

OPINION

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the Astorian

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Don't shame

At the forum on homelessness conducted on March 23, referenced in "Astoria leaders hear concerns about homelessness, downtown businesses at forum" (The Astorian, March 26), Mayor Bruce Jones called out those photographing and posting the declining situation in downtown Astoria, calling it "disgusting."

As a downtown business owner of Gizmo's Arcade, I felt ashamed and angry at the same time. Having a front row seat daily to Commercial Street, I occasionally take pictures for documentation purposes when people accuse me of hyperbole.

We are aware that legally the city's hands are tied, and they can't help us in most situations. I haven't seen any reporting in The Astorian about planters downtown being used for drug deals or some of the other problems that have happened in the past month.

When journalism is lacking a side of the story, citizen reporters will step up, for better or worse. The videos that have been posted on our experience downtown are meant to show others how bad it's gotten, so collectively, as a town, some action can be taken.

So instead of scolding us like children, how about scolding the "bad actors" or "frequent flyers" amongst the homeless population who are behaving like children. The expulsion zone ordinance being presented by Police Chief Geoff Spalding seems like a good "timeout" solution.

But don't shame business owners and concerned citizens for bringing to light our side of the story!

ANDREA McDERMED
Astoria

Should not be rushed

I'd like to thank the city and the project developer for their time spent with our community, sharing their process and gathering public input for Heritage Square.

Based on information shared to date, and my 30 years of experience developing affordable and market rate housing, the following are needed by our community before making any commitment to the project as proposed:

- Schematic building designs and elevations, with parking noted, including shadow studies for areas adjacent to the building.
- Budgeted development costs and 30-year income and expense projections to ensure longevity of the project, and financially viable options in terms of unit mix and rents.
- Confirmation of required city subsidies (land, tax abatement, loans, grants, etc.) for development, i.e. all potential investments by our city and taxpayers in the project.
- Definition of mechanisms to be put in place to ensure ongoing experienced management and ownership and to enable the city to step in if operation and management of the property is not to community standards.
- Documentation defining current downtown core residential statistics (number of existing residential units, populations being served by those units and household rents paid), confirming the unit mix will best service community needs.

As we are seeing, affordable housing developments are not simple, they will impact the community for a long time in the future, and they should not be rushed.

Tax credit and Local Innovation and Fast Track funds are not going away in 2023. Let's all ensure we use this important site in the best way possible for our community.

MAURA LEDERER LINEHAN
Astoria

Support affordable housing

I am writing in full support of increasing the stock of affordable housing in Clatsop County and within Astoria, more specifically.

Every person deserves to have their basic needs met. I encourage our community to find compassion, empathy and a sense of community care as we consider the development at Heritage Square.

Unhoused people aren't our problem. The lack of living wage jobs, and an adequate stock of affordable housing, are our problems.

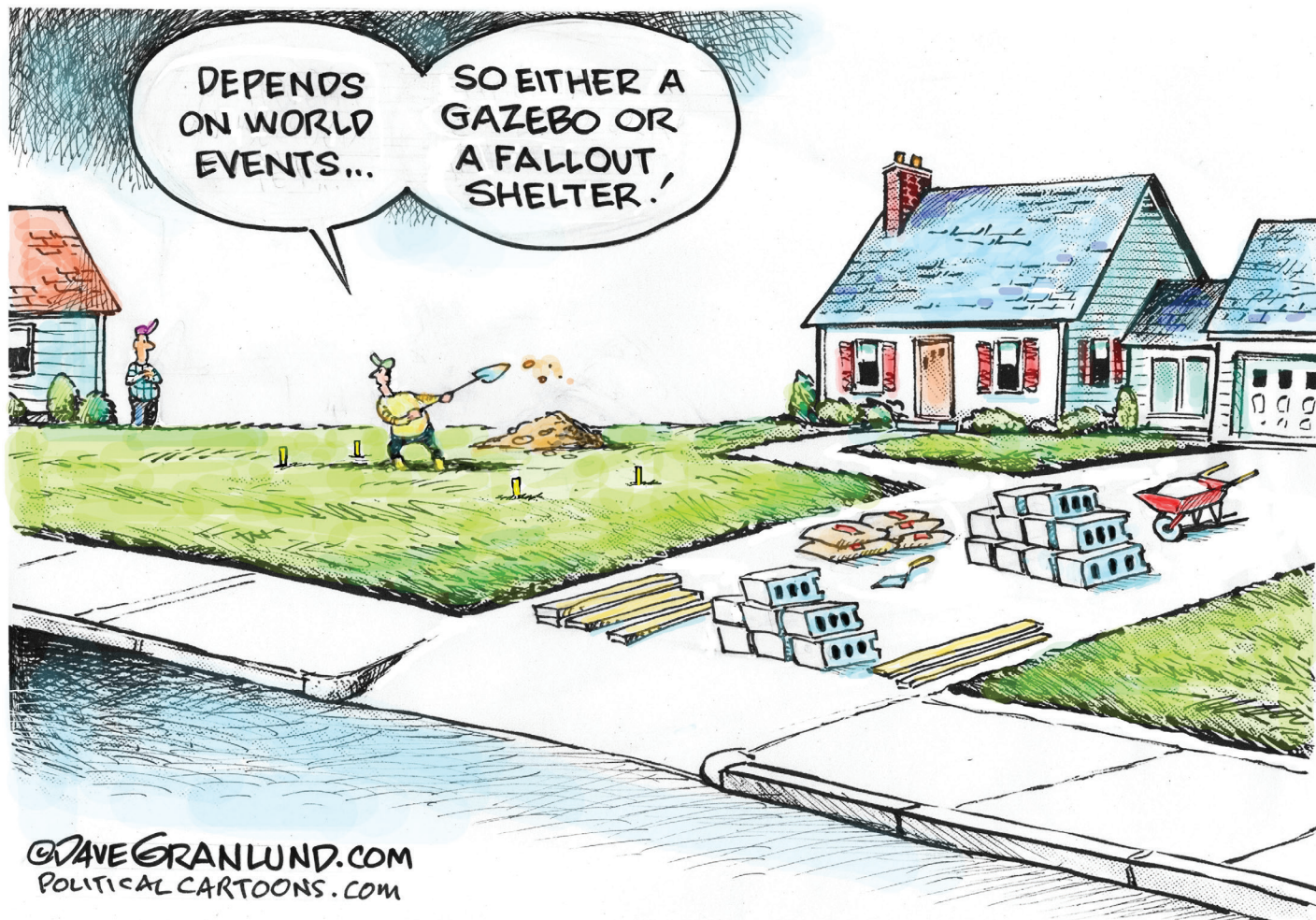
ERICH PITCHER
Astoria

Just the facts

It is a waste of time and energy talking about floor plans, whether Clatsop Behavioral Healthcare will be part of the project, if it includes parking and open space, and how many stories high.

It is simply not compatible with the small historic context of downtown Astoria.

None of it in its entirety!



Twisting and turning the design is fruitless. Put your energy into the proper location and you will have full steam ahead support of most citizens.

Try the basic tenet for crossing the street: Stop, look and listen (to the people).

• Feb. 7, 2022: Public hearing on Heritage Square agenda. Hearing closed at 10 p.m. with continuance for public comment until Feb. 22 because many people have their hands raised to speak on Zoom for three minutes.

• 11 a.m., Feb. 22, 2022: Petition of 450 signatures demanding a pause on Heritage Square development process for further public comment and study of this important proposal is filed and entered into record as public comment towards the public hearing on Feb. 7.

• 6 p.m., Feb. 22: Sixty people stood in 29 degree weather for an hour waiting to enter City Hall chambers. The mayor ruled no comments were being accepted, denying the aforementioned petition. Of the five councilors, three voted "yes" — those three won't be seeking reelection this year.

• 2 p.m., March 23, 2022: Three hundred signatures of an ongoing petition stating, We the undersigned, appeal the decision to give Heritage Square away to Edlen & Co. Filed as public comment towards the open house on March 14, 2022.

LISA DeCICCO
Astoria

Why?

The definition of community is to come together and unite. Referring to workforce housing in and around Astoria, I'm not seeing any cooperation with all the other major players.

Why are the school district, Clatsop Community College, the Clatsop County commissioners, the Port of Astoria, hospital, U.S. Coast Guard, and all others who have a stake in this real-life issue, not involved?

If we are not allowed to have a business in residential areas, then why do you want to put housing in the center of our business and entertainment zone?

The Astoria Sunday Market has been set up the way it has to utilize the only semi-covered spot, with electricity, a band can play under that is outside and in town. We know that self-employment will almost certainly double soon. That means more vendors for the market, which also means more tourists, and don't forget about the cruise ships bringing even more people.

Today Astoria's business is tourism, and we are not prepared. We need a place for musicians to play downtown without looking like beggars. Artists a place to draw funny faces of you for a \$5 bill. A larger food cart area, with some seating. Maybe even a small covered spot, for getting out of the rain. No town that I know of has ever grown without a central park.

The proposals I saw were beautiful if the location was, as an example, the east end of lower Columbia Fields — in the last 10 years, the most unused plot of ground in town!

TROY HASKELL
Astoria

Not the best location

Let's keep the heritage in Heritage Square. We have made a beautiful start with the Chinese garden, but what I am talking about is our own entrepreneurial heritage.

The one where local craftspeople, along with local farmers and area fishers, bring their goods to the city to sell. A centrally located successful market, one that is already beloved by residents, and becoming famous for visitors.

The Astoria Sunday Market has been located in downtown Astoria and bringing in money and supporting jobs for over a decade. The currently proposed project in Heritage Square will negatively impact our successful Astoria Sunday Market by substantially reducing the number of vendor spaces and potentially squeezing us out.

Do we need a mental health facility and low-income housing? Absolutely! But in the center of downtown Astoria is not the best location. Please think creatively. What about Blue Ridge for housing?

TED MESSING
Astoria

Justice before commerce

The problem with Astoria's business community's resistance to Heritage Square workforce housing is that their Main Street approach to revitalization is out of sync with the needs of the community.

Urban gentrification, without first dealing with homelessness, is destined to backfire like it has in Portland. A hallmark of urban gentrification is the widening wealth gap created by displacement of those less fortunate. The Heritage Square displacement, which could include young artists and craftspeople, will be proactive, the tenants being ousted before building construction begins.

Some say their resistance is about the new building itself. But how can a new building be worse than staring at a gaping hole which hasn't stifled yearly increases in tourism?

"We want a downtown plaza," they say, "a place for outdoor concerts and events." Compete with the Liberty Theatre and the Charlene Larsen Center for the Performing Arts? I have trouble scheduling a barbecue in summer without getting rained on.

Some are concerned the mental health component of the project bringing individuals struggling with mental illness into downtown. They are already there! So what will be different? They will have a dry central location where they will be treated with compassion and feel like they belong.

Finally, most visitors to Astoria aren't coming for a vibrant downtown. They're coming for the beer, the river, the Goonies, the history, the funk and what's left of our city's authenticity.

Astoria's heritage is working class. Let's keep it that way. Justice before commerce! Support the workforce housing project at Heritage Square.

ROGER DORBAND
Astoria

Unprotected and scared

One evening, I asked my dad for pizza for dinner, and he told me to order and pick it up, because Domino's was a block from our house. I did, and I reluctantly went to pick it up.

It was almost dark, and on my way there and back, I saw three homeless people. I felt uneasy and anxious at the sight of them. I wouldn't be able to defend myself if one of them spontaneously attacked me, no matter how small the chance of that happening was.

I crossed the street to not pass next to them. I felt unprotected and scared as I made my way back to my house. I got home safely, but told my parents that I never wanted to go downtown alone at that time ever again.

ERIN MAGIE
Astoria

Evident

Pam Wev's experience as a professional planning and economic development consultant has been evident since she was elected to the Clatsop County Board of Commissioners.

Everyone should watch Pam in action at the commission meetings, or on videos posted to the county's website. She always asks pertinent questions to stimulate discussion within the commission, and has sage advice from her decades of experience.

Her focus on long-term planning and economic well-being of the county's residents is a high priority with her. She is the county's point person for housing on the Northwest Oregon Housing Authority, and cares deeply about the mental health of our community.

Please join me in voting to keep Wev on the county commission.

JIM ALEGRIA
Astoria

Huge asset

Soon it will be time to salute our democracy once again, and vote for county, state and federal elective positions. I urge you to vote in May. It's one of the most patriotic things you can do!

I'm writing in support of Pam Wev for Clatsop County commissioner, District 3, now representing most of Astoria. I've known Commissioner Wev since before she ran successfully in the last election. She is bright, experienced, and cares deeply about our community and our county.

Pam has worked at every level of government. She came to Oregon 33 years ago, and is familiar with "the Oregon way."

As our county commissioner, she has supported housing, providing needed services and the much-needed update of the county's comprehensive plan. She needs no prep time.

Significant issues are under consideration in the county. The continuity of her voice and experience is a huge asset. She'll work collaboratively with our cities on housing and infrastructure, problems best addressed together. She listens!

I ask your vote for Commissioner Wev.

JAN MITCHELL
Astoria

Sound voice

Pam Wev, Clatsop County commissioner, is running for reelection. She has been doing a very good job, and is a sound voice for all of the people of the county.

Her previous experience with planning and economic development has brought to the county commission a strong influence and a good balance.

The county needs Wev to be reelected. When your ballot is mailed to your door in our May election, vote! It really counts!

BOB WESTERBERG
Astoria