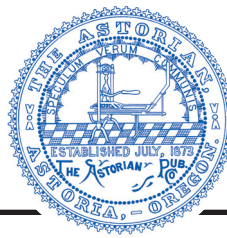


OPINION



the Astorian

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OUR VIEW

A reasonable calculation at Heritage Square

The Astoria City Council made a reasonable calculation this month in backing away from a workforce housing project at Heritage Square.

The city and Edlen & Co., a Portland-based developer, did not have enough public support to withstand the inevitable complications of launching a project of this size downtown.

Even if the City Council reconciled the estimated \$37.8 million cost and the developer obtained low-income housing tax credits and other government assistance, the project would have gone before the Historic Landmarks Commission in the shadow of the November election.

With vocal objections from a divided community and a new mayor and two new city councilors on the way, the project would likely have been one loose thread away from unraveling at any moment.

In our view, though, this was a loss for Astoria.

Edlen & Co.'s concept of workforce housing for lower-wage workers and supportive housing for people struggling with mental illness and drug and alcohol abuse would have helped the city respond to critical needs.

The project was the first tangible opportunity to redevelop Heritage Square since 2016, when the City Council voted 3 to 2 against a new library with the potential for housing that would have likely required bond financing.

While the estimated cost of the project was substantial, it was not exorbitant, especially given



Lydia Ely/The Astorian

The empty pit at Heritage Square has languished for 12 years.

WE HAVE DESCRIBED THE EMPTY PIT AT HERITAGE SQUARE AS A SYMBOL OF THE LACK OF URGENCY IN ASTORIA REDEVELOPMENT. MAYBE IT'S FITTING THAT IT STAYS EMPTY A LITTLE WHILE LONGER — AN EMBLEM OF OUR UGLY SIDE.

the frustrating history of the block.

In a public-private partnership, Edlen & Co. wanted the city to transfer the land for free, contribute \$2.2 million in gap funding through urban renewal money and offer property tax abatement for 60 years.

Last fall, the city had identified these possible funding tools — although not the specific amounts — as part of a potential deal structure when it asked developers for proposals at Heritage Square. From the start, the city was aware it was

likely going to have to participate directly in financing to help defray an expensive and complicated redevelopment.

We hope the end of the workforce housing project will lead to an honest reassessment about what is possible at Heritage Square.

The city acquired the former Safeway property two decades ago. The foundation of the market collapsed after heavy rains in 2010. The Garden of Surging Waves was completed in 2014. The library project was rejected in 2016. The City Council made

housing a goal in 2017.

At no point in all these years has a private developer stepped forward with a credible free-market solution. No philanthropist has offered to help underwrite a plaza or amphitheater.

Before embarking on another idea, the City Council should make clear how much public money the city is willing to invest to avoid the wishful thinking and sticker shock that clouded discussions over the library and workforce housing projects.

We also hope people reflect on the kind of policy debates the city should have going forward.

Heritage Square involves city property, so everyone should have a say.

We do not believe people need to be well-versed in community development, housing or social services to have opinions. We respect people who simply did not like Edlen & Co.'s concept or did not want the project downtown.

But we do not respect people who spread misinformation and engage in fear-mongering. This was not punching up at City Hall or an out-of-town developer. This was punching down at the expense of some of the most financially vulnerable people in our community.

We have described the empty pit at Heritage Square as a symbol of the lack of urgency in Astoria redevelopment.

Maybe it's fitting that it stays empty a little while longer — an emblem of our ugly side.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Experience and skill

We look to people who have experience and skill when we want a job done well. Whether we are looking for a car mechanic, a hairdresser or a surgeon, we want someone in whom we have the confidence that they will properly take care of our needs.

The same is true for people we elect to hold public office. Our current Clatsop County Commissioner Pam Wev is someone who has earned that confidence.

Pam has a long and exemplary career as a public servant. She has served in many levels of government, and has specific expertise in planning and economic development. Pam also has particular knowledge in the area of housing, which is especially important today in Clatsop County. Pam currently serves on the board of the Northwest Oregon Housing Authority.

Pam is a valuable contributor on our current county Board of Commissioners. Hers is a steady voice of reason, deliberation and action. Pam's years of experience have given her a wealth of understanding of how government works, and how different elements of our community are interconnected.

Keep Pam in the job she has shown herself to be so good at, working to build a better county for today and for future generations. Please vote, and reelect Commissioner Wev.

ERIC HALPERIN
Gearhart

Recommend

Pam Wev has served Clatsop County well in her recent term as our county commissioner. She has worked to improve housing and to provide a diverse economy. She is an experienced planner and economic developer. I recommend Wev for Clatsop County commissioner.

VICKI BAKER
Astoria

Highly qualified

Please vote for Steve Dillard for Clatsop County Commission, District 5.



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.

Steve is highly qualified to serve on the Clatsop County commission with a background in business and community service. He has operated an IT services business for 30 years and currently manages local short-term rentals and a motel.

Steve is a results-oriented person, and has worked on many business and community projects with successful outcomes. He will use his experience and skills to address the local issues of workforce housing, transitional housing and

homelessness.

He has also been active in programs for our youth, such as introducing them to aviation through the Experimental Aircraft Association.

Vote for Dillard.

CHRISTINE BRIDGENS
Warrenton

Grandma's wisdom

As a young lad at Easter, I asked my grandmother which she liked best, Christmas or Easter. Her quick response was, "Easter!"

I asked, "Why Easter?"

Her response was, "Christmas made the promise. Easter fulfilled the promise."

JIM BERNARD
Warrenton