

OPINION

theAstorian

editor@dailyastorian.com

KARI BORGEN
Publisher

DERRICK DePLEDGE
Editor

JEREMY FELDMAN
Circulation Manager

JOHN D. BRUIJN
Production Manager

CARL EARL
Systems Manager

Founded in 1873

OUR VIEW

Worker housing worth trying

When Pacific Seafood sought a way to address worker housing in Astoria, the reaction from neighbors was perhaps inevitable.

The company’s idea is that the old Astoria Pointe drug treatment center should be turned into a place for up to 125 workers to sleep after a day on the job at the Warrenton plant.

The immediate reaction of people living close by the Exchange Street building in Uniontown was to throw up arguments why it should not happen. Noise, traffic, safety and the potential impact on property values were all cited as potential negatives.

The company asked the city for a one-year conditional use permit to try out the creative idea. From the information made available to the public so far, we think there’s merit in giving this concept the green light.

Affordable and available worker housing is one of the North Coast’s biggest challenges. While we believe that leaders in Clatsop County are committed to creating an environment where this is addressed as a priority, the pace at which the private sector is investing in new projects isn’t as fast as anyone would like.

“Thinking outside the box”



Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian
Pacific Seafood wants to turn Astoria Pointe, the former drug treatment center in Uniontown, into temporary worker housing.

must be one of the most overused expressions in modern public policy discussions. But here is a company that is doing exactly that in Warrenton and Astoria. It needs to house its workers during the peak summer processing period without taking away from the region’s housing stock, much of which is not affordable.

Leaving the old 16,000-square-foot Astoria Pointe facility empty and at risk of deteriorating is absurd. Initially, the company

would lease it from the owners.

It opened as a nursing home in 1966 and was converted into a drug treatment center in 2006. That closed two years ago and it has since sat vacant. Only 13 employees’ cars would be allowed to park outside — most workers would rely on company buses to shuttle them to and from work in Warrenton.

One key criterion in the decision is that this neighborhood is already zoned for high-density residential use.

Zoning practices in the Western states have always sought to balance big-picture community needs with individuals’ potential conflicting preferences. Some decades ago, “performance zoning” was a creditable attempt to inject some flexibility into land use decisions, in part to better monitor industrial users’ impacts on the environment. It fell out of favor amid continuing debates over the balance of rigidity versus flexibility on the part of governments that administered it.

However, there are certain parallels here. If there is clear evidence that the idea does not “perform,” then the experiment can end.

Pacific Seafood is already trying similar ventures to address its needs. Warrenton’s city leaders, reassured by the company’s commitment to work with neighbors to police any troublesome issues, recently approved a plan to convert part of a machine shop in Hammond into a 70-bed bunkhouse. This location could add 20 more beds if the first year trial is a success.

The North Coast has significant needs to be met and this latest Astoria project appears one positive option. And the concept of fish processing workers living together in Uniontown? Well, it certainly has historical precedent.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Instant replay

‘Dorms under review,” the lead story of the Jan. 30 issue of The Astorian, is an almost duplicate application request by Pacific Seafood to the current approved application for Warrenton.

I want to alert Astoria homeowners who live very close to this proposed remodel of the following:

Warrenton government had to approve a zoning code text change in order to process the application, because they had to add the words “hotel” and “dormitory” in order to be able to place as many people in the building as they wanted. The Astoria request is for a building that is double the size of what Warrenton had, for 70 to 90 people to be housed.

I am in favor of seasonal worker housing when there is adequate space for the sleeping space between beds (4 to 6 feet) and substantial area for leisure activity.

A floor plan is an absolute must for Astorians to be able to see what the finished facility will look like before final conditions are established. If the conditions are set before the public can see the floor plan, good luck to nearby neighbors.

I cannot conceive that seasonal workers will only work, eat and sleep seven days a week, and have no other desire to do anything else for a six-month contract.

I have lived in this type of facility for more than four years in the past, and my experience tells me that it is only a matter of time before living stress leads to poor behavior in Astoria.

SCOTT WIDDICOMBE
Warrenton

Not served

On Friday, Jan. 31, the Senate just possibly brought the office of the presidency to an end as far as a branch of government is concerned. Regardless of your party, or your feelings of the guilt or innocence of President Donald Trump, America was not served that day.

The Senate voted along party lines (two Republican exceptions) to prevent any witnesses from testifying under oath and being cross examined. What this has done has made the idea of impeachment as a check on the presidency a thing of the past. The impeachment process is now a legitimate tool for political parties to use against each other.

Let us say that Trump is reelected president, and the Democrats flip the Senate and control both houses. What is there to stop the Democrats from starting a new impeachment trial against Trump, and remove him from office? Nothing.

Further, what would stop them from then starting another impeachment trial

against the vice president, and remove him from office? Nothing. Just politics as usual.

At this point the speaker of the House becomes president — a Democrat. No election. Voters left out of the process. The office of the president becomes the office of prime minister, chosen by the party that controls Congress.

This is not what our Founding Fathers wanted with our system of checks and balances. Independent, Republican or Democrat — no one was served this day.

PATRICK HAMMERSMITH
Warrenton

We can do better

Take two front-page articles from back-to-back editions of The Astorian, mix with a daily dose of rain, and this letter just writes itself.

Referring to the quote of Mayor Bruce Jones: “Failure would be coming over the hill from Crest Motel and seeing a big Olive Garden sign, an Applebee’s sign ...” (“Astoria looks to limit chain stores, hotels,” Jan. 18).

I would define failure as coming over the hill and seeing a Domino’s Pizza and a “Gross Me Outlet.” I just read that the Domino’s in Warrenton delivers here “as far east as 39th Street.” (“Domino’s planned for Astoria,” Jan. 21). That is where Geno’s Pizza and Burgers resides. Astoria lists 23 places that serve pizza. You get my point.

Pat, Jeff and Chris Farmer, I’m glad you invested in the building, but I have one word for you ... diversify. Look, if you pizza guys could talk with the mayor and City Council, you might come up with something better than another corporate pizza place. Your Warrenton location already has the Astoria school contract. Think out of the pizza box.

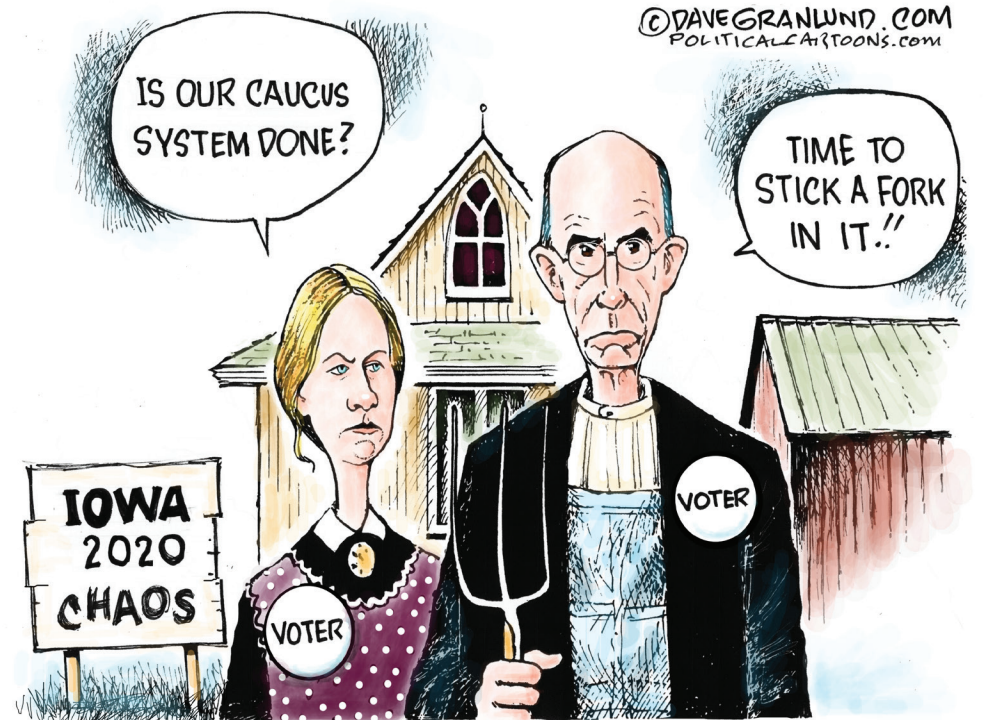
Stand at your new property and look across the street. Does Domino’s No. 29 fit in? We can do better.

JOHN GINDER
Astoria

Misleading

The Astorian article on the Grocery Outlet appeal did not portray everything I said, which made it very misleading (“Astoria hears Grocery Outlet appeal,” Jan. 23).

I believe the Heestands and the Grocery Outlet are happy with the outcome of the access agreement as we are, considering the situation. There was a negotiation on all sides as we worked through the details, but the final outcome will work well for all sides.



I heard some mention “blackmail” after the article was printed, which is far from what happened in the back-and-forth negotiation.

The Heestands have been a great neighbor these past years, working with us on the garbage/recycling area and the land-scaping issues. I hope the future of the property is a positive for everyone, whatever that may be.

DON PATTERSON
Astoria Mini Mart East

Ideal candidate

It is not too soon to be thinking about what candidates you should support in the May primary. The secretary of state is the administrator of public records, must oversee auditors of all public accounts, is the chief election officer, serves on the state Land Board and chairs the Oregon Sustainability Board.

The job is extensive and requires a person of diversified skills. Jamie McLeod-Skinner, a civil engineer and lawyer, is the most qualified candidate running for secretary of state.

I met Jamie at one of her many stops as she travels the state introducing herself and describing her plans, if elected. Jamie has leadership experience managing projects in the public and private sector. She has developed systems and policy for management of land, water and natural resources. She has served as an elected official in local government.

Plus, Jamie has shown her seriousness and dedication to serving all constituencies by visiting with concerned citizens in every county in Oregon. And, she is from rural Oregon, so she has personal knowledge of the specific needs of communities like ours.

Please vote for Jamie McLeod-Skinner for secretary of state.

CHERYL CONWAY
Astoria

Grit and pluck

Every day I marvel at the courage, tenacity and ingenuity of our myriad fishermen as they feed our community and teach the world over how to catch them.

The same could be said for our loggers, who hit the road at 2 a.m. every morning to tackle one of the oldest and most dangerous professions, in our industrial forests.

Then there are the bar pilots, river pilots, tugboaters and dockworkers who work 24/7/365 to make the Columbia River one of the most productive commercial conduits on the planet.

None of this is real pretty, but it’s definitely gritty. The only pretty aspect is the paycheck that supports the working families, our schools and the flourishing art and cultural activities that enhance our community.

If the politicians lose sight of the foundational grit and pluck, we’re doomed. You can’t make a silk purse out of a sow’s ear.

CHRIS CONNAWAY
Astoria

Hook up

I have a comment to make about the problem of people living in their RVs in Astoria, with no place to put their waste. My suggestion is to let them stay at Fort Stevens State Park to hook up their RVs. Just for the winter, when fewer people are using the spots.

GREER GILLILAND
Oregon City