

Tourism funds keep Astoria bathrooms clean

By EDWARD STRATTON
The Astorian

Tourism funds will keep two main public bathrooms in Astoria cleaned five days a week after federal coronavirus relief lapsed.

Over the summer, Astoria received regular complaints about feces, syringes and other vandalism of public restrooms, especially in those under the Doughboy Monument in Uniontown and on Exchange Street near a memorial plaque for Clark Gable.

A previous contractor declined to continue cleaning the city’s bathrooms for even double the money. The new contractor, Associated Cleaning Services, wanted more than three times the money for the same level of cleaning.

The city agreed to a scaled-back contract of \$57,697 that only covered cleaning the two main public bathrooms three days a week, including \$11,258 in coronavirus relief funds for two extra weekly visits to each of the two bathrooms through last year. But a new stimulus bill approved by Congress did not include any direct support for state and local governments this year.

After negotiating a lower landscaping contract, parks staff identified an extra \$16,887 in the Promote Astoria tourism fund that could be shifted toward the bathrooms. The City Council on Monday approved shifting the money to keep cleanings at five days a week.

Sarah Lu Heath, the executive director of the Astoria Downtown Historic District Association, said that keeping the two bathrooms cleaned more frequently is more important with the closure of many buildings to the public.

“We’ve lost the use of a couple restrooms downtown, with City Hall and the aquatic center being closed, and of course with restaurants largely closed to indoor dining,” she said. “I know both in the Uniontown and downtown, a lot of those restrooms might be what the customer used previously.”

Parks staff clean bathrooms at Tapiola Park and repair damage at all bathrooms. The city also pays for three port-a-potties along the Astoria Riverwalk.

Associated Cleaning Services is now being paid \$74,584 to clean the two bathrooms downtown and in Uniontown five days a week over a 10-month period at a time when many



Edward Stratton/The Astorian

Tourism funds will keep the public bathrooms on Exchange Street downtown and under the Doughboy Monument in Uniontown cleaned five days a week.

part-time staff at the parks department have been furloughed because of the pandemic. But Jonah Dart-McLean, the parks director, said there are background costs with hiring and training part-time staff for cleaning that make contracting out the janitorial services advantageous for the city.

“Going out for bid each year for the contract, (we) have just seen those costs increase, partly due to COVID from the cleaning perspective, in terms of the number of hours it takes to clean something safely,” he said. “And then procuring supplies has become more expensive.

“In addition to that, too, we have a specific janitorial license that an entity or the individual needs to have through the (Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries). So it’s not that anybody could take on the contract. They’d have to get licensed through the state.”

City Manager Brett Estes cautioned that the tourism revenue in the Promote Astoria fund has also been hurt by the coronavirus.

“If this is a prioritization — that we want to be able to keep having the restrooms cleaned at this rate — then this will be rolled into the financial report, which will be coming to the City Council later on in January, saying that this was a needed expenditure, and then looking at what other items might not be able to be taken on this current fiscal year,” Estes said.

Mayor Bruce Jones waxed hopeful that if Democrats win two runoff elections in Georgia and take control of the U.S. Senate, the chances of a new stimulus bill this year with more support for state and local governments would increase.

Ham: ‘Zero issue with their decision’

Continued from Page A1

Police Department.” Enterprise City Administrator Lacey McQuead told the Wallowa County Chieftain last week. “I am not able to go into detail regarding this decision.”

The decision to rescind the offer was made after a three-part hiring process, which included an application scoring committee and interviews by a panel consisting of the City Council’s executive committee, law enforcement personnel and community leaders. The decision was finalized through a formal recommendation made to the council by the Enterprise Police Committee.

“I always knew it was a possibility it wasn’t a done deal,” Ham said. “I have zero issue with their decision. They just decided to go in a different direction to look at some other candidates.”

The vacancy arose after Enterprise Police Chief Joel Fish was elected sheriff for Wallowa County.

The city made the offer to the 25-year law enforcement veteran after discussing the matter in executive session Nov. 9. He

accepted the conditional offer Nov. 13.

The move was “strictly a personal decision my wife and I have thought about, contemplated and researched for the past several years,” Ham said in November. “If this works out, it’s a good time to make that move.”

Ham, 50, was raised in Salem. He started his law enforcement career as a reserve officer in Independence and received his first paid police job in October 1995, when he joined Seaside police as a patrolman. Ham has been police chief in Seaside since 2014.

In the new year, Ham plans to lead the police department in a time of changing protocols as a result of the coronavirus pandemic.

With 17 full-time officers, the department is seeking to hire a community service officer and patrol officer. He plans on introducing the city’s lieutenant, sergeant and corporal promotions at a future City Council meeting.

“We’re looking forward to continuing our work here in Seaside,” Ham said.

Bill Bradshaw of the Wallowa County Chieftain contributed to this report.

Parklets: Foul weather could be an issue

Continued from Page A1

lic right of way, usually a parking space — as a creative measure to help bars and restaurants limited to indoor dining because of the increased danger of spreading the virus.

The City Council first approved a parklet outside the retail shop Cargo on 11th Street in 2016. Since the pandemic began, the council has approved three more, including two on 10th Street outside the Merry Time Bar and Grill and the Green Door Cafe, and another outside Blaylock’s Whiskey Bar on 13th Street.

But restaurateurs have been hesitant to invest in uncovered outdoor seating during foul weather.

Megan Leatherman, the city’s community development director, said businesses can come to city staff with plans to secure and weatherize coverings before a recommendation is brought to City Council. The city will not allow permanent walls, but will consider coverings to protect parklets from wind and rain.

“It’s going to be dependent on where it’s exactly located, if it’s protected at all,” she said. “I keep thinking of Blaylock’s, and the wind there goes down that street differently than it would down, say 10th or 11th” streets.

Michael Angiletta, a co-owner of Blaylock’s, said he plans to move forward sooner with a parklet now that he can have a cover. But the parklet would only be in addition to indoor seating of at least 25% capacity, he said.

“It’s not profitable for us to go with one outdoor parklet and no indoor seating,” he said.

Merry Time closed after the government freeze on indoor dining. Owners Terry and Todd Robinett plan to reopen Jan. 29 if indoor dining is still allowed. Todd Robinett said he could build a parklet on 10th Street as soon as February.

Kendall Padgett-McEuen, a co-owner of the Green Door Cafe, said the restaurant would move forward with its parklet on 10th Street as money and labor allow.

The parklet pilot program was approved for the duration of the coronavirus emergency, which the City Council on Monday extended through March 3 to coincide with Gov. Kate Brown’s state of emergency declaration. After the emergency is over, parklet coverings would have to come down.

“We will come back for a larger discussion about parklets after the pandemic,” City Manager Brett Estes said. “But it was felt that this privilege should be treated a little different, and that any coverings would come down at the end of the pandemic.”

City councilors generally supported providing restaurants more flexibility to create outdoor seating. New City Councilor Tom Hilton, in his first meeting Monday after being sworn in to represent the east side’s Ward 4, wondered about people seeking shelter in covered parklets after business hours.

The city passed a policy in December allowing restaurateurs to evict noncustomers sitting at outdoor chairs and tables.

“I don’t know if that policy applies after business hours,” City Attorney Blair Henningsgaard said. “And I’m not sure that the restaurateur would actually need to evict somebody at that time.”

County reports 19 new virus cases

The Astorian

Clatsop County reported 19 new coronavirus cases over the past few days.

On Wednesday, the county reported 11 new cases.

The cases include a male between 10 and 19 living in the southern part of the county. The others live in the northern part of the county, including three women and a man in their 20s, a man and a woman in their 30s, a man in his 40s, a man in his 50s and a man and a woman

in their 70s.

All 11 were recovering at home.

On Tuesday, the county reported eight new cases.

The cases involve a man in his 30s, two women in their 30s, two women in their 50s, two women in their 80s and a woman in her 90s living in the northern part of the county.

All eight were recovering at home.

The county has recorded 625 cases since March. According to the county, 10 were hospitalized and three have died.

Director: Crockett will be around to help transition

Continued from Page A1

stepping down. She was hired four years ago to replace longtime director Rosemary Baker-Monaghan.

Crockett will continue as director until the organization hires her replacement, a process that could take anywhere from six months to a year. She plans to stay in Astoria and will continue to serve on the fundraising committee after the new director is hired.

It was not an easy decision to make, Crockett said, but she had been considering the possibility of leaving for the past year. She felt she had accomplished much of what she hoped to at the theater. The disruption to the musical community caused by the coronavirus pandemic, she said, also made her reexamine her own priorities and desires as a professional musician.

Though she had remained involved with a few regional symphonic and chamber music groups since becoming the Liberty’s executive director, she had to step back from touring, playing in bands and the other performance opportunities that once filled her life as a musician. Now Crockett hopes to focus again on playing clarinet professionally and fostering new opportunities for musicians to connect with each other and bring classical music to the community in creative ways.

“Jen’s just incredible,” said Josh Stellmon, the theater’s board president. “She has the perfect balance of her performing arts background and her organizational skills. My goal at least would be to find somebody with similar skills. I’m not sure if that’s in this community or if we need to find somebody outside the community to fill that role.”

The job at the Liberty was one of several firsts for Crockett. It was her first time running a nonprofit and her first time taking on the role and responsibilities of an executive director. While she developed key relationships with donors and residents and ushered in a new diversity of performances, she believes someone with more experience in nonprofits could help guide the theater through a new type of growth.

“I knew I wanted to go out on a high point,” Crockett said. “I knew I didn’t want to outlive my usefulness at the theater. Everything I’ve tried to do over the last couple years has been with succession in mind.

“I feel strongly that I’ve gotten the theater to a place where it can be handed off,” she added. “We’ve built community partnerships and we’ve made people really like the theater again and I think the next person can take it to a higher level.”

Like other performing arts centers across the country, the theater closed its doors in March due to the coronavirus pandemic and has been wrestling ever since with how to stay afloat.

While the theater was dark, Crockett helped organize virtual events and coordinated the formation of a coalition of 17 performing arts groups in Clatsop County to pool resources and information and advocate for relief funds for local arts groups. Now, as



Colin Murphey/The Astorian

Jennifer Crockett is stepping down as executive director of the Liberty Theatre.

vaccines begin to be administered, focus is turning to a possible gradual reopening later this year.

“I think that’s going to be an easier transition than the transition to no performances at all and canceling a whole slate,” Stellmon said.

Still, he is relieved Crockett will be around to help guide that transition.

In addition to organizing and fundraising for the theater’s \$3.3 million capital campaign, Crockett worked to develop partnerships with area schools, offering workshops and annual field trips.

“I was largely a public school band kid so I’m personally invested in the education that goes on with the schools and working with teachers to find out what they need from us,” Crockett said.

She hopes these and similar efforts will continue under the new director.

The board has not met yet to discuss exactly what the organization will be looking for in Crockett’s replacement. Stellmon hopes whoever they hire will, in particular, continue Crockett’s commitment to booking a variety of performances, from classical string quartets to rock ‘n’ roll bands. This diversity drew new audiences to the historic theater, he said.

“I view the theater, personally, as a venue to provide the arts to everybody in Clatsop County and I don’t want to leave anybody out,” Stellmon said.

Steve Forrester, the former editor and publisher of The Astorian and the president and CEO of EO Media Group, who helped spearhead the Liberty Theatre’s restoration, described Crockett as “the right person at the right time.”

A former theater board member, Forrester was on the hiring group that offered the executive director job to Crockett in 2016.

Over the past four years, Crockett has helped define and refine the organization’s direction and mission, Forrester said. He pointed to her skills at building relationships in the community, with local governments and among donors, as well as her ability to develop programs and book performances that enticed many to the theater.

The fact that she was able to organize an online gala in the middle of the coronavirus pandemic that raised \$175,000 was “astounding,” he said.

2020

READERS' CHOICE AWARDS

NOMINATE NOW!

WWW.DISCOVEROURCOAST.COM