

# Downtown Astoria block named Heritage Square

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Some call it the Safeway block – but Safeway hasn't occupied the block for years, moving to the newer location on Marine Drive.

Some call it the American Legion block – which is accurate, given that the American Legion building sits on the same block, but doesn't really represent the subsided portion closest to Duane Street that has sparked the most discussion in the past year.

So the city of Astoria wants to name the block officially, once and for all.

The block will now be referred to as Heritage Square.

And whatever you do, don't call it the hole in the ground.

"I move that we rename the American Legion, former Safeway block 'Heritage Square,'" said Astoria City Councilwoman Arline LaMear at Tuesday night's meeting.

The motion passed unanimously, and the Astoria City Council approved the renaming of the square after more than a month of discussion that included a public hearing - one that heard no testimony.

With that, the discussion turned toward what will be inside of Heritage Square.

The Garden of Surging Waves, recognizing the Chinese contribution to the city of Astoria throughout history, has already been included in the Heritage Square designs.

But Mike Phillips, commander of Clatsop Post 12 of the American Legion, appeared before the council in hopes members would change their minds.

"The Legion does not have any direct negative responses for this, except that they believe as I believe ... as far as the square goes, I think there should be more acknowledgement for other nationalities other than just the Chinese," Phillips said. "That's one of my main concerns. It's going to be 'Heritage Square,' you don't just have the Chinese portion and then sign boards for everybody else."

He asked the council to consider making a smaller version of the Chinese park, also in an effort to conserve parking spaces.

Councilwoman Karen Mellin explained to Phillips that the Chinese don't have any recognition in the community.

"This isn't just to recognize the Chinese, but I think that we'll probably develop all kinds of activities or something to recognize other heritages here, too," Mellin said. "It's just that we have Suomi Hall, the Finns have their organization and the Legions do. I don't know about all of the others, but nobody has

ever recognized the Chinese influence in Astoria in any significant manner. So this was just kind of filling in that gap."

Another portion of the square will be used as open space, in an amphitheater-style environment, since the collapse of the Safeway basement floor.

City Manager Paul Benoit asked the council Tuesday to approve amendments to the comprehensive plan on the square, prior to Phillips' comments that included the desire for open space.

"It's been something that's been discussed in the community for the better part of 10 years," Benoit said. "More recently, the City Council has focused in on the Northwest corner of the block for the soon-to-be developed Garden of Surging Waves Chinese interpretive park. And the balance of that half of the block being open space, amphitheater-type development, the south half being parking."

The Astoria Downtown Historic District Association provided a letter of support for the amendments. President Dulcye Taylor was among those present.

"We believe this effort will draw more people - locals and tourists alike - to our downtown core, and provide a community gathering space in the heart of our historic district that has to this point has been lacking," Taylor wrote.

The council approved the first reading of the amendment, which will be brought back to the council for a second reading and approval in the near future.

In other city news;

- The Astoria-Walldorf Sister City Committee recommended to the Astoria City Council Tuesday night that the 5,000 Euros donation by the city of Walldorf, Germany, should be divided up to a few different projects. The money translates to \$6,750 which will be divided up in the following ways: \$5,500 will go to the sister city high school exchange program for students going to Walldorf, Germany during Spring Break; \$1,000 will go towards the installation of the Garden of Surging Waves; and \$250 will go to the Regatta Anchors.

- Public Works Director Ken Cook gave an update about the Mill Creek waterline relocation project - a \$4 million ODOT project involving a culvert and a bridge on U.S. Highway 30 near Tongue Point that the city wasn't informed about until the design phase had nearly reached completion. Cook said the city is still in discussions with ODOT about the project and the city's responsibility for the waterline relocation, which was estimated in October at \$400,000. Cook said the city is looking at about \$250,000 for a permanent waterline, funds that ODOT may be willing to loan the city to do the project.

"Opportunities to move it to a different place or move the bridge just aren't there," Cook said, "in order to save the waterline and its present alignment, or very close to its present alignment."

- Cook also briefed the council on the 17th Street Dock reconstruction project - a project funded through

a state grant to replace old wooden pilings, but delayed because of noise concerns for the Steller sea lions, a protected species.

"We are presently disputing," Cook said of the National Marine Fisheries Service, who refused to give the city their permits last summer. "They want a 2.8-mile radius, which basically translates to a 1.4 miles. Any Steller sea lion that comes within that 1.4 miles, which we would have to have two monitors watching, then all pile driving activity has to cease for an hour."

Cook said the city is trying to get that requirement down to one mile or less, given the width of the river.

"We're trying to protect these sea lions but when they get to Bonneville, they kill them," LaMear said. Cook countered that they are hazed with noise bombs in Bonneville. Noise is the reason why the pile driving at the 17th Street docks hasn't yet been allowed.