

Mill Ponds: Property is ‘short-term solution’

Continued from Page A1

The city repurposed the Mill Ponds parking lot site after implementation of the overnight camping ordinance in May, after closing down a temporary campsite on city-owned land at 10th Avenue and Necanicum that had become increasingly difficult to manage.

Facilities include running water, portable restrooms and garbage collection.

Changes to the camping policies enacted last week allow permitted RVs and

campers to stay six days before requiring them to move or break down their campsites.

The lot is temporary, City Councilor Tita Montero said, developed as a response to federal court rulings and state law requiring cities to provide shelter options for the homeless.

“This is not permanent,” Montero said at the July 25 City Council meeting. “If we let ourselves slide into this as permanent, we will run into situations with the state and the powers that be, because

we are looking ultimately at that being a parking lot for the Mill Ponds Park. We’ve got to find a different, better location.”

Camping, whether authorized or unauthorized, is not consistent with the purpose of the coastal wetlands program or the uses described, Eric Williams, the watershed board’s grant manager, said in a June letter to the city.

The city accepted \$250,000 from the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board in 1998 to buy the property, which has envi-

ronmental importance as a freshwater salt marsh and wildlife habitat.

The meeting between city staff and the state centered on the requirements of the fund sources that contributed to the land acquisition, which prohibit camping, Williams said after the meeting.

“City officials described their approach to addressing the situation, including the rationale for creating the hardscaped (graveled) camping area, which was placed on top of an existing dirt parking area,” he



R.J. Marx

RVs and campers at the city's camping area off Alder Mill Avenue.

said. “The city feels that actions to date have resulted in cleanup of the majority of the Mill Ponds property and more controls over how the property is being used. They acknowledged that this is a short-term solution and that alternative sites need to be

found, which they are working on.”

In terms of next steps, the watershed enhancement board’s North Coast program representative, Katie Duzik, will be meeting quarterly with city officials to check on progress, Williams said.

Moberg named Warrenton city manager

By ETHAN MYERS
The Astorian

WARRENTON — The city has found its next city manager.

Following an executive session on July 29, the City Commission voted unanimously in a special session to offer the position to Esther Moberg, the library director and public information officer in Seaside. The offer is pending contract negotiations.

“I am so excited for the opportunity to be a part of Warrenton and I am looking forward to getting to know the staff, community and building a future together,” Moberg said.

Moberg has held a number of library posts

on the North Coast, totaling nine years of local government management experience.

Moberg, along with Marc Howatt, a former public works director in Warrenton, and Donald Kewley, most recently a senior risk manager for a technical consultant, were named as finalists for the position earlier this month.

The city held staff and community receptions with candidates, as well panel interviews by community leaders, public administrators, city department heads and the City Commission over the past week.

“I’m pleased that we have unanimous support to offer Esther Moberg the job,” Mayor Henry Balensifer said in a statement. “We look forward to working together to build a better Warrenton.”

Moberg is set to replace Linda Engbretson, who is retiring. Her last day was Aug. 5.

Mathew Workman, the police chief, will act as interim city manager until Moberg is hired.

This is the second time within the last several months that the city has named a new city manager. In April, Ben Burgener, who held the same role in Stanfield, was named city manager, but contract negotiations failed.

The city then tasked Jensen Strategies, the Portland consulting firm hired to find and vet applicants, with conducting another search.

Ashley Driscoll, the city’s attorney, and Balensifer will negotiate the contract with Moberg. A timeline for her arrival will be announced at a later date, the city said.

Moberg: Library’s biggest need is more space

Continued from Page A1

“Originally, I wasn’t necessarily thinking of Warrenton, but after I went through that process, I felt maybe it was time to look into another city manager position,” Moberg said. “When that one opened up again, it seemed like a possible good fit.”

The interview process confirmed that, she said.

Warrenton city staff will negotiate the contract with Moberg. A timeline for her job transition will be announced at a later date.

Looking ahead, Moberg said the library’s biggest need is more space, both in the building and the parking lot, which could lead to expansion.

“I just love the Seaside Library,” she said. “I think it’s a jewel — and I’ve seen that from working with most of the libraries across the state. What we have here is just amazing. I just hope that continues.”

Appeal: Concern about changing neighborhoods

Continued from Page A1

“It’s just too small and there’s too many in the neighborhood,” Buck said. “The impact is increased traffic, constant noise and then once that group leaves another group comes in, then it’s all over again.”

The City Council is charged with reviewing appeals with the option to affirm, amend, or overturn the Planning Commission’s decision.

A permanent resident for 40 years, Buck asked the council to rescind the Planning Commission’s decision based on density rules and quality of life concerns.

Because of noise, fire and traffic concerns, Buck said he has had to act as neighborhood “policeman” to issues arising from vacation homes, including camping, fire pits, traffic and noise. Because of the high density, there is a constant battle for street park-

ing, he said.

Filling out complaint forms was “problematic,” he said, involving online submissions and calls to management companies or owner contacts.

In the last two years, five property owners have applied for vacation rental permits. “I sent my comments in opposition and each one was granted a license,” he said.

Neighbors shared his concerns.

“I’ve been in the same house for 33 years — and it ain’t the same ball game,” Marti Wajc said.

She described health and safety issues, illegal rentals at neighboring properties and dog barking.

“I implore you to stop it,” Wajc said. “Consider the people who live here first rather than dollar signs.”

Tedd Chillless said he bought his house on 14th Avenue in 1987, a time when “the street was like a Norman

Rockwell painting.”

“Kids played in the yard,” Chillless said. “They played with kids across the street. But today, we have numerous vacation rentals. The street is like a freeway.”

Chillless said school buses drop youth sports teams at rental properties. Outdoor tents and fire pits pose a safety threat and visitors keep late hours.

A co-owner of 430 14th Ave., Dave Reudlin, said he had never had a negative interaction or complaint regarding the home.

“Most recently one of our neighbors came over to me to tell me how nice the place looked recently,” he said.

“We built flowerbeds,” Reudlin said. “We’re trying to be good, respectful neighbors of the neighborhood. I don’t want to turn this into an investment property. I’d like to offset the cost of it because of the frequency with which we’re able to get down here at

this time in our lives.”

City Councilor Steve Wright agreed that the city had a problem with illegal rentals.

“Maybe the next step is to figure out how we crack down on the illegal operations,” Wright said. “But that’s not a decision to make tonight.”

Mayor Jay Barber said the appeal did not fit the criteria for overturning the Planning Commission decision.

Wright and city councilors Randy Frank, Tita Montero, Tom Horning and Dana Phillips joined Barber in voting to deny the appeal.

After the meeting, Buck said he was disappointed with the decision.

“There’s nothing else I can do short of getting a lawyer and trying to sue the city,” he said.

“Unfortunately, the only takeaway for the councilors was the matter of the illegal VRDs (vacation rental dwellings),” Wajc said after

Infant care: Grants aim to meet widespread need

Continued from Page A1

providers of early education and child care programs in the region, Archibald said.

Infant and toddler care brings a different set of expectations and standards, but also presents an opportunity to meet a portion of what is a significant need in the community and replicate the success the park district has had with this age group, he said.

About \$15,000 to \$20,000 will be needed for equipment and other expenses to change the physical space, Archibald said. The other portion will be used to cover staff wages for the first part of the program with the hope of securing long-term funding or different grants.

As time goes on, those

new programs will be folded into the park district’s youth programs, Archibald said.

Additional funding could be obtained from Oregon Community Foundation, with a grant application pending. Funds from Providence Seaside Hospital, Clatsop County and Columbia Memorial Hospital will also help launch the program.

Erin Reding, the park district’s youth programs manager, supervises the preschool, summer camp and after school-program and will also supervise this program when launched.

“Erin has a great deal of experience and we are fortunate to have her,” Archibald said.

Michael Hinton, a board member, sought greater

sustainability than previous district grant programs, including a recent camp program.

“It’s important that once we get this started, that we find that we make it affordable and then we make it sustainable,” he said.

Differences between the infant care program and previous programs, Archibald said, are that the program anticipates full registration and the park district now has use of the Sunset Recreation Center classrooms.

“I think the timing is lining up almost perfectly,” he said.

The board of directors

voted to support the pilot extension program for the expansion of infant and toddler care.

“We are hoping to launch the program around Sept. 6,” Archibald said.

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