

Falcon Cove Water District to extend moratorium

By NICOLE BALES
The Astorian

When the Falcon Cove Beach Water District board voted to extend a moratorium for another six months in December, they said they believed it would be the last time.

But Charles Dice, the water district's system operator, told property owners during a May teleconference that the moratorium would be extended again.

The water district declared an emergency in December 2018 after reporting that water production had been at record low levels for the past several years during late summer months. The board attributed the water shortage to increased use at vacation rentals.

Property owners who want to build in Cove Beach and Falcon Cove, an unincorporated area on the border of Clatsop and Tillamook counties, have been limited in their ability to obtain building permits because of the moratorium.

Separate investigations

The board's actions have drawn criticism about transparency and possible ulterior motives to limit development. Some property owners have conducted their own investigations, which have contradicted the board's findings.

Guido Paparoni, a geologist, and his wife, Margaret Rozendaal, a climate scientist, own a lot in Cove Beach and spent months analyzing data obtained through public records requests. They came to the conclusion that there is no drought or water shortage in the late summer months. David Livermore, a hydrogeologist and longtime homeowner in Cove Beach, came to the same conclusions. They shared their findings with the water district and Clatsop County last year.

Dice walked back claims of a water shortage in December after he said the water district discovered an obstruction in its well that led to false data. He said he felt confident another extension of the moratorium would not be needed.

But Dice told property owners that the water district is waiting on a water rights permit from the state for the well, which is why the board is extending the moratorium for another six months.

"As soon as we have final approval, then as the board has discussed, we will take the risk, sort to speak, and lift the moratorium even before we have finished the construction of the integration with well No. 1," Dice said. "That's our intent."

But Paparoni and others told the board in May that they emailed the Oregon Water Resources Depart-

ment and found that no permit application process is needed because the water district qualifies for exempt use.

Clatsop County Commissioner Lianne Thompson, who represents most of South County and lives in Cove Beach, told the water district board during a public hearing Saturday that the purpose of the board is to deliver water.

"To the extent that it strays beyond that — speaking hypothetically, of course — into areas such as constraining growth, that is beyond the scope of the legal authority of the water board," she said.

"Working with my experience and listening to the myriad of phone calls and emails — please, I have so many during the past months and years — I would say that this district is at risk for lawsuits because people see illegal taking of their property rights. I also have heard the risk of ethics complaints with the Oregon Ethics Commission, but most of all I have seen exacerbating conflict between neighbors. To the extent that we are living together here as neighbors, I beg you, I plead with you, look for ways to listen to others."

'Appropriate data'

Residents and property owners also spoke out against the board's plan to install a second well. The water district has identified a subdivision called Cove Creek as a location for a second well.

Jim Caldwell, who lives in Cove Creek, asked the board to consider delaying spending money on studies for a second well.

"From what I know of the other folks here, I think there's pretty much consensus that we're not interested in pushing forward with that until we have good evidence and the water is actually needed," he said.

"I think the main question that arises for many of us here and in Cove Creek is that, you know, this report that Guido Paparoni and Margaret Rozendaal have submitted in the past to the board has not really, as far as we can tell, been addressed," he said.

Krista Shipsey, who also lives in Cove Creek, told the board she wants to understand the discrepancies between Paparoni and Rozendaal's findings and the water district's findings, especially since the moratorium is driving the district's budget.

"And what I'm asking for is an opportunity to really ask questions regarding kind of both datasets, because I think in order to justify the moratorium and everything that goes toward that in terms of the budget, there needs to be appropriate data and there needs to be the ability to question that," she said.



Masudur Khan stands outside one of his hotels, the River Inn at Seaside, which features signs at the entrance about hand sanitizing stations and social distancing.

Hoteliers feel ready to salvage summer

By EDWARD STRATTON
The Astorian

Masudur Khan, who runs several hotels in Seaside and Cannon Beach with his wife, Taslema Sultana, was eager to show off the sanitation and other safety protocols he has installed at the River Inn at Seaside to prevent the spread of the coronavirus.

He was even more eager to welcome back the hotel's staff, which has been training in advance of reopening last week.

Regional hoteliers like Khan are scrambling to put in place stringent safety measures to reassure guests, avoid contributing to an outbreak and salvage an increasingly tenuous tourist season.

South County leaders, their economies heavily dependent on lodging and tourism, departed from their peers in Astoria, Warrenton and Gearhart, who with Clatsop County waited to reopen lodging at 60% capacity starting Friday.

At the River Inn, Khan has installed hand-sanitizing stations throughout the property, sourced masks for his employees, started taking temperatures and installed plexiglass barriers in the lobby.

Cleaning staff have trained on increased sanitation practices for all high-touch areas, down to bagging remote controls in plastic to ensure guests they are sterilized.

The hotel has instituted the check-in systems to control and track the usage of



Employees of hotelier Masudur Khan in Seaside have been training on enhanced sanitation procedures in advance of reopening.

everything from the gym and fire pits to bike rentals, all sanitized between every use.

Khan and his staff acknowledge the unpredictability of guests, who can come from anywhere and with any health issues. Sherry McCroskey, the general manager at the River Inn, said it's one of her husband's biggest fears for her as guests return.

"We're approaching the training as if you have to assume every guest could be carrying it," she said of the virus. "So you have to do everything you're supposed to do to protect yourself."

Khan and Sultana have phased in the reopening of their properties. They started May 26 with the smaller, 11-room historic Gilbert Inn and moved on to larger properties May 28. Sultana's properties in Cannon Beach reopened May 29.

Khan and his investors are also trying to open the 65-room boutique Saltline Hotel, under construction

on Downing Street in Seaside, by the end of June.

Khan and Sultana believe hoteliers have a clear incentive to do their utmost to protect employees and guests from spreading the virus.

"It's for everyone's benefit," Sultana said. "If it doesn't work, then everybody loses, right? People cannot come to the beach, and we cannot run the business."

Greg Staneruck, a regional membership representative for the Oregon Restaurant & Lodging Association, said the industry has coalesced around a unified set of best practices put out by the American Hotel & Lodging Association that go beyond Brown's recommendations.

"Of course they want people there, but they don't want to go backwards either," Staneruck said. "So they are laser-focused on keeping everybody safe, and they will do what they have to do."

Hoteliers have been

frustrated by the government's lack of confidence in their ability to operate safely, Staneruck said, and by the opening of beaches, drawing in tourists anyway while not providing them a safe place to stay.

Despite the industry's concerted effort to be safe, worries persist about how hoteliers can govern the behavior of travelers potentially coming from more infected areas or flaunting social distancing rules.

The U.S. has experienced a spike in cases as most states have started easing travel, business and other restrictions meant to stem the spread of the virus. Crowds could already be seen on Seaside's busy Broadway last week, most of them not wearing masks recommended to help protect others.

Khan is offering his guests disposable masks but not requiring them. He feels confident that guests will be more cautious after seeing all his employees are doing to be safer.

He sees little choice in hotels reopening, with government assistance only lasting so long and much of the region's economy dependent on the summer months. He has already dropped his rates up to 25% compared to last year and expects a slower summer altogether.

"It's going to be a challenge, but we have to figure it out how we can get through this year," he said. "Survival for this year, and get ready for the next year."

Seaside man seeking \$1.1M for negligence

By NICOLE BALES
The Astorian

A Seaside man is seeking more than \$1.1 million for negligence after being seriously injured in a crash in December.

Justin Powell was walking across 12th Avenue and N. Holladay Drive in Seaside when he was allegedly struck by a vehicle driven by Erick

Yetzael Mendez Lopez.

Powell was struck at a high rate of speed, which threw his body over the hood of the vehicle, according to a court filing. He suffered numerous fractures, a laceration, a concussion and other injuries that have required surgeries.

Mendez Lopez, 23, of

Seaside, was arrested and later charged with assault in the second degree, failure to perform the duties of a driver to injured persons, driving under the influence of intoxicants, failure to perform the duties of a driver with property damage, recklessly endangering another person and reckless driving.

The lawsuit also accuses Naked Wines of negligence for allegedly serving Mendez Lopez alcohol prior to the crash while he was visibly intoxicated.

Powell's attorney declined to comment.

Mendez Lopez's attorney and Naked Wines could not be reached for comment.

County warns of contact tracing scam

The Astorian

The Federal Trade Commission has issued a warning about a text messaging scam involving people posing as government coronavirus contact tracers.

Clatsop County is urging people to use caution and

not click on any links in a text message about contact tracing. Clicking on the link downloads software onto the phone that allows scammers access to personal and financial information.

Officials say legitimate text messages from a health department say that a call will be coming from a spe-

cific number. The contact tracer will not ask for money or any personal information like a Social Security or credit card number.

People who are unsure if a text message is legitimate should call the Clatsop County Public Health Department at 503-325-8500.

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