: ‘We think this is a critical part of the Columbia’

Continued from Page A1

and on the Skipanon Peninsula in Warrenton.

They were instrumental in the efforts because they provided technical, organizational and legal expertise to the activists.

“We became friends over the years,” VandenHeuvel

said. “In the early days of the LNG fight, most businesses were hesitant to get involved, and Jake jumped in and wasn’t afraid to say it was a bad idea for the community. It was a bad idea for his business to have LNG tankers sailing through the waterfront in Astoria.”

Jacob testified against liq-

uefied natural gas bills in Salem and supported the formation of the Columbia River Business Alliance, a local coalition that challenged the notion LNG projects would be good for business.

“We have a long history of working here in Astoria and in the estuary,” VandenHeuvel said. “We think this is

a critical part of the Columbia, so we are committed to continuing to try to work in the estuary, particularly on salmon issues.”

Terry Rosenau, a representative of Jacob’s estate, announced the donation Thursday night at an environmental film screening in Astoria hosted by Columbia

Riverkeeper.

Alongside Jacob’s brother, Greg Jacob, Rosenau told the audience the donation is supporting an important organization.

“And I don’t think we could be happier about that,” he said.

The hotel and Jacob’s estate worked with federal

and state authorities to help pay for the cleanup of an oil spill near the hotel last year.

Part of a crumbling dock next to the hotel collapsed, puncturing an abandoned cannery oil tank beneath it. Rosenau said Jacob and hotel management didn’t know there was an oil tank beneath the foundation.



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