

FEMA: Warrenton's 80-year-old levees have never been breached

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But with Johnson's SB 306, which was signed into law by Gov. Kate Brown this month, the city may finally see a path to certification.

State responsibility

The bill provides state funding for levee projects that improve, expand or repair infrastructure systems essential for the use or development of farm, industrial or commercial land.

"The state has taken a first step by providing \$7 million," Johnson, D-Scappoose, said. "This is going

to be an ongoing state responsibility, and I think to have the state step up in the 2015 session is the beginning of a long state engagement of the issues."

Though the Warrenton City Commission still needs to discuss the matter, Kujala said the city may use the new funding opportunities to hire a private consultant to certify the levees and do minor repairs and improvements. A geotech consultant alone could cost the city at least \$1 million, he estimated.

In February, Kujala testified in favor of the state House version of the bill before the House Committee on Rural Communities, Land Use and Water.

"The map has changed, but the risk hasn't changed, and the whole idea is that you're supposed to be measuring risk — that's what insurance companies are supposed to be based on," he said in an interview. "There isn't daily flooding from the Columbia River."

Measuring risk

By undertaking the certification process, Warrenton would demonstrate the 80-year-old levees, which have never been breached, function properly.

It would also address another pressing problem: FEMA's map of

Warrenton that extends the flood plain inland to encompass roughly 75 percent of the city.

The map — drawn on the assumption that the levees aren't there, let alone protecting anything — has forced property owners to pay for flood insurance that, if the levees were recognized, they would probably not need. And it has forced developers to build at elevations 4 to 6 feet higher than they would otherwise have to.

"We're trying to prevent any further damage to the city by trying to work through FEMA accreditation, and hopefully revision of the

maps, so that we can move on from this, because it's very detrimental to 75 percent of the city," Kujala said.

Johnson in their corner

Kujala applauds Johnson for bringing statewide awareness to the plight of coastal communities.

"Sen. Johnson really crafted this with not just Warrenton, but with Tillamook County, Columbia County and Clatsop County in mind," Kujala said. "This gives us a mechanism where the state would be in the fight with us to work through the bureaucracy of FEMA."

Hole: Astoria received a \$400,000 brownfields pilot grant

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dry cleaning. The city acquired the land in 2003 to help revitalize downtown and demolished the old supermarket in 2005. The supermarket's foundation — a slab built above a basement — collapsed after heavy rains in 2010, leaving the hole.

"We're looking for a green cleanup," said Rebecca Wells-Albers, the northwest region brownfields coordinator for the Department of Environmental Quality. "And green being financially green, but also environmentally green."

The new tests could help decide how much of the soil gets hauled to a special-purpose landfill in Hillsboro and how much can be disposed of closer to home.

Astoria received a \$400,000 brownfields pilot grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in 2012, with half of the money to assess contamination and the other half for cleanup. A consulting firm, Amec Foster Wheeler, was hired to help guide the project.

With the assessment nearly complete, the city worries that expensive hauling costs to Hillsboro or another far-flung landfill could sap the cleanup money.

The stockpiled soil, much of which is covered by tarps, is not believed to be heavily contaminated. Soil and an ash-like material in a hollow space under the parking lot in the northeast corner could be more problematic.

"The sampling next week is to help define where this material can go, and where it needs to go," Wells-Albers said.



Joshua Bessex/The Daily Astorian

The block has been home to a printing press, an auto repair shop, dry cleaners, and most recently, a Safeway store, before the city acquired the property.

Bamboo screens

City staff will update the City Council Monday night on the assessment and cleanup of the former Safeway lot. The city hopes to remove soil after Labor Day and stay on track to get a clean bill of health from the state — and the EPA — to redevelop the rest of Heritage Square.

Many residents, along with some on the council, have won-

dered about the timeline for filling the pit or have used the hole as a cautionary example when discussing the potential demolition or vacancy of other buildings downtown, such as the old Waldorf Hotel and the Astoria Public Library.

Over the years, the city has looked at several options for the Duane Street property near City Hall, from an urban campus for Clatsop Community College to a

public plaza to an amphitheater. A mixed-use library and housing idea was floated a decade ago and resurrected this year after preservationists fought the demolition of the Waldorf for an expanded library.

The Garden of Surging Waves was the first piece of redevelopment. The parking lot along 12th Street is used by the popular Astoria Sunday Market, while the

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Northwest region brownfields coordinator for the Department of Environmental Quality

American Legion is the dominant fixture along Exchange Street.

City Councilor Cindy Price said downtown merchants and other property owners have done so much to make downtown more attractive, "and then there's this hole. This horrible hole that seems to get worse every year."

Price and others have come up with a creative method to temporarily make the former Safeway lot less of an eyesore. The councilor has won city approval to put up bamboo screens along the chain-link fencing that surrounds the hole.

Price hopes the bamboo is in place in time for the Astoria Regatta in August.

"It will definitely screen it," she said. "You will not be able to see into the hole unless you walk up to it and put your eyeballs up to it."

Auburn, Wash., man died July 4 in Long Beach

Death deemed suspicious but still not officially a homicide

By KATIE WILSON
EO Media Group

LONG BEACH, Wash. — The Pacific County Sheriff's Office has released the name of the man who died "under suspicious circumstances" over the Fourth of July weekend in Long Beach.

Jeffery Beach, 36, of Auburn, was reportedly partying with a group of people on the beach near 120th Place, down from the Sunrise Pacific Holiday RV Park in Long Beach July 3. The police were called there to respond to an as-

sault around 10 p.m. and found Beach unconscious after he'd apparently wandered into the dunes following a fight or assault. Beach was taken to Ocean Beach Hospital then transported by helicopter to Portland where he was pronounced dead.

Oregon news channel Fox 12 reported that the death is considered a "homicide investigation," and that the Auburn man died due to a "spinal cord break caused by a blow to the head."

But Pat Matlock, chief criminal deputy with the Pacific County Sheriff's Office, says he does not have enough information to say one way or the other. He has yet to see an autopsy report, and there are no suspects, yet.

The scene July 3 was

chaotic — people drinking and partying — and investigators are working hard to put the pieces together, he said.

"The geographics ... the sheer number of people that may have been witnesses to this or may have been involved ... the levels of intoxication," Matlock said.

The list of people investigators need to talk to is long, and most of them live out of town, in Clark County and Pierce County.

"We have a lot of names to sort through," Matlock said.

He hopes to have an autopsy report in the next week. Until then, Beach's death is considered suspicious, not a homicide.

"I'm not calling it anything," Matlock said. "I'm calling it a suspicious death investigation."



Joshua Bessex/The Daily Astorian

A shattered window is shown from the outside of Clatsop County Jail. Kevin Michael Burnham and Anthony Craig Osborne attempted to escape from Clatsop County Jail around 1 a.m. Sunday by swinging a shower drain grate tied to a bedsheet against the window.

Escape: Inmates took about 20 swings against the window

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be removed from the cellblock and held in a library space, while maintenance crews temporarily fixed the broken window shortly after 2 a.m. Sunday.

Burnham and Osborne took about 20 swings against the window. A couple of more swings and they could have broken through the window, which is large enough for them to get through.

The estimated damage could cost between

\$4,000 and \$5,000 to fix, according to the jail.

"They were actually able to shatter the window," Bergin said. "It was definitely weakened enough it was getting close."

Escape attempts are rare at the jail, Bergin said. The last one he remembers is before his time as sheriff, when an inmate jumped from the roof of a recreation area, and was caught a day later.

Burnham and Osborne are scheduled to appear in Clatsop County Circuit Court next week for arraignment on the new charges.

Arraignment delayed in murder-for-hire case

By NATALIE ST. JOHN
EO Media Group

CATHLAMET, Wash. — A judge has postponed until next week the arraignment hearing for an Altoona man who is suspected of drug manufacturing and dealing and conspiracy to commit murder.

Sam F. Valdez, 63, was arrested at his Pillar Rock Road home on July 3 following an undercover investigation by the Cowlitz-Wahkiakum Narcotics Task Force.

The investigation and subsequent raid on Valdez's property revealed that Valdez was plotting with a "hit-man" (who was actually a police informant) to murder his ex-wife, ex-step children, and two local judges. The Task Force also discovered large quantities of alleged "honey oil" — marijuana concentrate — which Valdez was allegedly producing and selling.

Valdez was scheduled for an arraignment hearing July 14. However, he still

has not been arraigned, because he does not have legal representation yet.

Wahkiakum County Prosecutor Dan Bigelow said that Shelton attorney Bruce Finlay appeared in Wahkiakum County Superior Court by telephone July 14, and said he planned to formally register as Valdez's attorney.

Valdez is now scheduled to be arraigned at 8 a.m. on Monday. In the meantime, he is being held in the Wahkiakum County Jail on \$10 million bail.