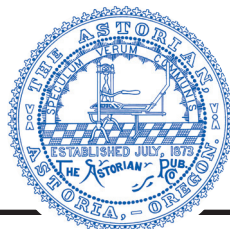


# OPINION



# the Astorian

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## OUR VIEW

# The right call at Heritage Square

The pit at Heritage Square has long been a symbol of the lack of urgency in Astoria redevelopment.

Few thought when the foundation of the old Safeway collapsed after heavy rains in 2010 that the hole would sit empty more than a decade later.

We believe the City Council — acting as the Astoria Development Commission — made the right call this month by declaring that the space should be used for workforce housing.

In a signal of intent, the City Council followed the announcement by holding a special meeting to launch the development code and comprehensive plan amendments necessary to redevelop Heritage Square.

Any code and comprehensive plan changes should be carefully vetted. Potential financial incentives to attract private developers should also be thoughtfully balanced with the objectives of the project and the number of new housing units.

But we should recognize this moment as a chance to finally make some progress on an eyesore downtown.

Housing is the most pressing public-policy issue in Clatsop County. The lack of rental housing, in particular, makes it harder to hire and retain workers. As our region becomes a more attractive tourist destination and a popular place for retirees and transplants to live, the cost of housing will likely increase and the gap between what many workers earn and what they can afford to pay in rent will continue to grow.

We believe our county and city leaders should be more aggressive about luring a range of new businesses — small manufacturing, data centers, health care and research — so we are not overly reliant on tourism. But we can't compete without better housing stock.



Moss covers the walls of the pit at Heritage Square.

Lydia Ely/The Astorian

We also won't likely reduce our homeless population without more lower-cost rentals that can serve as the next steps out of transitional housing.

A countywide housing study in 2019 found that there is a sufficient supply of land and housing units. The problem is that too much of the supply is soaked up by the second home and vacation rental markets. The study recommended more housing opportunities at affordable price points, more multifamily rental housing and more townhomes, cottage clusters and medium-density housing intended for first-time homebuyers.

Developers have stepped forward with housing projects in Warrenton and Seaside that could help meet local demand. In Astoria, projects in Uniontown and Uppertown have some promise.

While we all want to protect

what makes Astoria unique, there are too many vacant or underused properties downtown. There are too many workers struggling to afford a place to live.

We think the City Council has been too cautious and has often allowed land use debates to get hopelessly mired in code-speak. The declaration about workforce housing at Heritage Square is refreshing.

Ideally, the project could involve open space such as a public plaza or amphitheater that would complement the Garden of Surging Waves. The city had envisioned open space for the block, so preserving some element in the design could be a selling point that might win over skeptics. The American Legion should also be part of the conversation and share long-term plans for Clatsop Post 12.

We are certain there is a way to

adjust the footprint of the Astoria Sunday Market, which uses the parking lot off of 12th and Duane streets at Heritage Square during the season. And despite public perception, a parking study released in 2020 found there is adequate parking downtown.

John Southgate, the city's redevelopment consultant, said in a September memo that he met with community stakeholders and developers about Heritage Square and is confident the city would receive interest from developers who understand the expectations.

"It is obvious that Astorians care deeply about their city, their downtown, and how important it is for the city to find a development partner who will respect community perspectives on the redevelopment of the Heritage Square site," he wrote.

Let's give one a chance.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Smile

Do you remember the old song "Pack Up Your Troubles in Your Old Kit Bag (and Smile, Smile, Smile)"?

You may not feel like smiling in these trying times, but try it. Just the act of smiling changes your attitude, and others who see your smile change theirs.

If your mask is on, smile with a twinkle in your eyes.

If ever there was a time that we needed to lift each others' spirits, it is now. So let's smile!

JIM BERNARD  
Warrenton

### An investment

The saying goes that "a rising tide lifts all boats." In our small community, this sentiment rings true. Whether directly or indirectly, investing resources into the community builds an infrastructure that benefits all of us.

Strong public schools are an integral part of that framework. This fall, there is a bond for the Knappa School District on the ballot. If passed, the funds will address critical maintenance and infrastructure needs, enhance learning spaces for students and improve the safety and security at both schools.

The proposal is accountable. There was a community advisory committee that gave input on the schools' needs, the district polled the community to elicit their opinions, and there will be a community oversight committee once passed. The school will also budget annual maintenance funds to keep up the improvements over their lifespan.

The average tax rate for this bond will be slightly less than the average rate of the bond that recently expired. Items that would be provided include new middle

school classrooms, a science lab, roofing, fire sprinklers, a gym that can be used by both schools and the public and a dedicated preschool area, among other things.

I grew up in Knappa, and attended Knappa schools before heading to college at Oregon State University. I moved back after graduating because this is home. I want to see it grow, and the people thrive.

This is an opportunity to make an investment in our kids and our community for years to come. For more information, please visit [yesknappa.org](http://yesknappa.org)

BRIAN MONTGOMERY  
Astoria

### Make fiduciary sense

I agree that the Cannon Beach Rural Fire Protection District needs additional resources to maintain operations, and I believe the City Hall needs to be safe and functional, and the police department needs to be optimized.

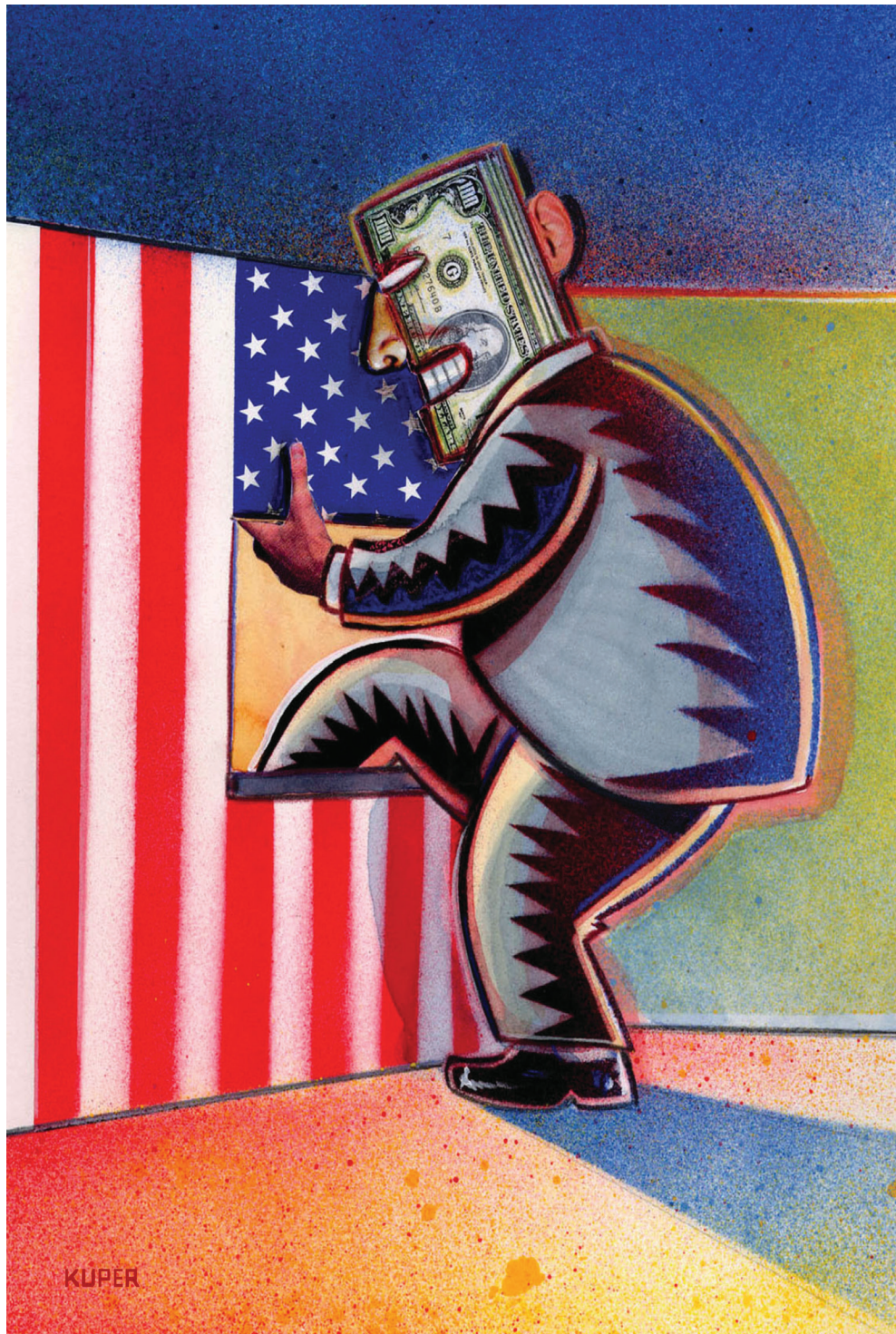
One resource that has not been discussed is the excess transient lodging tax dollars collected by local lodging properties for the city over what is budgeted. This past year, the city collected \$5.5 million, but the budget was \$3.3 million.

Many would lead us to believe that 70% of the excess money is legally required to go toward tourism or tourism-related functions or events. The truth is most of these excess dollars go directly to the city's general fund.

The question: Where does the excess money go, and why can't these dollars be leveraged toward the development of a new City Hall?

It would make fiduciary sense that these excess dollars be utilized before creating another sales tax. Please vote "no" sales tax on meals.

PATRICK NOFIELD  
Cannon Beach



KUPER