

OUR VIEW

A lack of urgency on homelessness

No one expected the task force Astoria created in 2017 would solve homelessness.

Our small town does not hold the secret to a problem overwhelming cities across the West. Housing, drug and alcohol abuse and mental illness are some of the many factors behind a surge of people living on the streets.

Mayor Arline LaMear’s idea was to build on the conversations on homelessness that led to portable restrooms near the Astoria Riverwalk to discourage people from urinating and defecating in public.

The task force, under the direction of Mayor Bruce Jones since last year, brings government, business, health care and social service leaders together for valuable discussions that deepen our understanding of the homeless.

But as Katie Frankowicz of The Astorian reported in February, the task force has struggled to find concrete solutions.

A homeless services coordinator could be hired to gather data and respond to gaps in Clatsop County. The position, modeled after an approach that appears to be working in Gresham, could be an important resource.

While we understand the challenges, we would like to see more urgency, not just in Astoria, but across the North Coast.

Homelessness has increased since the task force began work. At the very minimum, the task force should set a goal of reducing the homeless population over the next



Single mats with bags of clean blankets and pillows sit lined up on the floor at the Astoria Warming Center.

five years.

We believe several options would help:

- **A year-round homeless shelter.** One of the many vacant buildings or properties downtown could be converted into a year-round shelter where people could sleep at night.

During the day, the shelter could serve as a drop-in center for meals, showers and laundry and provide links to social services and job opportunities.

The city could partner with a social service agency or a coalition of churches. A shelter could be the focal point for the city’s response to homelessness and could qualify for state money that will likely be available from Salem. It could also replace — or reduce pressure — on the Astoria Warming Center, the emergency shelter at First

United Methodist Church during the winter, and Filling Empty Bellies, which offers free lunches at Peoples Park.

- **Transitional housing.** A bridge is necessary to help homeless people leaving the streets or drug, alcohol or mental health treatment prepare to compete in the rental housing market.

The city should partner with a nonprofit or private developer on low-cost apartments that would provide temporary relief while people gain the confidence and ability to be more independent.

A tiny home village, similar to a project in Eugene, could also work.

- **Land use changes.** The city should voluntarily embrace the changes the Oregon Legislature made to state law to encourage multifamily housing in neigh-

borhoods zoned for single-family homes.

Many of the changes are meant for larger cities, but the need in Astoria is undeniable.

The countywide housing study recommended more multifamily rental housing, as well as “missing middle” housing types such as cottage clusters and townhomes.

Making it easier for people with lower and middle incomes to rent or buy could free up low-cost apartments for people on the brink of homelessness.

- **Exclusion zones.** A clear line should be drawn between compassion and capitulation.

The city should help people who want help, but we should no longer shrug our shoulders and accept chronic bad behavior under the pretext of homelessness.

The City Council should establish exclusion zones for people who repeatedly violate laws ranging from harassment and disorderly conduct to drinking alcohol or using marijuana in public.

We agree with the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruling in *Martin v. Boise* in 2019. The court held that criminalizing people who sleep on the streets, when no alternatives are available, is a violation of the Eighth Amendment protection against cruel and unusual punishment.

The task force should urge Astoria to create alternatives — a year-round shelter, transitional housing, more apartments — and make measurable progress in reducing homelessness.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Awkward moments

I read the article discussing prejudice between people of different color, and how various awkward and tense situations may arise from those prejudices, and how we need to try and courageously intervene when they occur (“Moving forward, looking back,” The Astorian, Feb. 15).

I agree, however, getting stuck on racial issues is of limited value. It is a sad reality that when humans become insecure and fearful, they tend to engage in ethnic scapegoating, selfish power-plays and heinous acts, regardless of their skin color, status or location on the planet.

In college, I was making a delivery in an apartment complex and was attacked by a group of blacks and nearly kicked unconscious. When they left, I got up and saw numerous blacks leaning over their balconies watching me get assaulted. No one helped. Talk about an awkward moment.

From the dawn of man to the present, our history is replete with the exploitation, enslavement, oppression and genocide of our fellow man. Only by addressing the universal processes within man that promote the cruel, brutal hierarchal behavior we engage in — regardless of social status, race and other geopolitical factors — may we find solutions.

Focusing too much on the external world versus the internal to explain human behavior helps perpetuate the problem. We’re currently challenged at crisis-level proportions with similar processes, evidenced by Americans, sight-unseen, vilifying and dehumanizing fellow citizens based on their political party.

Really now, what then separates modern man from ancient man, outside of living in a cave versus a house? Not much.

BRENTON KAHLER
Astoria

Legal corruption

At 92, it is still one’s civic duty to speak out against corruption. Recently, President Donald Trump and the head of the Justice Department, William Barr, have intervened directly in a judicial decision contra the best interests of the U.S. legal system and the citizens of the U.S.

The four U.S. attorneys in the case of the sentencing of an associate of President Trump’s, Roger Stone, have rightly



resigned in protest to political interference. This situation is reminiscent of early events in the rise of Nazism in Germany in the 1930s and 1940s, events that I experienced personally as a boy.

The leader of Germany, Adolf Hitler, along with his deputies, determined to increase the political reliability of the courts. In 1933, he established special courts throughout Germany to try politically sensitive cases.

Dissatisfied with the not guilty verdicts rendered by the Supreme Court (Reichsgericht) in the Reichstag Fire Trial, Hitler ordered the creation of the People’s Court (Volkgerichtshof) in Berlin in 1934 to try treason and other important political cases. This led, as we know, to World War II, in which I also served.

I plead with my fellow citizens here in Oregon and in the U.S. to oppose vigorously the actions of President Trump and William Barr. I do not wish my seven great-grandchildren to have to endure a rehash of events that led to World War II.

J. KAREL LAMBERT
Professor emeritus,
University of California, Irvine
Hammond

Narrow focus

‘Cap and trade won’t solve any problems.’ The title of Bill Kerr’s guest column (The Astorian, Feb. 20) echoes a common refrain from the right these days. The truth is that even small incremental change that forces greenhouse gas producers to pollute less does make a difference.

Kerr argues correctly that even if zero carbon emission were achieved in Oregon, it would only reduce global emissions by less than 1%. But consider the same contribution multiple times over by other states and countries around the world, and you have a game-changing reduction in greenhouse gases. At least two Clatsop County commissioners should wake up to this fact, also.

I admire Kerr standing up for his union members, but his focus is too narrow. This is about a global emergency that threatens the future of succeeding generations if not dealt with immediately, and is already hurting the state’s economy. Oregon is trying to take a first step in an effort that is going to require sacrifice from everyone.

It is callous and cynical for Kerr to state that Senate Bill 1530 is “intended to

be a job killer” because it extends training and unemployment benefits to workers who may lose their jobs. Apparently Kerr would like to see those workers left alone without a hand up.

This aligns Kerr with the Trump administration, which denies climate change, wants to reduce benefits for workers and completely do away with unions. Hard to figure how any of that benefits steelworkers.

ROGER DORBAND
Astoria

Bad optics

I’m impressed that the city of Astoria is willing to support a brewery with tax breaks (“Astoria approves Fort George tax break,” The Astorian, Feb. 20), but refuses to allow a low cost grocer to open for business (“Astoria upholds denial of Grocery Outlet,” The Astorian, Feb. 20).

The optics are bad. I’d like to know why Astoria needs a brewery more than a grocer.

ROBERT NOYES
Astoria