

Warrenton will pay less, but remain in tourism council

The Columbia Press

City commissioners stepped back Tuesday night from an earlier decision to withdraw from the Lower Columbia Tourism Council.

Instead, the city will simply scale back the amount of money it sends.

LCTC was formed three decades ago to combine the marketing efforts of Astoria and Warrenton. Both cities collect taxes from tourists when they camp in the area or stay in a hotel. The tax money is used to attract more visitors by letting people across the state and nation know about the region's attractions.

In years past, Warrenton sent 6.8 percent of the "transient" tax it collects to LCTC, or about \$53,000 per year.

But recently, city leaders have felt the agency was taking the money without considering Warrenton's goals. And during budget meetings in May, the city's finance committee decided it could make better use of those tourism dollars, particularly through improvements to Hammond Marina.



Mayor Henry Balensifer and former Commissioner Pam Ackley dedicate an Oregon Film Trail sign at Hammond Marina, where parts of the movie "Free Willy" were filmed.

As Warrenton becomes a more dominant force in the region, it should renegotiate its participation in agencies such as LCTC, Mayor Henry Balensifer said Tuesday.

"We've discussed this for five years that I can remember," Commissioner Mark Baldwin said, advocating leaving the council. "What are we getting? That's the data we do know -- we're not getting much. ... We need to do work on that marina and this is a start."

Last month, city commis-

sioners unanimously approved the budget without funding for LCTC.

But Tuesday night, there was a change of heart.

"I believe we're getting more than our money's worth" from LCTC, Commissioner Rick Newton said. He'd like the agency to push his idea to make Warrenton the walking capitol of the region.

"I think what they do for us is very important. ... I do not have enough data to walk away from them."

Commissioner Tom Dyer agreed. "We need to make a decision based on facts, not feelings," Dyer said.

David Reid, executive director of the Astoria-Warrenton Area Chamber of Commerce, which manages LCTC, said Warrenton needs to take a more active role on the council's board.

"That has not been happening in the last year, so we need to work on that. It goes in both directions. It's a partnership," Reid said.

LCTC's primary mission isn't attracting more tourists to the region, it's about man-

aging visitors, getting people interested in coming here during the off season, he said.

"If there's a story to be told about Warrenton, I'd like Warrenton to be telling that story."

Commissioners passed a resolution Tuesday night that would give LCTC 2 percent of the transient tax, or about \$15,525 per year. The rest of the money would go to the Hammond Marina capital reserve fund.

The vote was 4-1, with Newton voting no.

Regatta returns after hiatus

Astoria Regatta returns this year for an abbreviated festival on Aug. 14.

Just a few weeks ago, the Regatta's Board of Directors had canceled the event for the second year in a row.

However, as COVID-19 infections have fallen and pandemic restrictions have lifted, the board reconsidered its decision.

"The Regatta board came together this year with the goal of reviving some outdoor events that could be held safely during the pandemic," President Melissa Grothe said. "I anticipate that we'll be celebrating a return of the full festival

in 2022."

The Seamen's Memorial and Highwater Boat Parade will take place.

The memorial will recognize the region's maritime history at 11 a.m. Aug. 14 at Astoria's Maritime Memorial Park.

The boat parade will be visible from the Riverwalk and begins at 5 p.m. Captains can sign up at astoria-regatta.com/parades.

Annalyse Steele, an Astoria High School graduate, was crowned 2020 Regatta queen in a small, ceremony last summer. She will continue to serve through 2022.

State gets upgraded 911 locational system

Oregon's 911 program and RapidSOS, an emergency response data platform, have formed a partnership to deliver enhanced location data to each of the state's 43 911 dispatch centers.

Oregon is the first in the nation to securely deploy RapidSOS into an existing, secure emergency services network.

"The existing 911 system used to locate cell phone calls is over 20 years old, designed long before smart-

phones or GPS," explained Program Manager Frank Kuchta. "When a person calls 911 from a cell phone, the dispatcher can't see the caller's exact location; instead, they have to rely on the caller's wireless carrier for the information."

Yet 80 percent of 911 calls come from cell phones and location information comes from a cell tower that could put the caller miles away from where they are physically.

More than 10,000 lives could be saved nationwide each year if 911 could locate wireless callers faster, allowing first responders to assist callers sooner, according to the Federal Communications Commission.

The RapidSOS Platform securely delivers real-time data from smartphones and sensors to 911 centers, helping personnel quickly verify emergencies and providing location and additional data.

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