



Lydia Ely/The Astorian

U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley and U.S. Trade Representative Katherine Tai take a selfie with the Astoria Bridge in the backdrop.

Roundtable: ‘We’re competing against countries that are unregulated, unreported, illegal and China is the worst of the lot’

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The ambassador emphasized that the Biden administration is committed to addressing challenges posed by foreign subsidies and practices that impact the environment and competition.

“We’ve been talking about this (discussion) for several months,” Tai, an attorney who previously served as the chief trade counsel to the U.S. House Ways and Means Committee, told The Astorian after the roundtable. “I know that Sen. Wyden has been a leader on these fisheries, sustainability (and) trade issues for a very long time. This was a high priority for me.”

Wyden, an Oregon Dem-

ocrat who is the chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, said he is working on bipartisan legislation that would increase transparency and sustainability in the fishing industry while lessening the impact of foreign subsidies.

Merkley, an Oregon Democrat, said, “The takeaway (from the discussion) is that we have an incredible fishing industry here in Oregon that’s significantly regulated and has produced sustainability as a model for the nation and the world. But we’re competing against countries that are unregulated, unreported, illegal and China is the worst of the lot.”

“We need all the help we

can get through international trade and the ambassador is really the key member of the executive branch driving that conversation.”

The senators signaled their appreciation to Tai for caring about the topic and making the trip out to the North Coast.

“There are a lot of places today other than the Oregon Coast and we made this a special priority,” Wyden said.

On Wednesday afternoon, Tai, the senators and U.S. Rep. Suzanne Bonamici, a Democrat who represents the North Coast, appeared at a roundtable and toured the Intel semiconductor manufacturing facility in Hillsboro.



Lydia Ely/The Astorian

Two providers are interested in taking over the space at Sprouts Learning Center.

Child care: ‘We need immediate assistance’

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“We have two very good proposals and we’re very excited to have received both of them,” Mayor Bruce Jones said. “As I said, we would have been excited to just receive one because we do not want our child care services to go away. It was a very painful decision by the City Council. We delayed it for as long as possible, but ultimately we had to make a decision to terminate these services in their existing configuration in order that we can provide other youth programs that are also vitally needed.”

“So we’re excited we have opportunities here to move forward on continuing without a loss of service.”

Bumble Art Studio, which offers a preschool program and summer camps, has looked at ways to expand in their existing space but found it is not feasible.

Bumble serves about 33 children ages 3 to 6 from September through May.

The provider plans on taking over the Sprouts facility at the Astoria Recreation Center and existing enrollment and offering preschool and child care.

Bumble expects to serve 20 to 40 children at the start, then gradually grow to include infant care. When their current lease expires in August, Bumble plans to move over the rest of their services.

At that time, they expect

to raise rates. Bumble hopes to partner with Preschool Promise, a state funded preschool program that makes services available to low-income families.

Their goal is to provide care for about 60 children, from infants to 5-year-olds. They also intend to offer art-based programs some week-ends and evenings during the summer.

Astoria Head Start, a federally and state funded preschool program for low-income families, operates at Gray School in Astoria from September through June and provides care for about 40 children ages 3 to 5.

Head Start is unable to expand in its current space, and has had difficulty finding other options in Astoria. Gray School is also expected to undergo renovations, which could cause complications for the program.

Head Start hopes to shift operations to the city’s space this summer and partner with another provider, Lauren Guiendon Childcare, to offer tuition-based care for children from infants to 5-year-olds. Guiendon intends to offer 46 slots and guarantee enrollment for Sprouts families.

Both Bumble and Astoria Head Start requested assistance with building upgrades.

Bumble asked for the city to offer the space rent free for the first five years. Head Start offered about \$8,000 a year for rent during the first five years.

Several leaders and employees at Columbia Memorial Hospital in Astoria spoke in favor of Bumble, which has discussed dedicating slots for hospital employees, many of which have children enrolled at Sprouts.

Ben Sherman, an orthopedic surgeon at the hospital, has a 2-year-old son enrolled at Sprouts. He said others in his clinic also have children enrolled at Sprouts, so maintaining the service is a priority for the hospital.

“Both my wife and myself work full time, and losing child care is something that makes us choose between working and taking care of our son,” Sherman said. “So thank you guys, like a lot for taking this up and making it a priority.”

Ciara Van Velsor, a resident with a 2-year-old son enrolled at Sprouts, said she hopes the service will resume this summer uninterrupted.

“The importance of child care in our community reverberates throughout, and I’m sure that’s very obvious to all of you,” Van Velsor said. “But I’m looking at, as a mother, having to choose between a job and child care. And this is a real thing for us.”

“And I also wanted to make sure that all of you ... understand that it affects more than just 21 families,” she said. “So it’s a very large impact in which we need immediate assistance from you all.”

Vacation rentals: Moratorium set to expire on April 27

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A 2018 county ordinance addressed safety and livability issues surrounding short-term rentals. But the county has not taken the step of adding references to rentals in development code zones where many already operate.

Before the county commissioners on Wednesday were two zoning recommendations.

County staff recommended making short-term rentals an allowable use in 16 zones: four commercial, 12 residential.

Last month, the Planning Commission, in a divided vote, scaled back the staff’s vision, recommending short-term rentals in only the four commercial zones and two multifamily residential zones. This move would prohibit vacation rentals in the other residential zones and lead to a phaseout of scores of vacation rentals as owners can’t get their permits renewed. Of more than 180 vacation rentals operating in unincorporated areas, all but 77 would be eliminated, staff said.

The Planning Commission’s recommendation would also lead to a nearly \$500,000 loss in lodging taxes, county staff estimated.

In addition, the Planning Commission recommended that all vacation rentals operate under a conditional use. This would involve a public notice, a public hearing and other measures that would cost the county thousands more. Staff recommended that these costs be passed onto rental applicants.

‘A common occurrence’

At the hearing Wednesday, county commissioners heard views that have been expressed in various forms at numerous town halls and meetings since late 2019.

Reba Owen, of Cove Beach, held up photos of recently occupied short-term rental sites.

“The renters are gone, but the garbage is not,” Owen said. “This is a common occurrence that the residents have to put up with.”

In her neighborhood, zoned Coastal Residential, vacation rentals compose about a third of the housing. Cove Beach residents have pushed to remove short-term rentals — which Owen and

her neighbors have called “mini hotels” — from residential zones.

“The full-time residents are so tired of the county being unwilling to support the residential zone at Cove Beach ...,” Owen said.

Monica Wellington, a Banks resident who with her husband owns a vacation rental in the Sunset Beach area, said the Planning Commission based its recommendations too heavily on the concerns of the Cove Beach contingent.

“We don’t believe that’s a fair representation of the entire community of short-term rental owners,” Wellington said.

COMMISSIONERS WILL MEET AGAIN TO DISCUSS THE ISSUE THE DAY BEFORE THE MORATORIUM IS SET TO EXPIRE.

She agreed that a neighborhood where a third of homes are vacation rentals has too high a proportion, and said she would support a cap on the number of rentals in a given zone. “But what we don’t want to do is craft a solution that doesn’t take all stakeholders into account, and without research,” she said. “It needs to be an objective decision.”

Wellington and other rental owners believe neighborhood complaints should be dealt with through operating standards. The county is looking to revise standards to address common complaints — such as fires, litter, speed limits and quiet hours — as well as permit transfers and occupancy limits. (Arch Cape has its own operating standards, which the county may move from the development code to the county code.)

A 2019 countywide housing study found that the county had adequate housing stock, but that much of the supply is used for second homes and short-term rentals.

Commissioner Lianne Thompson and Commis-

sioner John Toyooka say they want more data on how vacation rentals impact the region’s housing — its prices and availability — before they vote.

Toyooka said vacation rentals may play a role in housing prices and housing scarcity, but he suspects the impact is less than what has been alleged. Housing prices have also skyrocketed due to rising material and labor costs, he pointed out. And many homes that function as short-term rentals, he said, are high-value homes — such as those with oceanfront views — not homes considered affordable.

‘It’s a difficult decision’

Commissioner Pamela Wev said she is more concerned about how rentals affect the quality of life in neighborhoods. “I think that that’s what is truly important here,” she said. She worries about a “one-size-fits-all” ordinance that treats Clatsop Plains the same as, say, Brownsmead.

She said two weeks — when a moratorium on new vacation rental licenses is set to expire — may not enough time for her to decide how to vote on the issue.

“This is an ordinance that has too many questions, too much fraught detail, for me to ever consider passing it,” she said, “and I think that we have a responsibility as a county commission to do a lot more learning and strategizing about what we do with this ordinance in the future.”

Thompson and Wev also said they favor extending the moratorium while county staff works to gather more information.

Commissioner Courtney Bangs took a different view. She argued that, by adding references to short-term rentals in development code zones where rentals already exist, the county is addressing an oversight — reconciling the code with the county’s practices.

“I don’t feel we can keep indefinitely extending out a moratorium ... It’s a difficult decision, but I feel like we’re at a point where it needs to be made,” Bangs said.

The commissioners will meet again to discuss the issue on April 27, the day before the moratorium is set to expire.

Grille: Martins still own building

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antique, 19th century cherry wood bar.

Scully has lived on the Oregon Coast for two decades and moved to Warrenton a few years ago. He said the Silver Salmon became a favorite date night spot for him and his wife.

Scully owns the West Linn Saloon and the Blossoming Lotus in northeast Portland. In 2020, he purchased

Sam’s Seaside Café with his business partner, Frederick Slentz.

“Being a restaurateur, and finding out that Jeff and Laurie were interested in retiring, it didn’t take me too long to come down and see if I could visit with them. And we started talking, and got to know each other a little bit better, and we thought it would be the perfect fit,” Scully said.

Scully officially took over

the Silver Salmon on April 1, and said that six months from now people can expect to walk into the same restaurant they have enjoyed for years. He said the Martins still own the building.

“They’re still a part. They still own their home in the area. Their grandkids are still playing sports. They’re still a big part of the area. They’ve just given me the opportunity to come in and help out with Silver Salmon,” he said.

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