

OPINION



the Astorian

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OUR VIEW

Youth camp closure a big deal

Although it's nearly invisible to the average person living on the peninsula, Naselle Youth Camp has been an important part of Pacific County's economy and social fabric for five and a half decades. Located off State Route 4 just west of the State Route 401 junction, the camp has played a constructive role in thousands of young lives since 1966.

Over the years, it's provided steady government jobs to hundreds and hundreds of residents. Naturally, most camp workers settle in the Naselle River Valley and nearby western Wahkiakum County, while others commute from the peninsula or Clatsop County. Active and retired employees, spouses and children are everywhere you turn.

State Sen. Sid Snyder intervened nearly 20 years ago during Gov. Gary Locke's administration when the agency that oversees the youth camp first floated the idea of closing it. Thanks to Snyder's powerful influence, bolstered by strong citizen support in the county, that effort was derailed.

Closure has since been raised under both Christine Gregoire and Jay Inslee, with the Juvenile Rehabilitation leaders clearly in favor of eliminating it. Up until this year, Snyder's successors and their allies succeeded in keeping the camp alive.

As a practical matter, the fact that eliminating the youth camp kept being raised started to make it feel inevitable. The state persuasively argues that juvenile crime



The Naselle Youth Camp is scheduled to close.

THOSE WHO DEDICATED THEIR PROFESSIONAL LIVES AT NASELLE YOUTH CAMP TO HELPING YOUNG PEOPLE FIND PATHS TO SUCCESS DESERVE OUR PRAISE AND RESPECT.

has diminished, while at the same time the camp's concept of getting youthful urban lawbreakers away from bad influences and into an outdoor setting has outlived its usefulness.

Currently serving fewer than three dozen young men with a staff nearly three times that number, the youth camp's reasons for being have obviously dwindled in recent years. Its viability might have been bolstered by a robust and ongoing appeal through the years. The invisibility — inadvertent or deliber-

ate — resulted in a slow and steady move toward closure long before the final ax fell.

A last-minute intervention by Gov. Inslee to keep it open is highly unlikely. A traumatic closure process is likely, with changes centered in Naselle. The Chinook Observer will be devoting much news coverage to surrounding issues, such as what the youth camp's loss may mean for the Naselle-Grays River Valley School District and whether converting the facility into an outdoor school is viable.

If well funded and envisioned, it's conceivable such a school could be a valuable addition to the county. It must not merely be a symbolic bone to throw us for loss of the youth camp's many family-wage jobs. Time and political action will determine which way it goes. Vocal advocacy and involvement by local people will be required for any hope of success.

Those who dedicated their professional lives at Naselle Youth Camp to helping young people find paths to success deserve our praise and respect. We hope the many youths who unwillingly passed through Pacific County found their way to positive futures — maybe some now willingly visit with their families to enjoy clamming and our countless other natural and cultural assets. In the future, maybe their children or grandchildren will attend a fun and meaningful outdoor school on the former campus.

Despite the years of legislative and agency efforts, there still is a sense of unreality about such a long-standing institution ceasing to exist. The shock of the situation must not get in the way of making certain that the state provides appropriate services to nonviolent youths. Nor must youth camp employees be neglected. They have made their lives in a remote community based on a reasonable assumption their jobs would continue.

Make no mistake: this closure is a big deal, one with consequences that will play out for years.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Whose town is this, anyway?

With every issue of this newspaper, I scan the letters regarding putting the homeless right smack in the middle of the nicest part of our community ... front row center of the Astoria Sunday Market, to boot.

I keep looking for a positive letter or opinion that commends the wisdom of the City Council who jammed this crummy decision down our throats. But there are few. Few people favor this decision, apparently.

Whose town is this, anyway? I know nothing about the city charter, or if that is even what it is called, but why isn't an issue like this — that potentially impacts so many of us in such a negative manner — voted on?

DAVID TENNANT
Astoria

Show me the money

The leading voices of opposition to the development of housing on Heritage Square pine for a public square, a giant, open space for public use. They cite the success of Portland's Pioneer Square, while also decrying the affordable housing proposal, due to similarity to Portland developments — the contradiction here obviously being overlooked.

My question to these people is: Where is the money coming from? Pioneer Square was developed in the early 1980s, and cost more than \$7 million — care to adjust that for inflation?

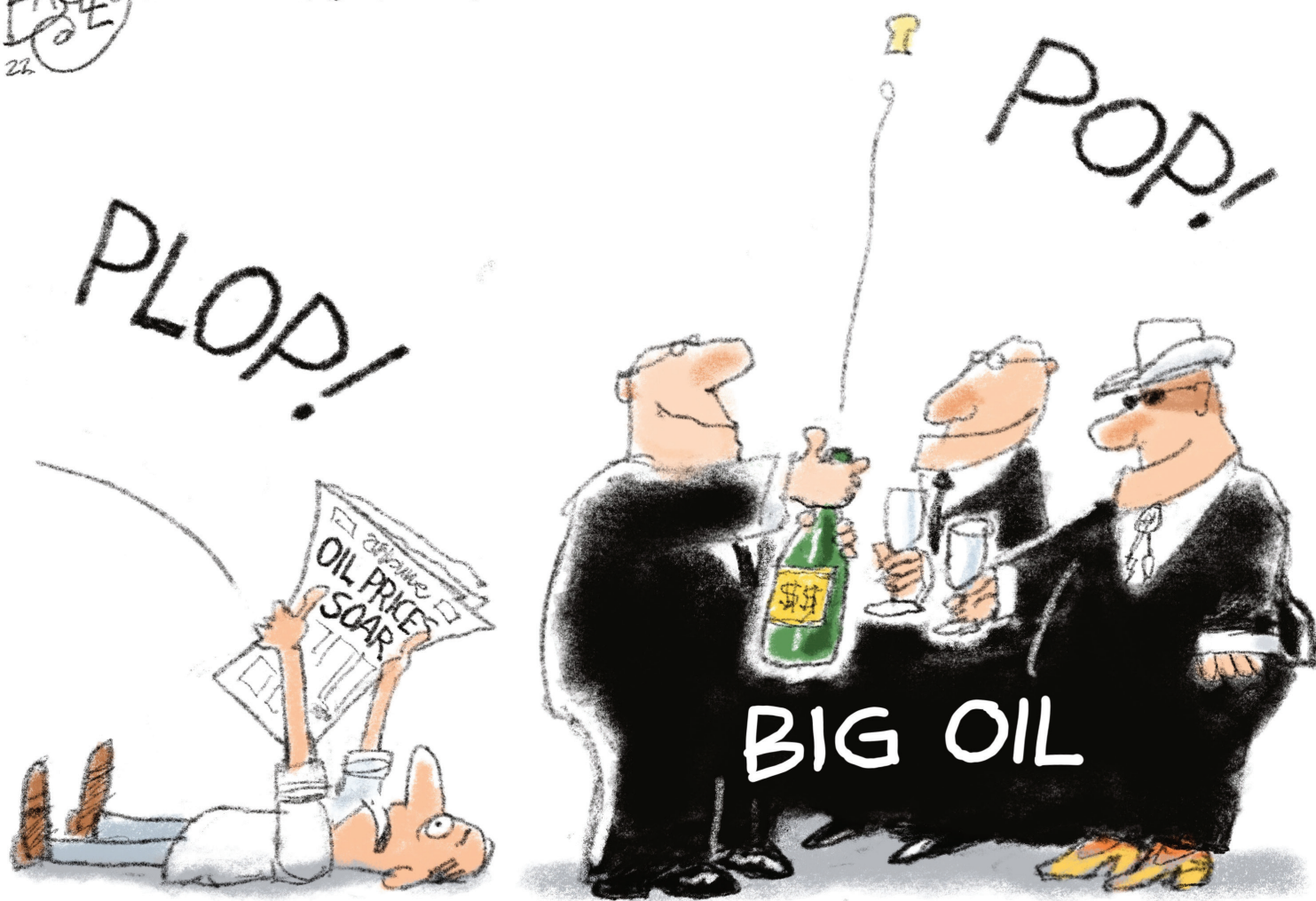
You all have had 12 years since the foundation of the old Safeway collapsed to develop a plan, a proposal and funders — where are they? If you cannot point to a feasible plan for alternative development, then please, sit back down.

Our heritage is as a working class river city, full of economic diversity. We are honoring that heritage by providing housing affordable to those making below 80% area median income.

And, by providing residents housing they can afford, they will have more expendable income to spend supporting our local shops and restaurants.

This development is a win-win for residents and business owners. You've had 12 years, and we still have an asphalt eyesore; time to realize your

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LETTERS WELCOME

Letters should be exclusive to The Astorian. Letters should be fewer than 250 words and must include the writer's name, address and phone number. You will be contacted to confirm authorship. All letters are subject to editing for space, grammar and factual accuracy. Only two letters per writer are allowed each month. Letters written in response

to other letter writers should address the issue at hand and should refer to the headline and date the letter was published. Discourse should be civil. Send via email to editor@dailyastorian.com, online at bit.ly/astorianletters, in person at 949 Exchange St. in Astoria or mail to Letters to the Editor, P.O. Box 210, Astoria, OR., 97103.

bringing down the house, and bringing up edgy issues for us to ponder. Many thanks to Karen Bain, the director, who has been staging profound and well-written plays in our area for many years.

Congrats to all who staged the show and to the management at Ten Fifteen for the beautiful space that's been created there. The show only runs through this coming weekend. Check it out before it's gone!

NED HEAVENRICH
Brownsmead

My idea

My idea for the old Safeway site: One, parking in the basement; two, at street level, create open air access for local businesses, a covered Sunday market, like Seattle has, with security roll up doors, like malls have; and three, use the top two floors for rentals, etc.

DICK DARBY
Astoria

dream of a giant downtown park is unrealistic, and move on.

LAURA JACKSON
Astoria

Check it out

My wife and I attended the wonderful and hilarious play "Art" at The Ten

Fifteen Theater in Astoria on Sunday. We are so thankful to have experienced such a well acted and directed play.

What a blessing it was to be at a live theater performance again! The many belly laughs I had during the performance allowed me to experience something really enjoyable amid these troubled times.

Kudos to actors David Sweeney, Jeremiah Williams and Marcus Liotta for