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## Freshman legislator Jennifer Williamson reports to constituents on current session

By Lee Perlman  
*The Southwest Portland Post*

One of the duties of a politician is to report back to his or her constituents and get their feedback. Freshman State

Rep. Jennifer Williamson performed that task last month at a morning meeting at South Waterfront's Rilassi Coffee House.

About 30 people turned out, some with very definite opinions on what their representative should be doing.

A Democrat, Williamson represents House District 36, which extends from "Good Sam[aritan Hospital] to Willamette Park, the river to the county line," as she put it.

"It includes some of the nicest neighborhoods in the state, and the poorest census tracts," she said. Williamson's own priorities include ensuring that public schools do not have to reduce their service levels.

Another is to obtain funding for a new School of Business at Portland State University and renovation of the Stott Center [gymnasium] at PSU for a total of nearly \$100 million. Yet another is to upgrade or replace the Multnomah County Courthouse.

One particularly aggressive questioner was Robert Nunn. He argued for Senate Bill 822, which would make major modifications in the Public Employee Retirement System.

Told that the bill might not survive a court challenge, Nunn retorted, "Why not try it and see if it works?"

Williamson replied that if the courts struck down the measure, it would force the state to deal with \$800 million in budget cuts. "I don't like telling school boards they'll have this money to spend and then not give it," she said.

Asked about sequestration (shrinking the General Fund to pay for new tax levies), Williamson said, "There are conversations occurring above my pay grade."

There will be major budget reductions this year, including a \$1 million cut in the state Corrections budget, Williamson said.

Current plans call for a cap on inmates, with more people diverted to substance abuse and other community rehabilitation programs.

"But to do that, we have to invest in more treatment programs, and we haven't done that," Williamson said.

Williamson quoted a Portland police officer as saying he takes people needing mental health care to jail "because I have no other place to take them."

Asked about the Wapato Jail, the expensive and unused prison, Williamson said it was designed for County use to house prisoners incarcerated for a year or less, rather than for long-term prisoners. "Running prisons after you've built them is what's expensive," she said.

Asked about gun control legislation, Williamson said there are four bills related to this in the current session, including stricter requirements for

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Rep. Jennifer Williamson (D-36) spoke to constituents including Kevin Countryman of South Portland at Rilassi Coffee House in South Waterfront on April 20. (Post photo by Lee Perlman)

## Landslide mitigation work to finish soon; County considers alternative trail route

### SELLWOOD BRIDGE

By Lee Perlman  
*The Southwest Portland Post*

Work continues on several fronts on construction of the new Sellwood Bridge.

According to Multnomah County spokesperson Mike Pullen, crews should be finished by early May with "landslide mitigation" – the installation of underground anchors near the bridge on the west side designed to halt a persistent landslide threat.

The situation had caused County officials to place a weight limit on vehicles crossing the bridge that excluded TriMet buses.

Other crews are working on removing part of the hillside to the west of Highway 43 to make way for the reconfiguration of the road – and they have some surprises.

Based on borings taken earlier, engineers had expected the hillside to be mostly solid rock and large boulders. Instead, they have encountered much rubble and soft earth.

"On one hand, there'll be less blasting needed," Pullen told *The Post*. "On the other hand, we'll have to do more work to retain the slope." Pullen didn't know, at press time, how great an impact this will have on the project budget.

The highway's southbound lanes will probably be moved into their new configuration by the end of this year, Pullen said, and the northbound lanes early next year.

Meanwhile, crews are removing the concrete piers of the old bridge, and building temporary work bridges that will extend about a third of the way into the river and provide access for work on the new structure, Pullen said.

On the east side, they are building the inland supports for the bridge; due to modern techniques, just five of these supports will be needed, as opposed to 20 for the previous bridge.

### County investigates Willamette Shore Trolley right-of-way for regional trail

In a related matter, at the request of residents, the County is re-investigating the possibility of placing a regional bicycle and pedestrian trail along the Willamette Shore Trolley right-of-way instead of Southwest Miles Place.

Residents of Miles Place had originally favored the use of the street as the place for the trail.

However, they were dismayed when City and County planners said it would be necessary to install a sidewalk on the west side, removing some parking and cutting down some mature trees.

This would be necessary, planners said, to provide for pedestrian safety in the face of up to 9,000 bike riders a day passing through.

At press time, a display of public art commissioned for the new bridge was scheduled to be exhibited May 1, from 5:30 to 7:00 p.m., at SMILE Station (Southeast 13th Avenue near Tacoma Street) in Sellwood. For more information, visit [www.sellwoodbridge.org](http://www.sellwoodbridge.org).



Crews excavate the west side of Highway 43 in preparation for the new Sellwood Bridge. (Photo courtesy of Multnomah County)

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