

A work session of the Astoria Common Council was held at the above place at the hour of 9:00 am.

Councilors Present: Nemlowill, Price, Jones, and Mayor LaMear. Councilor Brownson arrived at approximately 9:05 am.

Councilors Excused: None

Staff Present: City Manager Estes, Public Works Director Harrington, City Engineer Moore. The meeting is recorded and will be transcribed by ABC Transcription Services, Inc.

#### **CHANGES TO THE AGENDA**

There were none.

#### **DISCUSSION ABOUT BANNING PLASTIC BAGS IN ASTORIA**

City Manager Estes said the City had received a request to discuss the possibility of banning plastic bags in Astoria. Staff has done some technical research, looked at ordinances that other jurisdictions are using, and worked with McLaren Innes on gathering information for this discussion.

Mayor LaMear explained that she had become increasingly upset by the plastic grocery bags that are stuck in fences, trees, and even out in the ocean. She believed it was time to regulate the single-use plastic bags.

City Manager Estes noted that Carl Peters from Recology and Staff had information on ordinances from McMinnville, Port Angeles, Port Townsend, and Manzanita.

Director Harrington stated the heart of the problem was specific to disposable plastic grocery bags. He listed other types of plastic bags that are still used in areas where the grocery bags are banned and described many of the problems caused by plastic grocery bags. Currently, there are eight jurisdictions that regulate plastic bags. Staff had spoken to some of these jurisdictions to find out what they would have done differently. One recommendation was to work towards a county-wide, regional, or state-wide ban. Oregon started the process in 2013, but the efforts have now been classified as inactive. He reviewed the existing ordinances and explained how the regulations were implemented and enforced, and what impacts the regulations had. He also noted considerations recommended by other jurisdictions.

The Council, Staff, and guests briefly discussed the global and local impact of banning plastics bags and how that would relate to the City's end goal. Even though the United States is a minor contributor to the problem, it all adds up, the City still needs to be responsible, and the trend is going towards a change. They also discussed the importance of a county-wide solution. It would be unfair to place a burden on the one local grocery store because most of the problem is caused by bags from the big box stores in Warrenton. Mayor LaMear said Cam Moore and Scott Lee at the County were personally in favor of a ban. She believed if there was enough movement in the cities, the County would agree to a county-wide ban.

Carl Peters, General Manager, Recology, provided some statistics on plastic production, usage, disposal, and recycling. He explained that the United States sends plastic to China, where it is sorted and either recycled or thrown directly into the rivers. He shared photographs that demonstrated some of the recycling problems and increased costs caused by plastic grocery bags. He provided details about the challenges in the recycling industry that are increasing costs and leading to more waste being dumped in landfills. There are some innovators in the industry, but a lot of recycling was still being thrown away due to costs. One of the biggest impacts to increased costs is contamination that occurs when people mix non-recyclable with recyclable items. So, Recology has plans to educate people about the difference between trash and recyclables on a new website. He shared details of Amazon's efforts to replace cardboard packaging with single-use pouches that can be recycled. Many other businesses are looking for ways to eliminate the use of single-use disposable products like plastic straws and Styrofoam containers. He commended City Council for having this discussion and said he would support any decision that was made.

Mayor LaMear called for public comments.

Jan Faber 3015 Harrison, Astoria, said the jurisdictions that ban plastic bags have the same problem as Astoria, with stores that are very close to the city limits. It could be argued that a ban is unfair to Safeway. He asked how other cities handled this issue.

Mr. Peters said McMinnville understands they cannot do anything about Warrenton, but they wanted to do set a standard in the hopes that the County and other jurisdictions would follow. He had spoken to a store manager who said he did not believe it was a competitive disadvantage that the store did not have plastic bags.

Councilor Jones explained the importance of getting input from local businesses before any decisions are made. Mayor LaMear confirmed that would be part of the process and businesses would be given time to adjust to any new regulations.

Councilor Jones stated there were people who recycled grocery bags in a way that prevented the bags from ending up in the ocean. Those people, himself included, would have to find other potentially less environmentally friendly bags to use. Additionally, he believed the heavier multi-use bags were just as bad for the environment as the single-use bags. Therefore, he wanted to make sure the City was going about these regulations in a logical way. The City could impose taxes or require deposits like the deposits charged on glass bottles instead of banning items outright. He wanted more information about the pros and cons of each option.

Mayor LaMear asked for more information about compostable items.

Mr. Peters explained that in order to be classified compostable, an item must change in size by one inch in six months. Those items can be thrown away and they are great for single-use. He explained the decomposition process necessary for these items to break down. He also noted that labels confuse people about what is biodegradable and what is recyclable.

Councilor Brownson said the City should be clear about their motivation for regulating plastic bags because the issue is so complex. There is a lot of discrepancy in the statistics being published and plastic bags are seen as more of a problem because they are more visible than things like plastic bottles that sink in the ocean and are not seen as often. The issue could be argued from multiple corners, so the City must be solid about their decision. He also wanted the City to work with the County on a County-wide ban.

Mr. Peters noted that McMinnville realized their ban would be impactful because they were a population center that carried the county. He has recommended that Warrenton City Council consider regulating plastic bags.

Bridget, Gearhart, said Fort George Brewery supported a plastic bag ban. She is a server at Fort George who works on sustainability on the side. Fort George switched from plastic to paper bags and stressful part of the switch was with the customers, but the transition was easy. She believed a county-wide regulation would be most effective because everyone in the area would be on the same page and it would be easier to educate people. It is heartbreaking to see the plastic bags in the ocean and plastic does not degrade, it just breaks down into micro plastic that suffocates fish.

Mr. Peters added that a large percentage of fish have ingested micro plastics. When people eat fish, they are eating the plastic.

George Hague, 1 3<sup>rd</sup> Street, Astoria, said the Danish study on PBA said that people in Denmark use an average of four reusable bags a year. The study did not factor in littering because it was not an issue. Litter is one of Astoria's main issues with bags. Denmark incinerates their garbage, generating additional energy that is stored for future use. In California, when a county-wide ban was not possible, bags were banned city by city leading to a critical mass of people in favor of the ban. Then the county, and eventually the state was able to ban bags. People found out the ban was not so bad and the stores were in favor of the state-wide ban. The bags used in California are sturdy and reusable. More grocery carts are available because people are just carrying their items in the bags. He hoped the City moved forward on this instead of waiting on the County.

David Reid 4924 Cedar Street, Astoria, Director of the Chamber of Commerce, said business owners make decisions about the bags they provide to customers based on their business model. It is heavy handed for a city

to tell businesses to change their model. He offered to facilitate a conversation between the City and the Chamber's members because they would like to see something other than a ban on plastic bags. He did not believe a ban in the City would create a competitive disadvantage because all of the businesses in the City would be required to comply. He hoped the City would use a collaborative approach.

Director Harrington noted that many jurisdictions focused on grocery bags and made exceptions for other plastic materials like protective coatings and sanitary items.

Councilor Jones reiterated the importance of conveying the City's goal and purpose, and asking for feedback from the local businesses. It would be much better to make this decision in partnership rather than just imposing a new requirement.

The Council discussed incentives and benefits to businesses. Councilor Nemlowill did not believe large companies would care about incentives, so regulations would be necessary. She believed the City should pursue a ban and she supported a County-wide ban.

Councilor Brownson suggested the City find out where the County stood on this issue and then decide how to move forward. City Manager Estes noted that counties have limited jurisdiction over cities.

Councilor Price believed the large companies in Warrenton would eliminate plastic bags because all of those companies have stores in California. She added that the Council should prioritize this issue for Staff. She handed out a list at the dais of all the things Council has said they wanted to do over the last two years. Many of the things are tasked to Staff. This is important, but Council already has a list of goals for the fiscal year that are important and labor intensive. This issue would fall on the Public Works Department, which already has a lot going on.

Councilor Jones noted that three Councilors would be replaced in three months. He hoped that Council could accomplish one of their goals before the members turn over.

City Manager Estes explained that some of the projects Public Works is working on are larger than any other project the City has done. Their projects are numerous and complex, and they impact the City's infrastructure. So, their capacity to take on new projects is slim. His capacity to take on a new project was nil because the long-range planning projects have spilled over into his workload. If Council directs Staff to work on a ban, they would, but other projects would slow down.

Councilor Nemlowill said limited Staff capacity is always an issue, but that does not mean the City should not be responsive to citizen's concerns or the environment. She wanted to get this done quickly. All of the other goals would take time and money. She asked if Recology would put resources towards education and outreach.

Mr. Peters said absolutely.

City Manager Estes explained that if Council wanted an ordinance drafted, Director Harrington could do that in a short amount of time. However, the community outreach would take time and resources.

Councilor Jones recommended that Mr. Reed facilitate a discussion between the businesses and Director Harrington. If all the businesses want the same things, the process becomes a lot easier. Councilor Brownson added that the public could comment when an ordinance is presented to City Council.

City Manager Estes asked Council to prioritize their goals. Councilor Jones wanted Staff to replace the Mill Pond property sales with the plastic bag discussion with the Chamber. Councilor Price wanted to focus on the City Council goals.

Ted said he supported the ban and believed Astoria was crucial. There is a plaque on his sail boat stating he would not dispose of plastic in the ocean, yet he always sails past plastic bags. He also finds the bags on the beach. He had heard the argument that a ban would be an imposition on businesses. The same argument was made in the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century when factories employed children. Things like the Environmental Protection Act, The Clean Air and Clean Water Act, and the right for women to vote were passed in local jurisdictions prior to being passed at a national level. This issue is stuck at the State level because industry proponents want to keep

manufacturing plastic bags. So, it is the proper role of local government to pass these sorts of ordinances. It is simple to take another jurisdiction's ordinance and put Astoria in, discuss it for a while, hold a vote, and move to the next item on the agenda.

Dulcye Taylor, Astoria, said the City already had a bunch of people sitting in the audience who wanted to help educate people. She suggested the City allow community members and Recology work together to gather the feedback and present it to City Council.

Mr. Hague noted that the large grocery stores in California are allowed to use plastic in the produce and meat sections. Also, the farmer's markets are allowed to use plastic.

Mr. Reed said this Council could signal its intent. Plastic bag bans are happening around the country, so the City can still make some progress without completely abandoning the issue.

City Manager Estes explained that while the Waterfront Bridges Project and the Bond Street Project are ongoing, this issue would be worked on in between Public Works other functions as time allows.

Councilors Price, Brownson, and Jones agreed the City should allow volunteers to gather feedback from the public, as recommended by Ms. Taylor. Mayor LaMear said she and Ms. Innes could work on a sample ordinance to be reviewed by the City Attorney that could be shared with businesses for feedback. City Manager Estes noted that feedback from the Chamber and the Astoria Downtown Historic District Association (ADHDA) will help Staff expedite the work.

Mayor LaMear called for a recess at 11:02 am. The meeting reconvened at 11:09 am and City Council proceeded to the Waterfront Bridges Update at this time.

#### **POLICY DISCUSSION REGARDING RECREATIONAL VEHICLE DUMP STATION**

This discussion was held immediately following the Waterfront Bridges Update.

City Manager Estes said the recreational vehicle (RV) dump station at the round about has become a topic of discussion in the community. Some citizens are concerned that the dump station is a single point of entry to the City's sewer system and should be closed.

Director Harrington added that the City's wastewater treatment plant is a natural lagoon system without mechanical controls, so the City does everything possible to protect it and ensure it lasts as long as possible. If the lagoon becomes unusable, the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) will require the City to build a mechanical plant, which will be costly. Water and sewer rates are already high.

Engineer Moore provided background information on the RV dump station in Astoria and other free dump stations in the area. She displayed a list of concerns on the screen and noted that the City does not have many issues even though the station is unmonitored. However, the City wants to protect its water treatment plant, especially since water flows in the summer and fall have changed since the Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO) projects. A recent study completed by one of the City's consultants indicates the system cannot get enough oxygen to function properly in the summer and fall. The study also indicated this was a result of industrial water usage and waste. Staff is working on a scope of improvements to extend the useful life of the wastewater treatment plant, which she and Director Harrington reviewed in detail. Staff needed more data about what waste and how much waste was going into the City's system by industrial businesses. Additionally, Staff had no knowledge of who was using the RV dump station and how it was being used. She recommended options for better management of the dump station.

Staff answered Councilors questions about other dump stations in the area and who uses the free dump stations.

Councilor Brownson said he could see the dump station from his house. Most of the usage occurs on Sundays during summer by people traveling up the coast. The carpet restoration industry also dumps their cleaning chemicals in the dump station.

Director Harrington confirmed that the City had investigated the carpet company and confirmed they were using environmentally friendly products. They also filter out the plastic microfibers. It is common for municipalities to accept their wastewater.

Councilor Brownson cited public health concerns from spilled waste. The high school track team runs on the roadway through the area. Director Harrington noted there was a sidewalk in the area and another sidewalk was planned.

Engineer Moore confirmed that tourism has an impact on the system between winter and summer, but the increases that impact the system are not from people.

Director Harrington said Staff wanted more information about the use of the dump station by locals before deciding to close it down. City Manager Estes added that in the past, the dump station was an important community benefit.

Councilor Price said she had no problem closing it. People who could afford an RV could afford to pay to dump their tanks.

Councilor Nemlowill stated closing the dump station could extend the life of the City's current system without expensive upgrades.

Unidentified Speaker was concerned that closing the dump station would increase the risk of illegal dumping.

Mayor LaMear said she had spoken to Willis VanDusen who said that in 2004, there was considerable effort by the community to have the dump station. She believed there would be opposition to closing the dump station.

Councilor Price said a lot had changed in Astoria since 2004.

Director Harrington confirmed Staff's major concern was what might be getting dumped into their system.

City Manager Estes said the existing system could be upgraded or the pump station could be closed. Staff needed direction about how they should proceed. He confirmed Council needed to take action because this is a policy matter.

Councilor Jones suggested Staff bring back upgrade options and feedback from the public on closing the dump stations.

Councilor Brownson believed that if the City wanted to stop additional waste into the system, the dump station should be closed. Closing the dump station could reduce the overall impact to the City's system. If the City wants to allow the dump station, a few things could be done to make it more secure and less vulnerable.

Director Harrington noted that since 2004 other dump stations have closed along the I-5 corridor and in Seaside. That means more people are using Astoria's dump station because it is convenient and free. The additional load is a burden to the rate payers. The City's infrastructure was designed to provide services to its residents and the recreational tourist community of 2004 was a lot different than it is today.

City Manager Estes added that ultimately the City would need to decide whether a new sewer treatment plant should be installed. Director Harrington explained that the City has a DEQ permit, which imposes limits. Repetitively exceeding those limits will result in action by DEQ. Staff is considering ways to prolong the use of their current sewer treatment plant and closing the dump station, which has been identified as a vulnerability, is one of many options.

Councilor agreed that closing the dump station should be added to the agenda of a regular City Council meeting so the public could provide input before they vote.

Staff confirmed that working with industrial business would provide the best option for longevity of the current system. The upcoming headworks project would be designed to work with a mechanical system and would allow the City to reconfigure how waste is distributed, which would help the current situation.

Staff and the Council briefly discussed why it was so difficult to track data about the dump station and any impacts from closing the dump station.

**WATERFRONT BRIDGES UPDATE**

This update was presented after the Discussion about Banning Plastic Bags.

City Engineer Moore provided a brief update on the Waterfront Bridges Project and noted construction would begin October 1<sup>st</sup>.

Mr. Reed gave an update on the stakeholder meeting that was held earlier that day. The Chamber, the Small Business Development Center (SBDC) and the ADHDA would collaborate with affected businesses to mitigate against the impacts of the project.


City Manager Estes thanked the stakeholders for their partnerships and he thanked City Council for their support.

City Council proceeded the Policy Discussion Regarding the Recreational Vehicle Dump Station at this time.

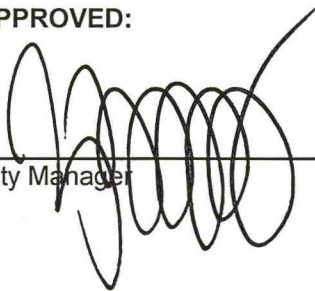
**ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 12:16 pm.

**ATTEST:**

  
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Finance Director

**APPROVED:**

  
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City Manager