



Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

Mara Dowaliby was crowned queen of the Astoria Regatta last year.

## Regatta: Cancellation hard to come to terms with

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"Fortunately, the pandemic does not stop us from continuing to provide leadership opportunities and scholarships to young women in our community," Thorsen said.

"I'd like to thank everyone who pledged their support for the Regatta and the education fund."

Mara Dowaliby, last year's Regatta queen and a senior at Warrenton High School, said the Regatta cancellation was even harder to come to terms with than the school closures.

"Regatta is such a fun thing to do and I enjoy every

part of it," she said. "This was my queen year so it was supposed to be a really fun year because I get to sit back and relax and just have fun and enjoy it all.

"And now that's kind of taken away, which is really, really sad. But I know that Regatta is going to honor us somehow and still make something special for us. I'm happy for that, but it's really hard to miss all that."

Dowaliby said she was looking forward to all the events with the other girls on the court this year. Zoey Alexander, of Seaside High School, Mia McFadden, of Warrenton High School, Gabrielle Morrill, of Knappa

High School, and Annalyse Steel, of Astoria High School, made up this year's court.

"And I was really looking forward to getting to know them and hearing their speeches and seeing them grow," Dowaliby said. "I'm more sad for them because they didn't have the experience I did last year.

"Last year, Regatta, for me, was incredible. We had such a great year and I wanted those girls to have that same experience. Now they won't get that, which is too bad. But they're all amazing girls and they'll all get through it and hopefully be honored in some way."

## Seaside: Restrictions end Tuesday

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The discussion to remove restrictions in place since the city's March 22 emergency declaration over the coronavirus came one week after city councilors approved reopening the city's beaches, waterways and parks. At that meeting, an amendment to reopen lodging fell short of approval. Councilors felt that a premature opening of hotels, vacation rentals and campgrounds could create a backlash among local residents.

Seaside lodging owners returned Wednesday to seek immediate reopening.

"It's retail and restaurants that are dying here," Mark Tolan, of Seaside Vacation Homes, said. "We will lose our economy if we don't take action."

Terrance Bichsel, chairman of the board of Best Western Hotels and Resorts and owner of Best Western Plus Ocean View Resort and Rivertides Suites Hotel, said the lodging community has been unfairly targeted by the economic downturn. "Our industry on the lodging side is in real trouble. We are asking you to please let us reopen, tomorrow," he said.

Bichsel estimated a potential for a 25% to 30% occu-

pancy rate if the city opened for Memorial Day. "Occupancy would be minuscule at best," he said.

Even with an immediate opening, lodging owners said it would take time to get to 100% occupancy.

Lodging creates opportunities for restaurants, Seaside Chamber of Commerce CEO Brian Owen added. "It's really, at this point, a must," he said.

Frank Erickson, a retired radiologist, opposed the reopening and said he favored "strict coordination with county and state rules."

Reopening would bring a spike in COVID-19 cases, Erickson said. "That's the virology of it. I wish it were different. It only takes one person to spread these things and your strong efforts are only as good as your weakest employee," he said. "This virus is just looking for new lungs. And it will find them."

The City Council voted down a proposal for an immediate opening, opting for a compromise measure.

Councilor Seth Morrisey said he sought a balanced approach that takes into account both residents and interests of the business community at large. "Working in conjunction with our

neighbor Cannon Beach is the best solution to opening safely," he said. "I'm in favor of removing restrictions on overnight lodging on May 26."

A Tuesday opening gives the lodging industry the opportunity to hire back staff and restart operations as the county moves toward a phase two reopening process on June 5, he added.

The city voted 5-1 to remove restrictions on lodging, hotels, vacation rentals and campgrounds beginning at 6 a.m. on Tuesday

Barber and councilors Morrisey, Randy Frank, Tita Montero and Steve Wright voted in favor of the resolution. Councilor Tom Horning voted against the plan, advocating the city adhere to county and state guidelines on lifting lodging restrictions rather than acting on its own. Councilor Dana Phillips was absent.

"This is a decision that about half of the people are going to be very happy about," Barber said after the vote. "The other half are going to be unhappy. I think this is a good decision based on what the lodging people have requested. It doesn't fully implement their request, but it's very close."

## Airbnb: City said there was no clear directive

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The Oregonian reported Thursday that following inquires from a reporter, Airbnb changed course.

"Airbnb is grateful to city leaders for their efforts to provide economic relief to those impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, including our host community, and we are working diligently to ensure hosts receive the appropriate tax refunds as outlined in the city's tourism relief program," the company said in a statement.

Rahl said the company called the city on Wednesday and scheduled a meeting to discuss the issue. He said that although the city encouraged Airbnb to return the money to property owners, there was not a clear directive.

"Could we have built a process to try and figure out, OK, what are all the homes that are on Airbnb, where should all this money return be returned

to? Yeah, I guess we could build that," he said. "But our rule on this was we're going to return the money to where it came from."

Money and Hura said that before The Oregonian asked questions, Seaside and Airbnb were unwilling to fix the error.

"The most frustrating thing at this point has been the lack of being able to get a clear response from either Airbnb or the city," Money said. "I mean, the Airbnb's customer service system is frankly a joke. It's not in any way, shape or form intended on helping our customers or their hosts. And the city, frankly, isn't a heck of a lot better.

"You can't get anybody on the phone that has any decision rights that can actually get anything done," Money said of Airbnb.

"And then you got the city that just won't respond and doesn't feel any sense of accountability when frankly,

this whole thing just became a problem because of their actions, however unintentionally it was."

Hura said the longer it took to resolve the problem, it became less about the money and more about holding the city accountable.

"The reason why I'm involved is because of the lack of integrity and the lack of responsibility on our City Council," he said.

"These are the people that are supposed to protect us. It's a gut-wrenching feeling to know that the people that are supposed to protect you don't even care. They turn their back on you. The only time they'll communicate to us is if we maybe don't pay our taxes on time — they'll be right there — they want their money.

"But if we need any kind of help or assistance from them, they won't even reply. And it's just embarrassing. It is shameful."

## Lodging: County is taking comments on the draft plan

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The state allowed the county to enter the first phase of reopening on May 15, including gatherings of up to 25 people. The decision also allowed businesses such as restaurants, bars, gyms, child care and salons to reopen with limited capacity and heightened sanitation and safety requirements.

County Manager Don Bohn said the plan to reopen lodging was timed to coincide with the expected lifting of restrictions on nonessential travel by the state as most counties likely enter a second phase of reopening June 5.

The plan will allow hotels, campgrounds and vacation rentals to operate at 60% capacity during a second phase from June 5 to June 25. Lodgings would then be able to open fully if the county enters a third phase.

Bohn and Warrenton Mayor Henry Balensifer said the plan strikes a balance between public health and economic concerns.

"We know daytrips will increase after the travel ban expires and Fort Stevens opens," Balensifer said in a text message. "As a result lodging then would assist in management of visitors, rather than the current situation where opening lodging would entice people who would then likely push the limits on closed areas, as has been seen in some more remote areas that opened where vandalism, damage and human waste issues have occurred."

The plan comes after Cannon Beach and Seaside approved fully reopening lodging on Tuesday, after the Memorial Day

weekend.

Bohn said the county spoke to all five cities about reopening, but that the conditions in South County led the two cities to go in another direction. The economies of Seaside and Cannon Beach are more dependent on lodging than other parts of the county.

Astoria Mayor Bruce Jones said he, Balensifer, Bohn and Gearhart Mayor Matt Brown felt it was more prudent to wait until a second phase of reopening before attracting more visitors.

"Really the only release valve we have available to us to restrict the number of visitors coming into the community is the lodging piece," Jones said. "We can't physically restrict the number of day-trippers coming into town or coming through town, but the lodging allows us one relief valve where we can reduce the total number of people coming into town, and we think doing so during phase one is important."

The phased reopening of the county depends on benchmarks like testing, contact tracing, hospital capacity and equipment supply to treat a surge of virus patients.

The county experienced a spike in coronavirus cases this month after outbreaks at Bornstein Seafoods in Astoria and Pacific Seafood in Warrenton. State health regulators still accepted the county's plan to partially reopen, feeling the outbreaks were contained.

"We have had more cases, but we haven't had hospitalizations," Bohn said.

The county and state will continue watching the

health metrics that drive reopening, Bohn said. Jones feels the county and cities, including Seaside and Cannon Beach, will work together if the health situation worsens.

"This one issue of hotel reopening dates is the only issue where we have differed within the county," Jones said. "Other than that, we've been in alignment on everything, and we still have great professional relations between all the cities and the county."

"I would think if the county's (coronavirus) situation takes a turn for the worst with a rash of hospitalizations, then I think you'll see the cities talking to each other in an effort to come up with a reunified response."

Seaside and Cannon Beach have also opened beaches to visitors. The county, meanwhile, has closed beach access to vehicles on its two approaches at Sunset and Del Rey beaches during weekends through at least the second phase of reopening.

"We have an addendum to our reopening plan that deals with the beach access during phase one, and we will be looking at that as we go closer to phase two, and having a conversation with cities about how we might manage beach access during phase two," Bohn said. "We haven't had that conversation yet."

The county is taking comments on the draft plan — available at [co.clatsop.or.us](http://co.clatsop.or.us) — via email at [commissioners@co.clatsop.or.us](mailto:commissioners@co.clatsop.or.us). Public comment will also be taken at a special May 29 electronic meeting of the Board of Commissioners.



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