



Nicole Bales/The Astorian

The Cannon Beach public works director co-owns the company that produced signs for the city during the coronavirus pandemic.

Probe: Investigation into the complaint is ongoing

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While La Bonte had provided verbal notices of a conflict of interest in the past, she does not seem to have properly notified the necessary people about a conflict of interest in writing, the investigator noted.

The investigator said it does not appear La Bonte used her position to benefit financially.

An investigation into the complaint is ongoing.

The complaint alleges La Bonte bypassed state provisions to hire Cannon Beach Design Co. to produce and install signs at the start of the coronavirus pandemic last year.

In a preliminary review, the state investigator wrote that — according to information provided by St. Denis and La Bonte — St. Denis told La Bonte to order the signs from Cannon Beach Design Co. so they could be available quickly.

“I did not authorize this work; the city manager did,” La Bonte wrote in an explanation to the state. “I did not sign any invoices for this work; the city manager did. I simply gathered details that allowed the city manager to make an informed decision.”

The complaint referred to two separate times when the city used the company.

In the spring of 2020, large signs went up at city entrances stating that, “Due to COVID-19 Cannon Beach is closed to visitors.” City leadership felt the signs were necessary after an influx of visitors descended on the town despite rising concerns about the coronavirus and a stay-at-home order from Gov. Kate Brown.

Another round of signs featuring animals wearing face masks went up later to remind people to wear protective face coverings.

The total cost of the signs came to \$2,677.50.

In the state’s preliminary review of the com-

plaint, La Bonte wrote that she made “every effort to follow the city’s process for keeping my relationship with this vendor separate from the work I personally authorize. I feel I was able to do that, even while under the pressure of a time crunch and a national pandemic.”

Rusty Morris, a Manzanita resident who filed the complaint with the Ethics Commission, has also urged St. Denis and the City Council to investigate the contracts for the signs. He said La Bonte should be placed on administrative leave pending the outcome.

“The taxpayers and this community deserve an explanation,” he wrote in an email to the city.

The Ethics Commission confirmed that a second complaint has been filed against La Bonte, but could not provide details until a preliminary review is complete.

St. Denis told the City Council the second complaint is tied to concerns raised by an employee in 2018 about how La Bonte disposed of wood fence posts.

The posts had been stored in the city’s wastewater yard for two to three years. The posts were not usable under the city’s fencing standards and deemed surplus, St. Denis said.

La Bonte contacted Fort Stevens State Park to see if they wanted the posts, according to St. Denis. When the state park declined, she offered them to three local contractors and a handyman who does work for the city. A contractor who was doing work on her home took the posts.

The people behind the complaints disagree with St. Denis’ characterization. Citing invoices, they say the fencing cost more than St. Denis claims and should not have been considered surplus material under the city’s code.

Settlement: State now oversees the contract with Clatsop Behavioral Healthcare

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characterized the investigations as biased and procedurally flawed.

The Astorian reported in 2019 that investigations into abuse and neglect at adult foster homes on the North Coast uncovered a lack of oversight in the county’s developmental disability program.

At the time, the county was responsible for overseeing a contract with Clatsop Behavioral Healthcare, a private nonprofit, to coordinate with providers and help people with intellectual and developmental disabilities like autism, cerebral palsy, Down syndrome and epilepsy.

Using the state’s public

records law, the newspaper obtained documents that showed the state’s concern over management of the program and how the state nearly pulled the contract in 2018 unless changes were made.

Many of the issues surrounding the lack of oversight stemmed from the state investigations into KC Care.

A few months after the state’s concerns became public, the county Board of Commissioners voted unanimously to shift oversight of the developmental disability program entirely to the Department of Human Services. The state now oversees the contract with Clatsop Behavioral Healthcare.



R.J. Marx/The Astorian

A commercial building in Seaside sits on one of the sites hotelier Masudur Khan aims to build apartments.

Hotelier: Hopes to start the projects in September and complete them within a year

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River Run, Khan’s second proposed apartment development on S. Holladay Drive, would be located between Riley’s Restaurant and the Red Lion Inn & Suites. The proposed 59-unit development will replace existing commercial and residential buildings with three separate apartment buildings and one building dedicated to office space, a lobby and housekeeping.

River Run is “a beautiful location for an apartment,” Khan said, sitting opposite the Necanicum River and close to downtown and restaurants.

Building A will face the water and will be a three-story building with nine two-bedroom apartments on each floor for a total of 27 units.

Building B, along the south property line, will be three stories, with eight two-bedroom apartments on each floor for a total of 24 units.

A mixed-use building will be three stories with two 1,200-square-foot office spaces on the ground floor. The second and third floors will provide four one-bedroom apartments on each floor for a total of eight units.

Seaside resident Patrick Roshay said notice for the meeting had come late. He said that the Necanicum River could be damaged or wildlife threatened from the proposed development. Emergency vehicles would have limited access to the area. “It’s a safety concern,” he said. “In the plans themselves, there isn’t a lot of wiggle room.”

Scott Alderson, who lives in Sandpiper Village, echoed those concerns. “I don’t think fire trucks are really great at 90 degree turns, which means we no longer have fire protection,” he said.

He also expressed concerns about noise and traffic.

Planning commissioners unanimously approved both applications, setting conditions that the developer address parking spaces, exterior lighting, drainage and other issues.

Khan said he hopes to start the projects in September and complete them within a year.

With two developments and the recent purchase of a single-family home, Khan has shown his confidence in the future of S. Holladay Drive. “I like the river,” he said. “I’ve always been a water guy.”

Vaccines: ‘It’s time for individual responsibility’

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challenged Brown over the policy, including state House Republicans. They argue that the rule violates privacy and personal choice.

Warrenton Mayor Henry Balensifer has also been publicly critical of the requirement.

Commissioner Mark Kujala, the board’s chairman, shared the county’s letter in a Facebook post saying the board stands in solidarity with businesses in Clatsop County.

“They don’t need to be the vaccine police, it’s time for some individual responsibility,” Kujala said.

Commissioner Courtney Bangs shared a similar sentiment with constituents.

“I am so proud of my fellow commissioners and I for standing up for our businesses and churches in our community,” Bangs wrote in a Facebook post. “No business or church should have to be put in a potentially confrontational position of policing a mandate that even our president doesn’t stand behind. Nor should they be faced with stringent punitive measures that could potentially put them out of business.”

“It’s time for individual responsibility, it’s time for the chains to be removed, it’s time for us to join our neighboring states and the majority of our nation. We stand in solidarity with our Clatsop County businesses and churches.”

Brown stood by her guidance during a Friday press conference. She said it gives businesses a choice for a very short period of time while the state nears its goal of administering at least one dose of the vaccine to 70% of Oregonians.

The governor said she anticipates reaching that target before the end of June, at which point she will lift mask and social distancing requirements and risk level restrictions.

“I want to be very clear that we are able to reopen like this because of the efficacy of the vaccines,” Brown said. “For those of you who are vaccinated, you’ve helped us reach this point and you are protected from



Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

County commissioners want Gov. Kate Brown to drop a proof of vaccination requirement on businesses and churches.

this virus. However, there are still Oregonians who need to take extra precautions to feel safe and to stay safe.

“When we cross the 70% threshold, it doesn’t mean we are stopping our vaccine rollout. Quite the contrary. It means we have more hard work in front of us to vaccinate the next 10% and more of Oregonians. It means we must double down to keep reaching every community with information and vaccines.”

The governor and Patrick Allen, the director of the Oregon Health Authority, described what they called two pandemics.

“As we begin the month of June, we’re nearly six months into Oregon’s COVID-19 vaccination drive,” Allen said. “It’s been close to six weeks since we expanded eligibility to all adults on April 19. During these past few months, we’ve seen the virus come roaring back and then begin to retreat. In that time, a stark picture has emerged. There isn’t one pandemic in Oregon. There are two. One is a pandemic that is dying out among people who are vaccinated, and the other is a pandemic that is raging as fiercely as ever among people who are unvaccinated.”

“The data clearly show that if you are fully vaccinated, you can begin to put the pandemic behind you.”

Allen cited Clatsop County with having a high vaccination rate and low case rate.

The county has vaccinated more than 60% of residents 16 and older, according to the health authority, and

moved into lower risk for the virus on Friday.

The county has set a goal of vaccinating 27,533 people — or 70% of the population — against the virus to try to reach herd immunity. As of

Friday, 17,270 people were fully vaccinated.

The county has recorded 1,011 virus cases since the pandemic began. According to the county, 25 were hospitalized and eight have died.



Taken by member Jeanette M.

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