

OPINION



the Astorian

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GUEST COLUMN

An old house gets a brighter future

On a busy stretch of W. Marine Drive, John Harper is spinning gold from dross — though it doesn't look like it.

The faded blue house at 441 Marine is distinguished by flaking paint, grass in the gutters and a barren yard that has been littered with garbage, much of it pulled from the interior. This week, an industrial-sized dumpster sits in front, receiving the contents left by tenants and visitors through the years.



MIKE FRANCIS

The house has been the subject of neighborhood consternation for a long time. Property records show it has been carved up into six bedrooms with two baths. In recent years, it became known as a place where people who had few other options could live for a while. But some of those who stayed or visited created problems, both for the house's owner and for its neighbors.

The combination of heavy turnover, noise, strewn syringes and trash caused neighbors to register numerous complaints to City Hall, which couldn't do much except send police to the address.

But patient work by city officials and the willingness of Uniontown's John Harper to take on the daunting project means the old house can look toward a brighter future. Harper's plan is to convert the 1918 junker into an attractive long-term rental for workers like the ones he employs at Under the Bridge Smoke Shop, Kick Ass Koffee and other businesses.

"I didn't need this house; I have enough houses," Harper said. But he decided to take on the daunting project when a relative of the former owner got in touch to ask if he was interested.

First there was the matter of negotiating the price. The family looked at size, vintage and location and sug-



John Harper is restoring a house with a troubled history off W. Marine Drive.

Mike Francis

gested one figure. Harper looked at the work that needed to be done to make the house habitable again and suggested a lower figure. Eventually, they met at \$237,500.

Part of the negotiation was Harper's argument for why the former owners should sell to him rather than to someone who might offer more money: Because he cares for the neighborhood and is deeply invested in it already.

Not only does he own and operate the nearby smoke shop, but he owns a couple of houses along Marine, including the attractive, well-maintained rental immediately next door to 441.

The sellers were persuaded, and now the work is underway. The house joins Harper's stable of about a dozen properties he owns around the county.

He has a track record of taking over troubled properties, renovating them

and turning them into attractive residences. And at a time when Astoria and Clatsop County are struggling to increase the supply of housing — especially affordable rental housing at or below market rates — Harper's work is especially important.

Mike Francis is a longtime Oregon journalist who has extensively covered military and veterans issues. He resides on Astoria's South Slope.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Change course

Kathy and I are extremely grateful that by a supermajority vote, Gearhart residents put the sanctity of our sleepy village first by rejecting an oversized, unnecessary and extremely expensive resiliency emergency station.

While Gearhart affirmed common sense and logic, it also presented a resounding vote of no confidence in our current leadership.

This landslide vote comes after six long years of costly effort, and tumultuous debate, where the city and the Gearhart Volunteer Fire Department ignored much of the opposition's concerns to such an extent that many Gearharters question the city's credibility, and wonder if irreparable harm has come to the fire department.

It's clear our city leadership failed in staying in touch with the mainstream of Gearhart — let's hope they find the courage and common sense to change course and represent all Gearhart residents.

JACK ZIMMERMAN
Gearhart

Moving forward

For decades, the No. 1 complaint about Astoria I hear, from visitors and locals alike, is the lack of parking.

As much money that comes through the doors of Astoria as a whole, and the amount of wealth that calls Astoria home, and now infrastructure assistance from the federal government, where are the plans and sites to solve this problem?

Even more than one parking structure may need to be built.

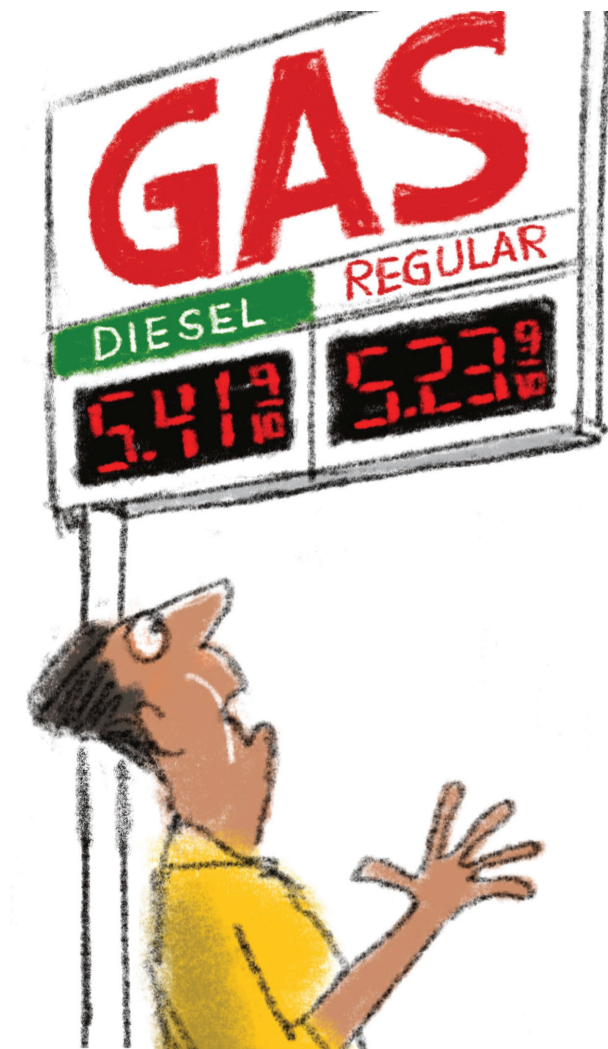
I think most feel this wheel has been greased enough. What is the holdup on moving forward with something Astoria has needed for an exceedingly long time? Unfortunately, if the parking structure had a brewery or distillery in it, I believe I would not be writing this today!

TROY HASKELL
Astoria

Ray of sunlight

Iam so appalled at the animosity taking over my beautiful little town of Gearhart. It seems to be tearing us apart. It is fueled by the hatred of its citizens towards one another. Why? Because we have different opinions? That is the beauty of a democracy. We have the right to have different opinions.

I believe a ray of sunlight has appeared. Our designated mayor, Kerry Smith, will hopefully be able to mediate a truce. I know



him. He is a fair, thoughtful man. He will listen to both sides. He will try to make sense of all this.

Please. Let's all get behind him. He needs our support.

PENNY SABOL
Gearhart

Betrayal

Many of us who live in Cove Beach feel betrayed by our Clatsop County Board of Commissioners. It seems that the commissioners are not interested in what residents in our part of the county want — in what we were promised, over past decades, in the Coastal Residential zone, meaning that short-term rentals are not a permitted use in this zone (nor in other residential zones in the county).

The commissioners are hellbent on changing every residential ordinance in the county to allow short-term rentals in every zone. Once this new ordinance is passed, as has already occurred in our neighborhood, residences will be converted to commercial short-term rental or "mini-motel" businesses by property owners and investors who can make a ton of money

from their business property. No more neighbors, and no more neighborhood.

Why are the commissioners making such a sweeping, life-altering change to every residential zone in the county?

If this callous, dictatorial behavior concerns you or alarms you (as it does us), then please contact your commissioner and ask them why they are taking this action. Please let us know that you are not happy with this dramatic and unwarranted change by email at NorthCoastNeighborsUnited@gmail.com

CHARLES DICE
Arch Cape

What representation?

It's a sad time for representative government in Clatsop County. "Our" board of county commissioners is poised to approve a sweeping ordinance, despite overwhelming opposition from impacted county residents, that will allow short-term rentals in every residential zone in the county.

Amazingly, in just a couple of weeks, county planning staff was able to gather enough "data" to convince the commissioners to disregard both the 2019 Housing Strategies Report, cautioning against short-

term rentals in residential zones, an in-depth study comprising months of research in collaboration with county and city representatives, and the March 2022 recommendations of the county's own Planning Commission, also objecting to allowing short-term rentals in residential areas not capable of sustaining this kind of commercial activity.

At least one commissioner didn't need convincing, stating in the April 27 public hearing on the matter that she wouldn't change her mind regardless of any data obtained. Does this reflect the open-mindedness we expect in our government representatives?

So, when your neighborhood has become a resort, and you're awakened in the middle of the night by the vacationers in the house next door, you can thank the Board of Commissioners, who care more about the tax revenue brought in by investors' commercial endeavors than the quality of life of the county's residents.

If you oppose this travesty, please make your objections known to "our" county commissioners at commissioners@co.clatsop.or.us before the June 22 public hearing on short-term rentals.

JEFF and DENISE DAVIS
Arch Cape