

Port from 1A

help bring Port of Siuslaw to state and federal agencies to help fund its major projects. By doing this, the agency can help save port staff time, and discover new opportunities that a smaller-staffed port like Siuslaw would have difficulty finding.

“Small ports have benefited (from the IGA),” Harlen emphasized. “The reality is, the legislatures are lined up behind this. Hopefully there’s a pot of money at the end of this.”

An IGA with Business Oregon potentially would give Port of Siuslaw access to thousands of dollars for projects.

Port commissioners found no immediate cause to reject Business Oregon’s offer and will be studying the particulars in the coming weeks.

In the public meeting following the group session, Bridgeport Market owner Jay Cable spoke during the public comments period with a number of suggestions. He first discussed a fix for the handicapped parking space at the far west end of the parking lot, where individuals in wheelchairs have difficulty reaching a sidewalk without maneuvering into traffic. Cable suggested creating an entry point in the sidewalk next to the parking spaces.

Cable then stated the parking directly along the river was being monopolized by fishermen who didn’t want to pay a \$2 parking fee.

“People who come to just view the river and sit and eat their lunch don’t have a nice place to park,” Cable said. “An easy fix to that would make that strip two-hour parking, which would eliminate that problem and allow people to park there at all times.”

While the commission agreed that cars parked for a long period of time were an issue, they saw a roadblock in enforcement.

“I understand that,” Cable said. “I think most conscientious people, if they saw that it was two-hour parking, just wouldn’t park there.”

“People who get there at 5 in the morning aren’t really conscientious,”

Port Commissioner Terry Duman replied. “I agree that it would help in some instances. But then the problems come, too, that if you don’t get there at 4:30 or 5, the workers park there. The people who work at the concessions.”

While the commission saw hurdles in the plan, they agreed that parking needed to be looked at.

Finally, Cable voiced his frustration with a Feb. 10 article published in the Siuslaw News. The article, which covered the third in a series of public input meetings held at

the port, covered a letter written by a moorage customer who listed a host of concerns about sanitation and the safety of the port.

“It’s really a matter of frustration and economics,” Cable said. “Somebody without regard to the port, or without regard to the property values around the port, wrote a scathing letter of the condition of the port. None of it was true. For it to be included on the front page of the newspaper I thought was very unfortunate.”

The letter included references to poor sanitation from wildlife and visitors, as well as worries about fights on the docks.

“We have a good workforce here,” Cable said. “They keep the lawns mowed, they keep the trash picked up. (References in the letter to) people skinny dipping and diapers made the port look, unfortunately, very poor. People who live here will understand that this is not true, but people who don’t live here read stuff like that and think, ‘Maybe we should just go on to another place where they care about their port.’”

The article listed passages from the letter, which accused both the port and the Florence

Police Department of essentially ignoring what the writer felt were safety issues.

The article then quoted Florence Police Commander John Pitcher, who called the accusations unfounded. It went on to give the commissioner’s response as they took umbrage with the characterization that the port had sanitation issues.

Despite the feelings that the letter mischaracterized the port, the commissioners spoke at length about bolstering security through gates and listed the efforts taken by port staff to keep the area clean.

“I’ve lived there for 10 years,” Port Commissioner Bill Meyer said. “I have always appreciated the port as a neighbor. I’m sure everything noted in that letter has occurred at least once, but to present it as if it’s a chronic ongoing problem is a disservice. ... If people believe that letter is true, it lowered the property value by millions of dollars in this area.”

Florence City Councilor Ron Preisler, who was sitting in the audience, stated that the only way to refute comments like the ones presented would be to write a letter to the editor to show what they believe

is true.

After Cable, public comment was given by Jeff Amenson, who addressed the commission with a plan to open up state roads to off-road vehicles. He mentioned a new Oregon law that allows communities to do this, and the town of Oakridge has already been seeing success.

“They can come and camp at the port, and ride up to the dunes,” Amenson said. “The staging areas are so full right now. As the community becomes the staging area, it would allow more people to come to the area to recreate. This could be an awesome thing for the motels and the campground.”

While the law doesn’t limit the type of off-road vehicles that are allowed on the roads, Amenson suggested that the city first allow side-by-side vehicles on the road first, with the possibility of quads being allowed in the future.

Amenson said he is forming a group to solicit businesses about the idea and gain their support to bring the issue to the Florence City council. If the city decided to allow the vehicles on the road, Amenson said, ODOT and Oregon Parks and Recreation would come out to review safety and speed. Noise limitations could

also be mandated by the city.

“I know that during the winter, if the weather is decent, you cannot get into that staging area,” Meyer said. “If you get there past 9:30 in the morning, you’re shut out. This would, during our slow season, possibly be a benefit.”

The commissioners said they would review the proposal.

Later in the meeting, the erosion repair project was discussed.

Interim Port Manager Dina McClure reported that the engineer on the project, Jack Aiken, was working on speeding up the permitting process, which can take months.

“His focus is to have this project approved,” McClure said. “He is actually shooting for April for the two-week construction and he also plans on getting in touch with Business Oregon to get 100 percent funding for the project.”

The project is funded by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), with 75 percent of the cost provided by the government, and 25 percent funded by the port.

McClure stated that Aiken believed he could get the 25 percent match from Business Oregon.

The commission then discussed the formation of a public input committee. Over the past few months, the port has held input meetings where community members were able to make suggestions on improving the port. The proposed committee would take that input and help the port study the feasibility of the suggestions and work them into the port’s upcoming strategic plan.

Meyer pointed out an issue with creating the committee right now, saying that the port is in flux with its port manager position.

“I don’t know how advisable it would be to build a plan without a manager,” Meyer said. “We may want to postpone in conducting the evaluation until we get another manager.”

McClure will be leaving the port in March, and the port is still currently looking for her replacement.

Duman agreed, stating the commission did not want to overburden a new manager with such a large project so soon into their new tenure.

The commission affirmed that they still want to have a committee with members of the public, but decided to hold off on creating one until a new manager is hired.

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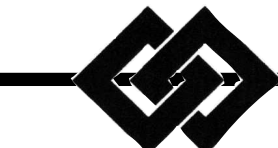
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