

Participant: Spencer Nebel
Title: City Manager, City of Newport
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Courtney: We talked a little bit already about the Voices from the West Coast Project, what that is, what the goals of that project are. So what I'd like to start it with is just talking to you a little bit more about what it's like to live and work in Newport. Maybe you can start with a story about being the City Manager, what a typical day looks like for you.

Spencer: Sure. I've been City Manager in Newport since December of 2013. And so my perceptions of Newport have been developed over a fairly short period of time. And before this time I came from Michigan so this is my first real experience in Oregon as far as working and living on the coast. But Newport's a truly fascinating community to manage and to live in. I think you know we have a number of elements in this community that really bring together a lot of different things in order to make this community successful. Commercial fishing is one of those key areas, the marine research is huge here as well. And definitely a growing area. And then tourism is kinda that third leg of the stool that helps support the economy of this community. But my wife and I have both you know from a living standpoint have both been very happy living on the coast and in Newport. And, uh, it's just been a very fascinating community to live in. And you know, it's been great so far.

C: Yeah. What brought you to the West Coast? Anything in particular or just looking for a new opportunity?

S: Actually I had two sisters that have lived out here for years and years and so I would visit out here and then my wife and I would visit out here and, uh, we kinda put Oregon on our short list for places that we might want to try working in before, before I ultimately retire and, uh, the first job that came up on the communities that we had visited that we thought would be a fun place to work was Newport. I applied for the job and the city council hired me as manager here. And so, and I ...you indicated you were from Coos Bay or graduated from Coos Bay and that's where my sister originally located to was to assist a friend that lived in Coos Bay. And now both sisters live in the Salem area. So that was kinda the introduction to Oregon that we had and the more times we came out here we thought it'd be a nice place to live. And after two and a half years we're very comfortable with our decision to make a move out this direction.

C: Yeah. Great. I know you haven't been City Manager all that long but do you have any particularly memorable days as City Manager? Either maybe it was a really good day for some reason or maybe a not so good day?

S: Well certainly one of the things that has really impressed me about this community. Um, came as we received some disheartening news about the Coast Guard discontinuing

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our helicopter facility that's at the Newport municipal airport. And, uh, ended up getting that call when I was actually you know taking that afternoon off and get notice of this and I thought oh man, this is not good news. And so from my standpoint as a City Manager you know immediately communicated that information to the Mayor and Council and then we got partnered with the, uh, Port and the county and other organizations along the coast and in the state and the one group that truly impressed me was the Newport Fishermen Wives and the role that they played in this whole, whole effort. But the one thing that I learned from that entire experience is this is a community that can come together very quickly and very effectively to influence a national decision. And in particular the fishermen wives are power houses when it comes to communicating an issue at federal level, at state level. I think how our state and federal Oregon legislative team came together on this issue was amazing and, uh, and so it, uh, I think, I think being a coastal community and being as inter-connected with the commercial fishing associations and those sorts of things, um, it's amazing how much power that, that could be exerted from a small community on the coast on this specific issue to reverse that decision in Washington. And, uh, and so that's... that, I always like to cite that as an example because it's still kinda, kinda blows my mind how effective that group was in really making change and it, and it was amazing how everyone came together on that issue to work hand in... you know, you know hand in hand to try to get a different outcome from what was planned by the U.S. Coast Guard at that time.

C: Yeah. That's a great story. What kinds of issues do you deal with on a day to day basis as the City Manager in Newport?

S: In Newport, uh, as City Manager you deal with a lot of the same issues that I dealt with as City Manager in Michigan. Um, I'd say the differences are the strong interaction with the marine science community and some of the issues that we have going on in this community such as, um, Oregon State University's decision to have a marine studies initiative program that will bring undergraduate students to the coast here in Newport for part of a, kind of a comprehensive marine studies program. That goes beyond the hard science but includes business and arts and those sorts of things. Uh, that's been certainly a lot of fun. It was great working with OMSI and opening Camp Gray here in Newport as well. Probably the biggest change for me coming from Michigan is dealing with the Cascadia subduction zone, emergency planning and those sorts of things because, again, I'm, you know, recent on the scene but even as a state this is sort of kind of a recent phenomena and so yeah I think the City of Newport and Lincoln County and coastal communities and the state are all really trying to you know get our collective acts together on how do we deal with such a potential issue that could occur, could occur tomorrow, could occur 300 years from now but it's, uh, you know certainly if you look at the geological history it's gonna occur at some time. And, uh, you know having a community prepared to, um, deal with that immediate emergency and then taking a look at resilience following the emergency are really key things that are far different from what I had to deal with in Michigan. But, uh, so far like I said it's been a great experience and it's been, um, you know, really, I continue to be impressed at both the capability of people once there's a common vision or a common idea for people to work together to make that, make that happen.

C: Great. Can you describe the community of Newport for me a little bit more?

S: Sure. I earlier had talked a little bit about kinda the economic description of Newport. I think the bayfront is an amazing place. You know where can you have tourist attractions like Ripley's Believe it or Not across the street from seafood processing facilities and forklifts loading fish and you see, uh, you know the fish processing going on right across the street. So it truly is a you know from a bayfront standpoint, this community truly has a working bayfront that is very interesting to visitors coming to this community as well. And to get that marriage of tourism and you know the seafood industry together on one street is kind of an amazing feat. Um, so I think, I think that's certainly one of the remarkable things about Newport. I think you know the, the whole South Beach development of, uh, of the marine science industry with the aquarium, with the Hatfield center, with NOAA coming into this community, and then the federal agencies that are housed at South Beach. You know it really creates a unique marine science community that's clustered together at that location and that adds a lot of, uh, interest to this community as well. Um, of course we have also you know a completely separate commercial area with Nye Beach which is you know definitely an area that caters heavily to tourism and, uh, we have a lot of visitors in that particular area with the various hotels kinda stretching from Nye Beach to the jetty and, uh, um, and so I think from a community standpoint the diversity, you know we aren't a one horse town here which I think a number of the coastal communities may be strictly tourism or may be strictly something else but, uh, I think we've got a very, very healthy blend of, uh, economic factors that help keep this community moving forward. Um, and so I think that's an interesting thing about the community. Another thing from a more of a geological standpoint is, uh, you know Newport as many other coastal communities deal with, again coming from a Michigan perspective, deal with some very challenging issues. You know this past December we had over two feet of rain you know in December alone. We ended up having slide issues in various locations including affecting one neighborhood and affecting some houses in this community. And that's again just the fact that you've got land that's still moving, uh, in Oregon creates you know some real challenges for infrastructure and development of those parcels. I think the other thing too related to that is with the topography here there are not very many easy spots for, um, developing new areas within this community. So land is at a premium here and, uh, and I think, I think that will always be the case because there just are not that many spots that can be easily developed. And so that's another factor that's somewhat of a limiting factor but it also encourages densification of activities within the existing footprint of the community which can be positive. I think the other thing that Newport has going for it, uh, again comparing Newport to some of the other coastal communities is fortunately a majority of our community is above the tsunami line that has been determined by the state geologists. Um, you know which is, we still have our challenges with that but some of the communities on the coast are virtually entirely located within those tsunami areas and so that gives us you know a little more latitude to deal with planning issues than, um, a community such as Seaside that's basically you know not very far above the sea level. So, I think that's a positive thing about the community. I think the other thing too that, um, you know i really like about the folks in Newport and Lincoln County and I'm sure it's the

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same up and down the coast is, uh, you know, there's enough isolation on the coast that you really create a self-sufficiency among people. You get that kinda, that spirit that we can, we can do this and nobody else is gonna do it for us so we've got to roll our sleeves up and get involved with the effort. So I think the fact that the coast is you know is isolated from the valley really kinda creates a spirit of independence, a spirit of resourcefulness, of these communities that, uh, make them a lot of fun to manage and to live in.

C: Yeah. Great. Um, can you tell me more about the role of fishing in the economy of Newport?

S: Yeah. Commercial fishing is certainly a critical component of our economy. It's something that builds significant wealth in the community. It, uh, you know it creates a lot of jobs both from the fishing standpoint as well as the processing standpoint. Um, and it creates a lot of interest you know from a social standpoint. To you know have that sort of a business that is important for the community. One of the issues, and I haven't seen this too much yet because I've only been here a short time, you know one of the challenges of commercial fishing is it can be somewhat cyclical you know as different populations expand. You know they have good years, there's a contraction of those populations, the different types of fish that are being commercially harvested. Then you can have contraction of that and so it's kinda interesting to see how everything cycles 'cause sometimes you know some species, some species are down. And it affects different fishermen differently depending on what they're geared for, uh, you know for their commercial fishing. But, um, but I think you know certainly, um, you know the commercial fishing really is a significant hallmark of what Newport's about. You know we've got a great port in Yaquina Bay that provides great shelter for fishing, we've got great fisheries off the coast and so we're really blessed to have that element be so strong in this community. And I think with the, um, you know efforts to really look at commercial fishing in a very sustainable way, um, I think, I think that will be something that will be, um, a you know, a forever component of the economy of Newport. And, uh, and so its I think it's a great element of our economic backbone in this community and uh, and as I indicated it's a very interesting one too. It's just fun to see to see the boats come in, see the boats go out, it's nice to be able to get fresh fish right off the docks. Uh, you know so there's a, there's a you know, just a lot of positive things that are tied to the commercial fishing industry in this community.

C: Yeah. Can you speak any more to the culture of fishing and what that contributes to Newport?

S: Yeah, I think, and certainly we're in the neighborhood I live in, our neighbors right below us are commercial fishermen. We have neighbors that are involved with commercial fishing a couple doors down. You know I could tell you from a neighborly standpoint it's nice to have the commercial fishermen that you have good neighbors with because every once in awhile they'll bring you something to share you know from their catch. But, um, no, I think it's just you know when you look at small businesses and all these commercial fishermen are small business people it really does give them an

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opportunity to you know create wealth in the community. And I think from a social standpoint, um, you know, it's just you know when you go down on the bayfront it's just fascinating to see tourists walking with folks wearing you know the boots that you know the guys wear out on the fishing boats. You know everyone's walking side by side and, uh, the interaction on the docks between visitors and commercial fishermen are, uh, you know fun and, uh, and I think it gives an authenticity to this community because we're really you know we're really using the resources that, uh, that we have in Newport in order to generate good jobs for folks, and good business opportunities for folks that want to be you know have a small business. And one of the things that I've heard from one of our seafood processors, and one of the reasons that they are making significant investments in Newport, is they see, um, the commercial fishing business in Newport as more sustainable than in some of the other ports. There seems to be a younger generation that's stepping into the commercial fishing here that they haven't seen in a couple of the other locations that they're in. And again that's not my observation but that's an observation that we've had from Bornstein's who are one of our, um, seafood processors here in Newport. And, uh, and when you look at the folks that are fishing, there are you know, I think there is a number of that next generation that are actively engaged in that process. And so hopefully from a generational standpoint that will be sustainable and, um, and so we'll you know... it seems that those that are involved with commercial fishing have recognized that in Newport and are making investments based on that observation.

C: Yeah. That's really interesting. I know you said this is coming from seafood processors. Do you know any more about why that may be unique to Newport?

S: I really don't because, uh, again my perspective is here. And I don't really understand what's happening with the other ports but, uh, but I just remember when we met with Bornstein's on a few issues that was one of the very clear things they indicated in they're making this investment here in Newport because they see you know the commercial fishing families you know passing the torch to the next generation here which they don't see that same level of commitment from the next generation in some of the other ports they work with.

C: Great. My next question actually had to do with the role of family-based businesses, whether you see that here, which is sounds like you do...

S: Right.

C: Are you aware of any changes in those family-based businesses or has it been pretty consistent over time?

S: You know certainly in the limited time I've been in Newport you know things have been pretty consistent. Um, but, uh, the, so yeah I don't really have any other observations beyond you know, beyond that.

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C: Yeah, yeah. That's fine. What do you see in terms of the age of fishermen here in Newport? Just anecdotally or spending time down on the dock.

S: Yeah, I think, uh, again you know there's you know, I think a variety of ages of folks that are involved with the, with commercial fishing. Um, you know, and I think that's healthy. If everyone was, you know, if everyone was the same age that's you know a problematic demographic because that means they're all gonna be getting out of the business at the same time and there's not you know kinda the next generation to follow up. But it seems that there are, um, you know different generations that are involved with commercial fishing here and I think that's critical for its sustainability in the future.

C: Do you have a sense of why young people might be interested in getting into the commercial fishing industry? What might push them that direction?

S: I don't really have any specific observations on that other than I think particularly for those that are involved with commercial fishing now, you know, it can be a fairly lucrative opportunity. Of course it's cyclical so you may have you know good years, you may have bad years. Uh, but, um, but I think there's, there just seems to be a strong tradition of, uh, of folks around this area and you know just, just looking at the fishermen wives organization as a group, again that's a multi-generational group. You've got younger fishermen wives, you've got fishermen wives that have been you know at this that are you know are, are older for a number of years. But it's not, its... you see that mix of ages of folks involved with the organization and I think that's reflected throughout all aspects of commercial fishing in Newport. Again that's from my observation which I haven't been involved with it for a long time, but that seems to be what I see and when I'm talking to folks that are involved in fishing.

C: Yeah. No, that's great. Just thinking hypothetically, if that weren't the case, if we did see more of this problematic demographic of young people not being able to get into the industry for whatever reason and this aging of the fleet that's currently working these boats, what do you think the impact might be here in Newport?

S: I think it would be significant because I think you know any time you have you know you have a you know a primary economic part of your economy and you potentially lose, um, you know, a substantial part of that economy that obviously has significant ripple effects throughout the community. I think the beauty of commercial fishing is again these are all business people you know and its small business. And it really creates a I think local wealth, particularly when they're successful in fishing for the community. And that's an important thing. These aren't service jobs, these are substantial paying jobs that help keep the economy of this community you know going strong. And, um, and so, the loss of that would certainly something that would have you know significant impact on this community. So I think it's important from a community standpoint and I think the city council and councils before the current city council really recognize that as a city, as a governing body we really need to make sure that we, we keep that balance so that we have a healthy commercial fishing community in Newport for many years in the future. And you know there's certainly a number of discussions that take place periodically

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specifically focusing on that role of keeping Newport a very attractive place for commercial fishing.

C: Yeah. What do you think would happen if we lost all the family-based fishing businesses in Newport? So maybe fishing continues to be an integral part of the economy but it's not as family-based as it once was?

S: I think again that's kinda the same scenario as you would have with, uh, that we've seen across the country with your traditional downtown stores that were all individually owned. Um, that have basically gone out of business because of the, um, you know the basically national and international you know merchandising of everything today. Um, and so what you lose in a community is, you lose, that entrepreneurial spirit. You lose that ability to keep those profits local versus those profits going to some sort of you know regional or national or international company. Um, you know again, if someone is a Newport based commercial fishermen or a Newport based business person, um, the profit they make stays right in this community. And so I think if, uh, if you know the fishing fleet changed from being you know a whole series of independent small business owners fishing then you know it would certainly have a significant impact on you know the generation of income in this community.

C: Yeah. Great. Well those are the last of my formal questions. But if there's anything else related either to the fishing industry and its relationship to the City of Newport that you thought we'd talk about that we didn't mention you have time to talk about that.

S: Okay. Yeah no I think generally, um, those are my observations as a City Manager of this community for two and a half years. It's ... I just continue to be fascinated by it and I learn more about it every day that I work. And there's you know I'm certainly far from being an expert on commercial fishing in Newport but I've certainly had enough observations to start developing some opinions you know about how significant and how important this is to this community.

C: Yeah. Great. Okay.