

OPINION



the Astorian

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Founded in 1873

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OUR VIEW

Brownson, Hilton for Astoria City Council

Astoria reached a milestone this year by completing the Riverfront Vision Plan. Over a decade in the making, the blueprint provides a sense of order and predictability to land use along the Columbia River from Uniontown to Alderbrook.

The deliberations show the city can balance competing interests, protecting our historic character while preserving a working waterfront. That balance will be necessary as the city looks to improve the western gateway, revive Uniontown, redevelop Heritage Square and remodel the Astoria Library.

Before the coronavirus pandemic disrupted our lives, Astoria was also under pressure to respond to homelessness, offer incentives for workforce housing and develop a strategy for economic diversification.

For all the promise of the past several years, there were still too many empty storefronts, too much vacant or underused property, well before the virus hit.

When considering City Council candidates for endorsement in the November election, we looked at whether they have a clear-eyed, pragmatic view of Astoria’s challenges, have the potential to be effective, but also an ability to create some friction.

Ward 2

We endorse City Councilor Tom Brownson in Ward 2, which covers the South Slope, the western edge of Uniontown and the industrial piers at the Port of Astoria.



Brownson, who has worked as a contractor, takes a measured, deliberative approach to policy questions. “What I think that I bring to the table — I’d like to say things like thoughtfulness, fairness. I listen to



Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

Riverfront development is a critical issue in Astoria.

others. I work for consensus. I think that fairly well explains what I do up there,” he said. “I work hard to be prepared for meetings. I want to know the subjects well. I ask questions. I’m not afraid to ask questions.”

Brownson was a voice of caution in the rush to strengthen development restrictions in the Bridge Vista section of the Riverfront Vision Plan last year after backlash over the city’s approval of a four-story Fairfield Inn and Suites.

He favored carving out plan districts within Bridge Vista for the Port and for the Astoria Warehousing property being redeveloped by Fort George Brewery. Without the flexibility of the plan districts, development restrictions could handcuff the Port and Fort George and undermine economic viability.

Brownson was unopposed when he ran for City Council in 2016, so he did not have to compete for voters. This year, he does.

Floyd Holcom, the owner of Pier 39, is the challenger.

The U.S. Army combat veteran has consulting, development and emergency management expertise and served on the Port Commission. Raised in Astoria, he believes hometown voices and business interests are missing in debates at City Hall.

While his “Astorians for Astoria” campaign theme lacks nuance, he does have a point. Our politics, especially around development, often seem weighted toward people who have moved here from bigger cities or who are retired and understandably want to protect a postcard version of Astoria.

Our concern is the tightrope Holcom could face if elected. He would represent the Port on the west side, while holding a significant development stake near the Port’s East Mooring Basin and around Pier 39.

Holcom explained he would recuse himself if conflicts of interests arise and speak as a citizen, not as a city councilor, if necessary.

We saw an aggressive side to Holcom’s advocacy last year after he was unable to get support from Clatsop County for \$1.9 million in state money to restore the Salvage Chief for use in disaster response. He called the county’s skepticism over upgrading the World War II-era craft “political back-stabbing” and blamed the county for the setback in Salem.

In his endorsement interview, Holcom described disaster response as “life-and-death issues,” but doubted he would bring that same level of passion to most city concerns. Even so, the exchange with the county was a window into his leadership style.

Ward 4

We endorse Tom Hilton in Ward 4, which covers Uppertown and Alderbrook.

Like Holcom, Hilton, who operates Hanthorn Crab Co. at Pier 39, was raised in Astoria and feels a sense of history is lost in the city’s politics.



Tom Hilton

“I’m an Astorian,” he said. “I’ve listened to the people of the neighborhood. I’ve listened to the businesses of the neighborhood. And that’s who I represent and that’ll be what I do.

“It won’t be about me. It’ll be about what the people of that neighborhood want, the vision that they see for their future and the changes they feel that need to be made.”

The Ward 4 seat is open because City Councilor Jessamyn Grace West, who was appointed last year, chose not to run for election. Our choice to replace her is based mostly on having a blend of different backgrounds on the City Council.

A FisherPoet with deep ties to commercial fishing, Hilton would bring the perspective of a local trying to build a small business. We also think he can be a contrarian — an important quality, since city councilors are supposed to act as a check on city staff, not an extension.

We hope the other candidates also continue to take an interest in local government.

Lisa Morley, a workplace safety consultant, was a leader in organizing neighbors to save Birch Field in Alderbrook. The city had considered the park underused and a potential site for housing before Morley and others petitioned to preserve it as green space.

Joshua Conklin, who works at Costco in Warrenton, has experience in the service sector, a growing segment of our regional economy often overlooked in policy discussions.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Building Gearhart up

Making the choice to represent your city as a mayor or city councilor is an incredible commitment. These are not paid positions. They require an extraordinary amount of time from those who serve. Monthly and special-issue meetings, county meetings, even changing travel plans can come into play. Each month there is an enormous amount of reading. One must be informed and current about ordinances, local and state law. All of our current city officials deserve our respect and recognition. I endorse Paulina Cockrum for Gearhart mayor, and Reita Fackerell and Dan Jesse for Gearhart city councilors, because all three bring to the table knowledge and experience. All three believe in serving our community. All three have demonstrated the ability to work with our present mayor, Matt Brown, and councilor, Kerry Smith. Paulina and Dan have long been involved with the Community Emergency Response Team, helping to prepare our community for disaster.

Dan formerly served on the Gearhart Planning Commission. Reita serves on the food bank board, and has written numerous grants for local organizations. Why do I support these three? They represent you, not themselves. Do they always agree? Not on your life, and you wouldn’t want them to. Do they always get their own way? Never. They do their best to represent you through compromise. They agonize over important decisions which will affect our town. These three are about building Gearhart up, not tearing it down. SUSAN EDY Gearhart

Very impressive

The Alderbrook neighborhood is located alongside the river in Astoria’s Ward 4. A few years ago, the mayor was looking around to liquidate unused land, and she honed in on the neighborhood ball field.

The city had quit maintaining the field and usage had dropped, so why not sell it? The City Council agreed, and they declared the field surplus property. The problem for the mayor was an anticipated reaction from the neighbors. We formed a group in opposition, and what followed were difficult conversations with the city, which ultimately concluded in an agreement with the Friends of Birch Field assuming maintenance. I’m telling you this story because the person instrumental for working out our agreement between the city and Friends of Birch Field was none other than neighbor and City Council candidate for Ward 4, Lisa Morley. Could the neighborhood have prevailed without her? Maybe. But it was very impressive to see her dedication and the way she handled the agreement details. Vote for Morley. JIM STOFFER Astoria

Safeguard

For a number of years now, both my wife and I have been very grateful for our monthly Social Security checks. We are even more appreciative of this program, that we both contributed to for over 40 years, as we navigate this pandemic and its many challenges. Though the Social Security trust fund is strong, we know that changes will need to happen to keep it solvent for the next 100 years. I ask all recipients and future recipients as well: “Whom do you trust to maintain a viable Social Security, President Donald Trump or Joe Biden?” Our current president said that he will terminate the Social Security payroll tax if he gets reelected. According to the actuary for Social Security, cutting the payroll tax would put the whole system in jeopardy by 2023. Biden says he will not change payroll taxes for anyone earning less than \$400,000, but will increase the tax on those who make more than that amount. This change would keep the system healthy for many years to

come in the amount of money it will raise. It will also improve the financial security of all Americans who retire. Vote for Biden and the Democratic ticket to safeguard this precious and vital institution that has kept many older Americans out of poverty for over 80 years. NED HEAVENRICH Astoria

Proven leadership I am urging everyone in Astoria’s Ward 4 to vote for Lisa Morley. Lisa has a track record of leadership as a project manager and program manager in the private sector, as well as community involvement in helping create and lead the Friends of Birch Field and Park in Alderbrook to save it from being sold by the city. Since I live on Birch Street, I drive by the park regularly, and can verify that they have kept their commitment to fully maintain the park, and have even added improvements. They’ve also added playground equipment for young children, so young families can freely gather there. By dealing with the city and negotiating its lease, Lisa is fully aware of the city’s desire to keep park and recreation maintenance expenses to a minimum. Morley will fit right in as an experienced community people-oriented leader on the Astoria City Council. FRANK SPENCE Astoria

Go Fish! During the 2019-20 school year, the Astoria High School CommuniCare organization was a part of Joshua Fisher’s Introduction to Business class. I had the privilege of being the student ambassador. We began by developing our mission, based upon results from a student body survey. Our focus then transitioned to our fundraising goal of raising up to \$1,500 to be matched 10 to 1 by the Harold and Arlene

Schnitzer CARE Foundation. The group chose to support those suffering from mental health and homelessness by funding Clatsop Community Action and Helping Hands Reentry Outreach Centers. I am extremely grateful for the opportunity to continue serving in the student ambassador role, and look forward to working with the class and our community to support Clatsop County. Astoria High School’s principal, Lynn Jackson, said, “the collaborative support received from local community organizations and partners is vital in helping Astoria High School serve our students and families. These supports help our students meet fundamental human needs, and therefore allow them to focus on their educational goals and interests. We are very appreciative of these partnerships and support.” Fisher is excited as well. “Inspiring young adults to serve our community by volunteering at the Iron Chef, Day of Giving and coordinating with Baked Alaska for a profit-share day is heartwarming.” Just because the world is changing does not mean we have to stop giving back. Stay supportive Clatsop County, and Go Fish! ANNALYSE STEELE Warrenton

Lovely respite

During this time of political and social strife, my husband and I found a bit of lovely respite on a Monday night in Astoria. We celebrated our anniversary at the Silver Salmon Grille, sitting by the front window, enjoying cocktails and reminiscing of how we met. We watched other couples and families walk by. The service was outstanding, and the food by chef Jeff Martin extraordinary and sumptuous. We reflected on how Astoria has much to offer, even in this world of social distancing and mask-wearing. What a lovely evening suspended in time, yet reflecting of better times ahead. DELORES SULLIVAN Gearhart