



Lydia Ely/The Astorian

The county has placed a moratorium on new vacation rental permits while debating code changes.

Vacation rentals: Moratorium set to end in August

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concluded that, with second homes and vacation rentals, there is technically enough supply, but not of the right kind.

The new report highlights the wealth gap between people who rent and people who own: “Owner households have a higher median income (\$65,500) than renter households (\$34,500).”

Gail Henrikson, the county’s community development director, said at Wednesday’s meeting, “The houses where we see the most short-term rentals are probably the houses that are least affordable to people who are making \$30,000 less than a homeowner might make.”

County staff prepared the report at commissioners’ request to address concerns — aired in public meetings over more than two years — about vacation rentals’ impact on home values and availability on the North

Coast.

Toyooka said the data shows the vacation rental industry alone does not drive up prices.

“I think that answers the question that the community has asked in their emails and letters about the impact of short-term (rentals) on pricing,” he said, “and I think this satisfies that information.”

Commissioner Pamela Wev said in an interview afterward that she is not ready to vote on the issue and thinks the proposed code changes need more work.

“I don’t think this is an ordinance that should be one-size-fits-all throughout the whole county,” she said. A blanket policy, she said, is “bad land use planning in our situation.”

Wev is sympathetic to an alternate recommendation from the Planning Commission to allow vacation rentals in only commercial and multifamily residential zones, and in Arch Cape, where

vacation rentals are already recognized. In other residential zones, the rentals would be banned and phased out as permits expire. The county’s Department of Assessment and Taxation said the recommendation would lead to a loss of roughly half a million dollars in lodging tax revenue.

The discussion around vacation rentals is one that communities are having all along the Oregon Coast and goes to the heart of property rights, neighborhood livability and trade-offs between them.

In Cove Beach — the community that began the local conversation about vacation rentals’ impact on residential areas — the rentals make up roughly a third of homes. Opponents of vacation rentals have referred to them as “mini hotels.”

Cove Beach residents have leaned on a view expressed by a Portland land use attorney, whom they retained, that

a use not explicitly mentioned in the code is prohibited by default. That vacation rentals have been allowed in Arch Cape for almost 20 years suggests the activity was meant for some zones and not others, the attorney argued, and that issuing permits for those other zones constitutes a development code violation.

In April, commissioners revised the operating standards to address permit transfers, occupancy and nuisance-type behaviors, such as trash, noise and parking, that figure in neighborhood complaints.

Commissioners were also scheduled to decide where vacation rentals would be allowed, but asked county staff to put together the data report to help inform their decision. They extended a moratorium on new vacation rental permits until late August.

The moratorium could end sooner if the commission settles the issue before then.

Coffee shop: Aiming for ‘smoothest transition’

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and they know her, and she knows their drink, and that’s what’s important. That’s why I moved to Astoria, to build that community.”

Cross first purchased The Rusty Cup in 2004, sight unseen, after coming across a newspaper advertisement.

When she finally got the keys, she opened the door to a gorgeous — but unexpected and overwhelming — floor-to-ceiling jungle mural that included a giraffe, elephant and leopard.

“I knew nothing. I knew how to make coffee, but I remember thinking, like, ‘What the hell am I doing,’” she said, laughing.

Now, all that remains of the jungle mural is a small,

framed butterfly above the cafe’s little library.

While Cross and Medford talked about the business’ transition, Jessie Weis and her grandchildren entered The Rusty Cup and a staff member got to work on their orders.

Weis has been a regular since Cross’ first week on the job, 18 years ago.

With barely a word of greeting, the kids sat down and 9-year-old Alex Davidson dealt Cross and Medford into a round of Pokémon. Medford took the surprise card game, and Alex’s on-the-fly rules, in stride.

Weis said that it was Cross’ time to make an exit.

“I hate it, but I mean it has to happen. Time marches on,” Weis said. “She’s

become my best friend and you don’t want your best friend to work herself into the ground. I’m glad (Medford’s) following, because he’s really easy to work with for her.”

Weis said she is glad Medford will allow regulars like herself to keep treating the cafe as a second home. She laughed, watching him get fully invested into the card game with her grandkids and debate about who had the strongest Pokémon.

Medford will officially take over the business on June 30. He said he wants to keep the cafe mostly as is, including its name and staff.

He plans to add in-house baking capability with a focus on breakfast pies.

“I think it will change a

little bit, for my personality, but it works. What is the most important to me is I want people to feel as comfortable coming in here to me as they do with Kristy. And I don’t want to change it into something that it’s not,” he said.

Cross will be focusing on relaxing. She has some house projects to catch up on and plans to spend time with her parents in Seattle.

She will continue to make appearances at The Rusty Cup, too.

“I told him that I’ll come in and help out as long as he needs,” she said. “We just want to make it the smoothest transition, where he comes in and I slowly fade out. And then come back to fill in whenever he needs it.”

LiFEBoat: A call for more transitional employment positions

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Gibbs said showing up, especially on bad days, is not easy. And some days she cannot show up.

“I could have quit, but I knew mentally that was something I had to do because I had to show my kid you can still kick butt and not be OK,” she said.

For Beacon Clubhouse, which is based on an international model, supporting members with employment is central to the organization’s mission.

Erin Carlsen, the director of Beacon Clubhouse, runs LiFEBoat Services with her fiancée, Osarch Orak, the director of Filling Empty Bellies.

Carlsen and Orak said that as LiFEBoat expands, the goal is to grow the transitional employment program and build more partnerships with local employers.

They described transitional employment as a “win-win.” Members can try a job and build skills that could lead to permanent roles. Employers can try an employee for 90 days

and determine whether it is a long-term fit, knowing LiFEBoat will be there to provide support when needed.

“We want to reach out to more local businesses who are willing and able to leave a position open for transitional employment,” Orak said.

‘THE AREA IS VERY SPREAD OUT. YOU CAN’T WALK TO CAMP RILEA.’

Olga Watkins | program manager of the food service

“There are so many different types of mental illness and just because you have mental illness doesn’t mean that you can’t be a productive member of society, you can’t hold down a job or that you don’t want to. You might just need a little bit of extra help in a particular area to push past your issues, whatever you’re struggling with.”

Orak and Carlsen are also pursuing other types of employment partnerships in the community.

Gibbs recently helped the organization form a partnership with Service Care of America, a food service contractor that provides food services at Camp Rilea. Gibbs’ daughter works for the company and reached out when they were facing staffing shortages.

Four people from Beacon Clubhouse and Filling Empty Bellies now work at the food service full time.

Olga Watkins, the program manager of the food service, said the partnership is going great.

Watkins said she has struggled with the same staffing shortages as other businesses, adding that the labor market on the North Coast is even more difficult because of the lack of transportation options.

“The area is very spread out. You can’t walk to Camp Rilea,” Watkins said. “As an employer, though, with the current situation, it is important, I feel, to approach hiring people a lit-

tle differently these days.”

Oftentimes, there are barriers, especially for people who are homeless, Watkins said. Once people pass a background check and get hired, she talks with employees about any impediments they may have to getting to work and communicating.

In response to the transportation challenge, Watkins said, her staff of 15 have worked out a carpool schedule.

She said that while there is a perception that many homeless people do not want to work, she has found that many do.

But it takes extra time to work through issues like transportation, housing and completing paperwork. It also takes time to coordinate with organizations like LiFEBoat and other employment services.

“But if I need the help, I have to be willing to do that,” Watkins said. “If I’m going to hire people that have those obstacles in their lives, then I have to do a little extra work as well. And that’s OK.”

Wastewater: Col-Pac presented an economic impact study

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Pacific Economic Development District, told the City Council on Monday. The nonprofit assists in diversifying and strengthening the economy and livability of Northwest Oregon.

First, Colombo said, the fermentation sector in Clatsop County is young and is not necessarily able to withstand cost shocks the way a more mature industry can.

“Secondly, we have found in our research that they’ve provided outsized contributions to the community,” she said, noting that the businesses have accounted for \$21 million in visitor spending. “And I could probably name a number of communities that would welcome your wastewater challenges if it meant that the fermentation sector in Clatsop County came with it. For every challenging situation there are always creative solutions, and Col-Pac looks forward to being a part of helping you find those and we hope that you continue to consider that.”

The nonprofit presented an economic impact study of the fermentation sector to the council’s adoption of the industrial pretreatment ordinance. Colombo said the nonprofit was asked to prepare the study, in part, in response to the wastewater challenges.

“We are not experts on rate structures, wastewater systems or ordinances, but we do have some expertise in recognizing economic interdependencies and dynamics,” she said. “And we feel like this cluster is special, and it’s something that we don’t see often when we’re looking at local economies, and especially rural economies.”

Mayor Bruce Jones said the city will continue to collaborate with the businesses and look at creative solutions and evolving technologies.

“I know that we all appreciate the fermentation sector very, very much,” Jones said. “We’ve all seen directly the charitable contributions, especially to various — countless, frankly — fundraisers in the community, and recognize the special role that these businesses have played.”

He pointed to the City Council’s support when it approved Fort George’s application in 2020 to enter into the Clatsop Enterprise Zone, which offers up to 15 years of tax breaks in exchange for their expansion in the former Astoria Warehousing property in Uniontown.

Fort George was approved for an estimated \$617,000 in tax relief over 15 years in exchange for a promise to invest at least \$12.5 million into the expansion and create

at least 35 jobs earning at least 130% of area median wage.

River Barrel Brewing, the parent company behind Buoy Beer and Pilot House Distilling, was also approved into the enterprise zone for their expansion on the waterfront. The business is estimated to save \$734,800 in property taxes over five years.

Jones also pointed to a \$1 million grant Fort George received from the state to clean up petroleum contamination at the Uniontown site, which cleared the way for the brewery to secure a \$12 million low-interest loan from Craft3. The lender secured financing from the competitive federal New Markets Tax Credit program.

Presentation

The mayor, City Councilor Roger Rocka, City Councilor Tom Brownson and business leaders attended a presentation Wednesday at the Fort George Lovell Showroom given by ClearBlu Environmental, an industrial wastewater treatment company based in Monterey, California.

Chris Nemlowill, the owner of Fort George Brewery, said his wastewater consultant, John Mercer, recommended exploring ClearBlu’s technology as a way to increase the capacity of the city’s treatment lagoons. The company specializes in high strength wastewater and designs systems for breweries, wineries and other industrial businesses throughout the country.

The company discussed how adding aeration technology and specific bacteria to the treatment lagoons can increase capacity and handle high strength waste.

“We’re trying to do as much as we possibly can to work on our site with a 50-year-old wastewater treatment plant,” Nemlowill said at the beginning of the presentation. “We just wanted to look at the entire spectrum of the system from what we’re doing to also our wastewater treatment lagoon.”

Jeff Harrington, the city’s public works director, said the city already has aeration technology at the treatment lagoons, and that the technology would not change the city’s course of action.

“We have a \$5 million project rolling forward, designed, multiple wastewater experts, we have a whole wastewater design team,” Harrington told The Astorian. “This product is something that has not been used in municipal settings. Our wastewater consultants have no confidence it’s going to do anything different than what our aerators out there do now.”

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VOLUNTEER
PICK OF THE WEEK



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