

Thompson and Dillard face off on issues

Seaside Signal

Candidates for upcoming elections gathered in Astoria on April 19 for an election forum sponsored by The Astorian, KMUN, the Astoria Branch of the American Association of University Women and Clatsop County Community College. District 5, which covers much of the South County, was represented by incumbent county commissioner Lianne Thompson and challenger Steve Dillard. Here are portions from their discussion.

Moderator: We'll ask you to introduce yourselves. You have two minutes to do that and then I'll start asking questions and you each have a minute to respond to those. So, I'm going to go ahead and take it away.

Steve Dillard: Good evening, thanks for the chance to be here. My name is Steve Dillard. I'm running for District 5 commissioner.

In 2014, housing prices were high in this county and finding economical workforce housing was a challenge. Eight years later, workforce housing is a big issue all over the county. And our incumbent commissioner has a plan for this: to run for a third term.

There were homeless people in this county eight years ago. Now homelessness is a huge issue in our county. If you think the county is going in the right direction, if you think the leadership is working and making progress on this problem, then you need to vote for a third-term incumbent. I'm a person that believes in citizen representative, somebody who goes and serves the community, then comes back and lives under the laws that they helped create.

If you want a career politician, somebody who can't even spell term limits, then you need to vote for a third-term incumbent.

People over in the valley keep coming up with great ideas that they implement and then we pay the price for them here in our county. They keep over-regulating our timber, our fishing, our health care, our schools, even our construction.

Our existing commissioner has been meeting with people all over the state for years and years and years. But the regulations keep coming. And I submit that if you want more of this, then you need to vote for a third-term incumbent. My name is Steve Dillard and I'm here because I represent change.

Lianne Thompson: Good evening, everyone. My name is Lianne Thompson. I'm that person he's talking about. I would tell you Clatsop County government is a really interesting proposition. We're only one or two counties in Oregon, where the commissioners are volunteers.

That means the Clatsop County commissioners are either rich or retired or part time. When I took office in 2015, I was the fifth commissioner from District 5 in seven years. We had a churn in this district, which runs from the ocean to the Columbia County line, from the Tillamook County line to clear up to Fish Hawk Lake. It's a big district. It's over half the size of the county.

What it means is it takes a while to have the consistency to have the impact to make the difference. What I'm committed to is teamwork, building good relationships, community building, not making war on each other. Not finding reasons to criticize or hate or be angry at each other because we can all find what's the best in each person.

How do we come together to bring the best? How do we build housing that doesn't generate resistance because it threatens the well-being of the people who already have houses. You can call it NIMBY when there's backlash, or you can say wait a minute, we need to bring everybody to the table, get the right data, have the right relationships and then find ways to work together to solve the problems that we all have so that we have strong, positive communities where everybody is seen and heard and respected. Thank you.

Moderator: Thank you. Lianne, and we're gonna start the first question with you. What do you see as the county's role regard-



Lydia Ely/The Astorian

Lianne Thompson is running for a third term in South County's District 5.

ing the need for child care, including providing facilities and trained personnel?

Thompson: Thank you for that question. Child care is something that's in a long-term interest of mine. And what I did was hold on to the Child Care Task Force until Commissioner (Mark) Kujala and Commissioner (Courtney) Bangs could step up to deal with it. So the county's role in child care and in other essential community services is to convene people, bring the right people to the table, get the right data presented, and then find ways to implement those data into solutions that work in the community.

So we have got to have a business model that works. We have to have an educational model that works. We have to have an employment model that works. Most of all, we have to be taking care of the children and their families. So the county supports all that in our convening role.

Dillard: The county is doing a lot of work with the commission with the funds that they've done. I also think, when possible, they need to incentivize private child care. Thank you.

Moderator: What changes would you like to bring to Clatsop County?

Dillard: Accountability and transparency are big. As I travel around the county, I'd like more representation, more feedback, more connection from the commission to the voters of District 5. I keep hearing over and over and over again about the overreach from the folks over in the valley. And so I would like to see in our county more pushback against Salem and some of their great ideas that keep hammering us.

Thompson: In the last few years at the county Board of Commissioners, we've developed very functional collaboration and teamwork. I want to see that permeate all over Clatsop County. I want to see us really effective at developing workforce housing, child care, broadband dealing with water issues.

I'd like to see us heal from COVID.

Earlier tonight, I grabbed this musician friend of mine and said we need more community building. We need more art. We need to heal from this COVID. We've all been scared. We've all been isolated. We've all been concerned about things like inflation and how we maintain a quality of life. How do we deal with those who are homeless and hurting?

As a community, if we heal, if we form teams, if we collaborate, if we listen to each other with respect and affection, we can do that. That's what I want to see.

Moderator: How would you promote transparency of allocation of public funds?

Dillard: The transparency that is already there can be supplemented by adding any requests for more information on the website. The budget's on the website, you should



Lydia Ely/The Astorian

Steve Dillard, an innkeeper, is the challenger in District 5.

be able to make requests and if the certain information that detailed information that you're looking for isn't available, staff should be able to provide it at some point. And any of this will be public information and it should be published.

Thompson: I think visibility is a big part of transparency. And electronic visibility is great. You can watch us on the Zoom meetings. I've been asking for years to move the meetings of the county Board of Commissioners around the county because I think life is a "be-there" joke.

We had some inclination to do that and then COVID came, let us move around.

I've also begun a water roundtable. And what we've done is gather people from all kinds of interests, timber, brewing, environmental folk, watershed folk, bring them all together and look at those data so we can communicate relevant data on specific topics.

I want to do the same thing for housing that we're doing for water. Because if we share relevant information, and if we come and visit people so that we see the reality they see, then we're all going to communicate more effectively and that's the most transparency of all, in that two-way friendly conversation. Thank you.

Moderator: What projects would you promote as a commission?

Dillard: I think the county did a great study in 2018 that they published and has a lot of great information in that. One piece that I would add to that is when we talk about workforce housing is the commute distance, to add that into the equation. How close can we get people to their jobs and what kind of commuting distance? Transit could be added in there as a factor and what can we do to improve or supplement transit.

One of the other things that I think we need to do is oversee or step back a little bit the regulations that are being implemented. I was talking to a county employee that wanted to add a couple of duplexes onto his property in the city of Astoria. With all the permits, with all the extra money, with all the extra engineering that had to go on, it was going to be too cost prohibitive to generate the kind of housing that he was hoping to do. So to step back and say, we need to look at this from a higher level and maybe coordinate to where we can escalate some of these or supplement some of these city regulations could help with the overall condition.

Thompson: OK, this is late breaking news. The last thing I did today, before I came to this meeting, was to have a conversation with the executive director of ORLA (Oregon Restaurant and Lodging Association), Jason Brandt. "Jason, I know your restaurant workers, your hotel workers, they need housing. Will your organization collaborate with us so you'll help us?"

"Yeah," he said. "I think maybe we can get behind that." "Great," I said. "Would you like to know about Professor (Judith) Schein and Iain MacDonald from the TallWood Design Institute, because wait for it — modular housing made with mass plywood panels." Do you know I gave him the phone numbers. I called and I said to Iain, "Look for this call." He said, "Wait, Jason Brandt is calling me right now." That's what I'm doing. So I've been talking about this since 2010. I'm just going to keep talking about it. But I tell you I think we're getting to critical mass. I think it can happen.

Moderator: So that's the last question and so what I'd now like to do is invite the candidates to make their final statements. We'll start with you, Stephen. You have two minutes.

Dillard: Thank you. My wife and I are at a place in our lives where we were looking to help out and we've been looking to serve for quite a while now. It's about six months since I've been attending local meetings, mostly in the city of Seaside. Different kinds of meetings, work task forces and getting to know the different issues that are going on at the local level.

When I found that there was a chance to run for the county level I changed lanes and decided to serve Clatsop County. If elected, I have a long history of being a business person. I am an outdoorsman, and I'm in love with this county.

I'm in love with this county and I'm looking forward to doing more to help out here. I am pro-law enforcement, I am pro-parental rights and I've worked with a lot of different community organizations from Rotary and Habitat for Humanity, to Continuum of Care and lots of different local agencies, law enforcement, to work on county community projects.

I've had success in business, success in the community level and after attending many, many, many community meetings on the homelessness issue in our area, my wife and I finally decided to get out and do something because we care about people. We put our own funds, our own time, into creating a nonprofit organization to a transitional housing program to work with men in recovery.

We ran that for several years. brought a lot of people together, and we were able to make the difference in a lot of people's lives. So I've got a history in this area. And I'm looking forward to being able to serve the people of this county with my experience and my talents. Thank you for your time this evening.

Thompson: Well, Clatsop County commissioners are by charter nonpartisan, and that means we have to work with everybody. We have to bring out the best in everybody. We put partisanship aside to make a team with each other and every single other person.

Everybody's talents are welcome. Everybody's contribution is welcome. Because it really will take all of us working together, again with respect and affection, to use our best to deal with our worst, to heal what needs to be healed. We're at a period of great change. We're at a period of great stress. If you're driven down the highway, you know, there's a lot of stressed out people in the world. So how do we have grace with one another?

How do we take the time to look for what's best in each person, what we can agree to, how we can build something positive and constructive.

I play it right up the middle. I listen to everybody and work hard. I go the extra mile. We're starting to see the fruits of the capacity-building that we've done at the county. We're on track to really start blossoming and bearing fruit and these community concerns that are so important. I read a 10-year-old housing study. Back then, people thought that the problem was homeless people. Now we know it's something else. We know that building a strong economy and having child care and broadband, having options in this county, but most of all, practicing being good neighbors with one another and looking for ways to build a positive, constructive community.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Vote for Dillard

I will be voting for Steve Dillard for county commissioner District 5. The main reason is his past history of successfully working with homeless issues in California. He believes that a county-wide coordination will play a key role in making progress. He is results-oriented and ready to get to work.

He has volunteered in youth programs, Habitat for Humanity, Rotary, and others. He demonstrates honesty, integrity, accountability, and believes in freedom. Vote for Steve Dillard for District 5 commissioner.

Judy Hixson
Seaside

Taking the high ground

In my early 20s I moved to a small Maine fishing village on an island just a few miles off the coast. It hosted around 100 year-round residents and lobstering was the mainstay of the economy. At 373 acres, fire was never far from peoples' minds.

Every able-bodied man was expected to join the Volunteer Fire Department. A vintage hand-me-down fire truck was housed in a small garage next to the two-room schoolhouse, along with a 1940s military surplus power wagon. Training was minimal. No one had much of an idea how to plan for a large forest fire. It would be accurate to conclude that we

were woefully unprepared for such an event.

This fact was driven home one windy fall day when a trash fire ignited the high grass in a field on the island's south shore. Fortunately, most of us fishermen were ashore at the time. By the time we arrived, the fire, driven by a brisk wind, had crossed the field and was about to enter the woods. Luck was with us that day. I shudder to think about the consequences had we lost that fight. And it drove home to all of us the need for a bigger, better equipped fire station, and more modern equipment.

Fifty years on, thankfully, these things are a reality. That small town voted to

fund these improvements, and the bond measure passed with broad support.

Gearhart voters are poised to vote on our own firehouse bond measure. I've had the privilege of working as an appointee under four mayors over the past 16 years in the ongoing effort to replace our aging fire station, most recently as chairman of the ad hoc firehouse committee. I've come to believe it must be built on high ground so we will not risk the millions we've already invested in equipment.

As I learned long ago on that small island, when it comes to public safety,

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