Port of CL bans smoking at park playground

By PATRICK MULVIHILL
News staff writer

Smokers will be warned to steer clear of the kids' play area at the Cascade Locks marine park this summer.

The Cascade Locks Port Commission passed a resolution at a work session Friday that prohibits smoking, alcohol and vaping within a 50-foot radius of the children's playground at the port's marine park along the Columbia River.

Cascade Locks Interim General Manager Paul Koch said the port's "smoke free" resolution began with a request from the county, and conversations over the last six months with Belinda Ballah, Hood River County Tobacco Prevention Specialist.

Because the resolution is not an ordinance, county officers will most likely not enforce the smoking ban, Koch said. However, the county will be putting up a no-smoking sign at the site, produced by Hood River County Prevention Network. The sign hasn't been erected, but it is authorized. Ballah said the sign has not yet been created.

The port's action against smoking is part of a countywide push to curtail tobacco in public areas. In 2013, Hood River County commissioners voted to make all properties "smoke and tobacco free." The City of Hood River passed a similar resolution April 13, 2015, which prohibits tobacco on all city owned properties. The city council noted in its resolution document that "tobacco related chronic disease costs Oregonians almost $2.5 billion each year in medical expenses and lost productivity" and "pose(s) a risk to toddlers, pets and wildlife due to ingestion."

The Port of Cascade Locks went as far as to include provisions barring alcohol and vaping at the park play area in their May 8 resolution on the grounds that "park patrons who do not smoke, vape or consume alcohol should not be subjected to second hand smoke or vaping or the effects of alcohol while enjoying the Children's Playground."

Koch said making the play area smoke free was the "logical first step" in applying the resolution to additional port properties — possibly all of them in the future. "We may take the big jump as many communities have," said Koch.

The port's current resolution applies only to a small circle drawn around the park's playground. The commission considered other options, such as designating smoking areas or making the entire park smoke free. However, smoking areas had a high projected maintenance cost for cleaning up trash and cigarette butts, and making the entire park smoke free could have conflicted with neighboring businesses who "may have a smoking need," Koch said.

However, Koch said the port commission had "an increasing number of concerns" regarding campers and visitors who occupy the park each summer, many of whom smoke or drink. "We begin to see people from Portland and Seattle camping at the marine park and … people staying in pickup trucks."

Another concern was the state's decision to approve recreational marijuana. According to Oregon.gov, Oregon Measure 91 will take effect July 1, allowing personal possession of marijuana, and the Oregon Liquor Control Commission will begin taking applications for commercial growers and sellers in January of 2016.

In its resolution document, the port commission barred "smoking" and "vaping" at the playground in general, and did not specify a tobacco-only limitation to that ban.

In other action items at the work session Friday, the Cascade Locks Port Commission appointed David Lipps, owner of Thunder Island Brewery, to the commission's budget committee and authorized an application for a $160,000 federal grant through the U.S. Department of Homeland Security for park security enhancements.

Koch described the grant as necessary to get port buildings and waterfront facilities "up to date." The funds would go toward hiring a security consultant to analyze port properties, and replacing or enhancing current smoke alarms, burglar alarms, security cameras and other technology. The port owns several old buildings near the waterfront including the pavilion and history museum that haven't seen major security upgrades in decades.

Photo courtesy of Port of Cascade Locks

THE CASCADE LOCKS Port Commission passed a resolution Friday banning smoking at the children's playground area at the port's marine park on the Columbia River.

Council

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Regarding utility fee increases, city planner Stoner Bell and consultant Ray Bartlett, along with public works director Mark Lago, presented a lengthy and detailed report on the state of sewer and water facilities, which will need a total of $12 million to $14 million in repair and upgrade projects over a five-year period.

"Improvements are up for discussion, but these are the ones we feel need to be done," said city manager Steve Wheeler.

Bartlett and Bell identified $43.7 million in potential water projects, with $7 to $9 million to be dealt with in the five year-plan and in sewer, the figures are $29 million and about $5 million.

Water rates were last increased in 2012, up 15 percent from $26.72 per month for typical residences to the current $32.30. Bartlett said rates would likely need to go up another 15 percent next year for both sewer and water, and about five percent annually for the next four years, to pay for projects under the five-year plan.

For sewer, rates were set lowered in 2013 by 15 percent, to $41.75 in 2013, down from the $48 approved by council in 2010.

Bartlett urged the council to consider doing away with the residential 5,000 gallon monthly base amount and decreasing it gradually to as low as 1,000 to encourage conservation and reward those who use less water.

This summer council will be discussing the water and projects to be done, and the resulting increase in fees as well as looking at other funding sources such as grants, loans or bonds. Bartlett also suggested the city look at raising system development charges (SDCs) for new construction, 33 to 43 percent, to help pay for projects.

Decisions on projects will flow into an updated Comprehensive Plan (the city's first since 2001) and then go through a public process before the council decides on changes in rates.

Bell said that many water projects were put on hold in the past five years as the city completed the $10 million mainline replacement in 2010-13, done with city funds and state grant money.

"That project absolutely needed to be done and everything else got put on hold," Bell said.

Critical issues come down to three:

- Lead pipes and joints that leach into the water supply;
- Clay pipes carrying sewage that are in need of repair or are at the end of their intended life, and many are used in high-pressure areas;
- Water pressure that is too high (areas of downtown) or too low (throughout the Heights and west Hood River) in times of high use or when water is used for fire suppression.

Bell said the staff will recommend projects that can be carried out in an affordable five-year plan, and with current personnel.

"The problem is that our largest growth is to the west, yet as you go west, the ground rises slightly," adding to flow and pressure challenges, Bell explained. (The Indian Creek pump station on the Heights was built in the past year to serve the Heights and the southwest and southeast areas of the city sewer system, and is about to go on line.)

Critical factors are sewer lines on flat slopes, conducive to buildup of oils that constrict the lines and require frequent maintenance; in some areas, crews must clean lines three or four times a year.

"Surfacing" or surcharge incidents affect peoples' backyards and even basements, and potential projects involve easements or other line relocation methods so that sewer lines "go where they belong, underneath the street," Lago said.

One current water pipe project is going on now on Fairview Drive, just off Belmont, to increase pressure to the Fairview/Rocky Court/West May neighborhoods; a similar pipe project is planned in 2016 just to the north, off West Cascade.

Also on the books are about $800,000 in improvements at the wastewater treatment plant at the waterfront; at least one project will help abate odor from the facility, according to Lago.

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Council also gave official support to a request council Member Becky Brun will make to Sustainable Northwest for the city host a workshop on developing sustainable energy projects

"I'll be collecting ideas from the community about the things we want to commit to getting further assistance, including technical help," Brun said.

Because of the impending application deadline, the council agreed to pass a "minute action" rather than resolution, at city manager Steve Wheeler's suggestion. That means the council goes on record in the minutes of the May 11 meeting as supporting the application.

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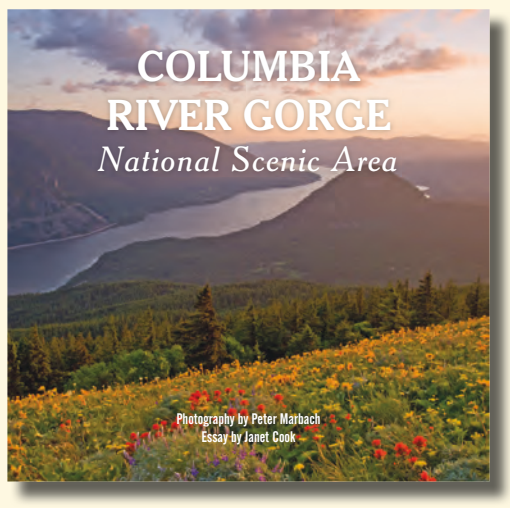

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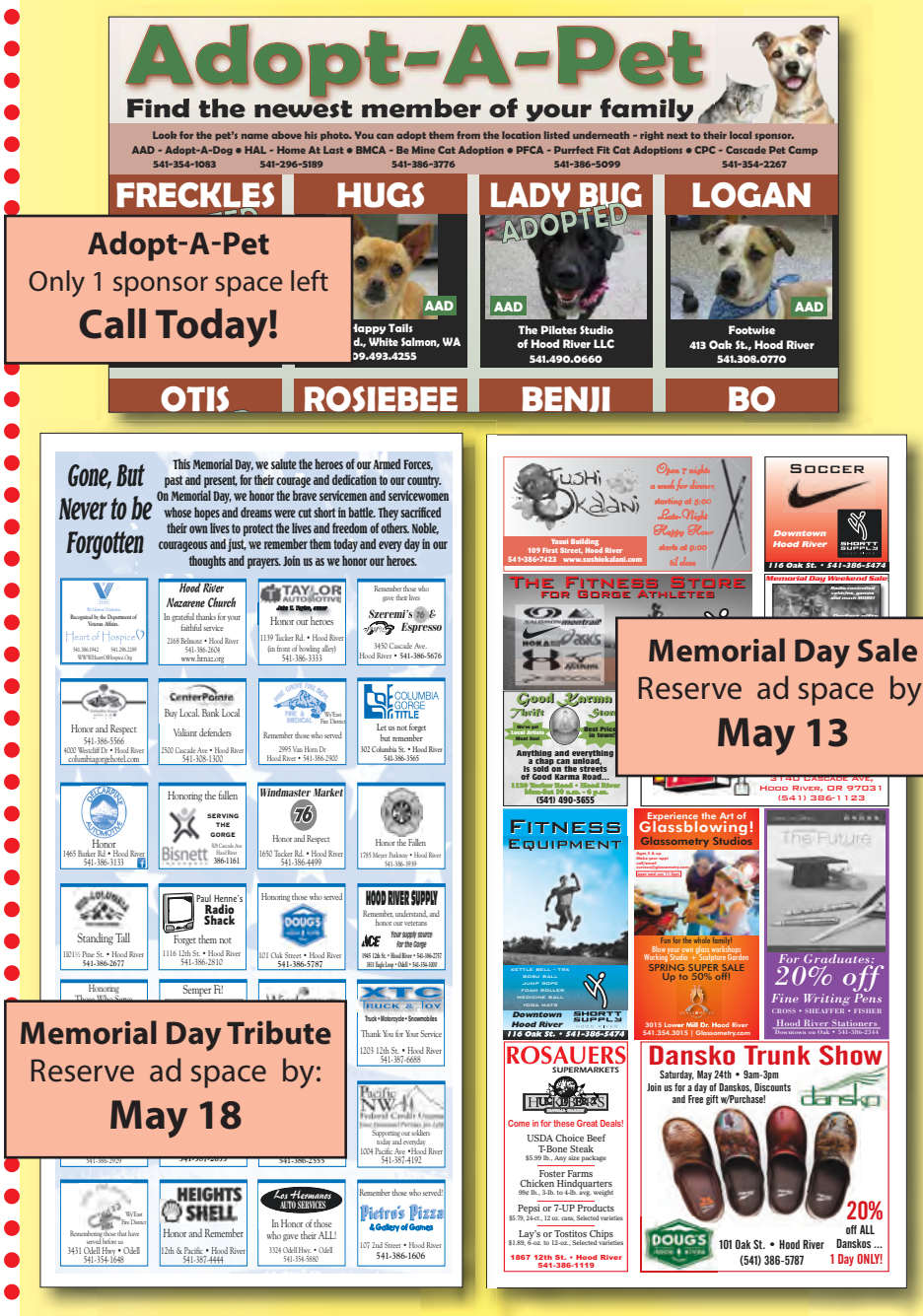
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