

# Neighbors: Astoria hasn't had a parks master plan since 1978

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Sisson is a graduate of Illinois Institute of Technology with a degree in architecture. He worked for the past two years in urban planning and design for a landscape architecture firm.

He applied for the RARE program to get into project management and was placed with the city of Astoria Parks and Recreation Department, where he is helping develop a parks master plan, giving him a chance to lead a project.

There has not been a parks master plan in Astoria since 1978. The department is collecting input through community workshops and an online survey open on the city's website until Jan. 1.

The department is looking at how people use the parks, what the parks' shortcomings are and what opportunities are available. Sisson is working with a mayor-appointed citizen advisory committee to create recommendations for the master plan and set criteria for prioritizing those recommendations.

"There is going to be a lot coming out of this," Sisson said. "This should be a really good thing for the department and for the city."



**Bijan Fayyaz (left) and Ian Sisson came to the North Coast this fall through Resource Assistance for Rural Environments (RARE), a division of AmeriCorps that operates through the University of Oregon.**

Kyle Spurr  
The Daily Astorian

Fayyaz recently graduated from Florida State University with a bachelor's degree in economics and planning. He is also certified in emergency management and homeland security.

Through RARE, Fayyaz will spend his time working with Clatsop County Emergency Management helping with emergency planning and facilitating new projects.

His focus is on getting high school students involved in Community Emergency Re-

sponse Teams, known as Teen CERT.

"We are trying to have each high school have their own unit," Fayyaz said. "In the event of a disaster, there are benefits to having a group in every school."

Fayyaz and Sisson have also both attended training sessions in Cascade Locks and Roseburg with the other RARE volunteers.

Neither Fayyaz or Sisson have spent time in Oregon before joining RARE. They said

it has been a change of pace coming from large metro areas. Working in a smaller area has allowed them to feel more a part of the community. They can see the impacts of their work, firsthand.

"It's really neat seeing how much the community leaders are a part of the community," Fayyaz said. "Some of the places I've lived, there is a distance in the leadership. Here, it's people engaged in the neighborhoods and their own town, and they care."

# Year ahead: Brown unlikely to face formidable competition in election

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Conceptually, the bill would raise the minimum in the Portland region, where housing costs have skyrocketed. A middle-level minimum would take effect in mid-size cities such as Ashland, Bend and Eugene, while the lowest minimum would apply to less-populated coastal and rural communities.

## Corporate tax fight

A union-backed tax measure planned for the November 2016 ballot would require certain corporations to pay a 2.5 percent tax on sales in Oregon greater than \$25 million.

Economists in the Legislative Revenue Office have already projected the corporate sales tax would raise an additional \$2.65 billion annually for the state.

State Sen. Mark Hass, D-Beaverton, said he's heard businesses could spend as much as \$30 million to fight the tax measure, and supporters could spend a similarly large amount.

"You're going to have two months of nasty business on TV and social media," Hass said back in November. "And out of that, a very toxic atmosphere."

Hass hoped to bring together the governor, lawmakers, supporters and opponents of the tax to broker an alternative revenue measure which the Legislature could pass in 2016. So far, he hasn't had much luck and the outlook for alternative revenue legislation is not good.

"We just need some people to come to the center," Hass said on Dec. 22.

## PERS shortfall

Oregon's unfunded public pension liability roughly doubled this fall, under newly updated actuarial projections. That means the pension fund is now \$18 billion short of the money it is supposed to pay retired school teachers, state workers and other public employees.

The increase is partly due to a decision in April by the Oregon Supreme Court, which struck down a portion of the pension reforms which the Legislature passed in 2013 to trim costs. The state is also paying out more because retirees are living longer, and the pension fund's investment returns have fallen short of expectations since 2014.

Gov. Kate Brown and legislative leaders haven't given any indication that they plan to tackle the shortfall in 2016.



Kate Brown



Michael Dembrow



Sara Gelsler



Mark Hass



Jim Moore

But they won't be able to avoid the issue when the pension system governing board sets the 2017-2019 contribution rates at the end of September.

By then, election campaigns will be in full swing for governor and legislative seats across the state.

If lawmakers and the governor put off working on the issue until 2017, they will only have a few months to agree on solutions during that legislative session, before schools and other governments are forced to pay more starting in July 2017. Interest groups plan to begin hammering out potential solutions behind the scenes in 2016, for the governor and Legislature to take up the following year.

## Fuel standard fight

Oregon's low-carbon fuel standard, which the Legislature made permanent in 2015, takes effect in January.

However, the Oregon Environmental Quality Commission recently voted to delay enforcement of the standard until 2018 and opponents of the law have filed three proposed ballot measures to weaken or repeal it in November.

Brown and lawmakers are closely following the fight, because the outcome could impact the Legislature's ability to pass a funding bill in 2017 to pay for the state's backlog of highway, bridge, transit and other transportation work.

Republicans refused in 2015 to vote for a gas tax increase to pay for transportation projects, unless Democrats agreed to repeal the fuel standard.

The law calls for gasoline and diesel importers and producers to reduce the total carbon emissions from the fuels by up to 10 percent over the next decade.

## Power battles

Brown is unlikely to attract any formidable competition during the 2016 election, according to political analysts.

"The chance of dark horse candidate in the gubernatorial races is zero," said Jim Moore, politics professor at Pacific

University and director of the Tom McCall Center for Policy Innovation.

But some House and Senate races could tip the scales of power in Salem, Moore said.

Races to watch are in districts that have traditionally swung between Democrat and Republican victories in the past few election cycles, especially seats where incumbents might decide against seeking re-election, he said.

One example is District 40, where Rep. Brent Barton, D-Clackamas County, has decided against seeking re-election.

So far, one Democrat, real estate executive Mark Meek, and no Republicans or Independents have filed for that election, according to the Secretary of State's elections database.

Other potentially interesting races: District 30, held by Rep. Joe Gallegos, D-Hillsboro; District 20 held by Rep. Paul Evans, D-Monmouth; District 29, held by Rep. Susan McLain, D-Forest Grove; District 25 held by Rep. Bill Post, R-Keizer; District 51 held by Shemia Fagan, D-Clackamas; and District 52 held by Rep. Mark Johnson, R-Hood River.

"The Oregon Senate is a much more sedate place for elections, but the swing of just three districts puts the Senate in a 15-15 tie for 2017," he said.

## Child welfare

Lawmakers plan to take up legislation in 2016 to address some of the problems in the state's child welfare system revealed in stories about the Portland foster care program Give Us This Day and other service providers.

State Sen. Sara Gelsler, D-Corvallis, has proposed legislation to tighten licensing and financial regulations on providers and change how the state handles abuse and neglect allegations. Brown also ordered an outside review of the Department of Human Services, and the consultant's findings — along with recommendations from a new task force appointed by the gover-

nor — could result in additional legislation in 2016.

## Overhaul or scrap DOE

After years of news reports about problems at the Oregon Department of Energy, Democratic legislative leaders announced in early December that they will explore in 2016 whether the agency can be fixed or is beyond repair. A newly formed bipartisan committee will look into problems at the agency and issue recommendations and legislation for the full Legislature to take up in 2017.

In June, the EO Media Group/Pamplin Media Group Capital Bureau reported that Department of Energy employees quietly stopped enforcing state price regulations on tax credits intended to incentivize renewable energy and efficiency projects.

The bureau also reported that Oregon Department of Revenue Director Jim Buchholz told auditors in 2012 to ignore problems on tax returns where people or corporations used energy tax credits to reduce taxes they owed the state. People and corporations who bought the tax credits for less than their face value were supposed to pay capital gains taxes on difference, but auditors found people weren't reporting the gains or paying the taxes.

A top official at the Department of Energy told certain tax credit recipients and brokers they could ignore state rules, and the agency retroactively changed the rules under pressure from a Portland consulting firm that brokered tax credit deals.

Republican lawmakers in December asked Attorney General Ellen Rosenblum, the state's U.S. Attorney, the FBI, the IRS and Marion County District Attorney Walter Beglau to investigate similar allegations by whistleblowers. In a response to the lawmakers, the Oregon Department of Justice asked for more details about their allegations.

The Capital Bureau is a collaboration between EO Media Group and Pamplin Media Group.

# Two decisions will help shape Ocean Beach Hospital's future

By NATALIE ST. JOHN  
EO Media Group

ILWACO, Wash. — In the first few months of 2016, Ocean Beach Hospital administrators and board members will need to make two important decisions about the future of the hospital.

First, hospital leaders will need to find a permanent replacement for current CEO Kendall Sawa, who in mid-January will depart for a new job as the CEO of Providence Seaside Hospital. Second, leaders need to decide whether to renew an existing "operating agreement" with the PeaceHealth hospital system, pursue a partnership with another healthcare organization, or make another go at operating as an independent hospital.

## Search for new leader

Hospital officials aren't going to rush either decision, Sawa said in December.

Hospital board commissioners recently appointed OBH Chief Financial Officer Larry Cohen as the interim CEO for 2016. The one-year contract will give Cohen a chance to see if the role is a good fit for him, and will ensure consistency while the board considers their options for hiring a permanent CEO, Sawa said.

Cohen will start his new role in early January and should be running the hospital on his own by about mid-January, Sawa said.

"At that time, I'll kind of be in the background," Sawa said.

Hospital board Chairwoman Nancy Gorshe said she is very confident in Cohen's ability to lead the hospital, but he will have to formally apply for the permanent job if he wants it.

"He's a great candidate but we want to be thorough and do a full recruiting process," Gorshe said, adding that commissioners want to finish setting goals for 2016 before turning their attention to recruiting a CEO.

"I would guess we may begin a recruiting process within the first quarter, but we want to get through the planning process," Gorshe said.

Hospital officials plan to discuss their recruitment strategy in more detail during the January board meeting, and possibly at the annual strategic planning retreat, which takes place in the second week of January, Sawa said. Hospital officials could decide to hire a "headhunter." That option tends to be costly, but usually provides a bigger selection of well-qualified candidates to choose from, Sawa said. They may also advertise the job through industry publications and websites, or through the Washington Rural Health Collaborative, Sawa said.

"All I can say is the board is committed to doing it well, rather than quickly," Sawa said, noting that recruiting for high-level positions is often challenging for rural hospitals.

In addition to having professional expertise and experience, the candidate needs to be someone who understands the unique challenges of running a small hospital,

who is excited to live in a rural community and is prepared to deal with the Peninsula's gloomy weather.

"It really is about fit with the community, fit with the hospital leadership team," Sawa said.



Kendall Sawa

Gorshe and Sawa said they don't know if Cohen plans to apply to be the permanent CEO.

"I'm hoping he will," Gorshe said. "He's not just a placeholder."

## Considering potential partners

Hospital leaders also need to decide how to manage the hospital.

As part of an effort to save the failing hospital, Ocean Beach Hospital leaders signed a contract in 2012 that allowed PeaceHealth to take over most aspects of hospital operations, and made it possible to bring in Sawa, who is a longtime PeaceHealth employee.

That contract was set to expire at the end of the year, but Gorshe recently worked with PeaceHealth to extend the contract until Jan. 31, so that Sawa could consult with Cohen during his first month as interim CEO.

So far, PeaceHealth officials haven't offered to renew the operating agreement for the remainder of 2016.

"It hasn't been clearly laid out that that is an option," Sawa said. "... We don't have a contract in front of us."

Gorshe said the hospital has changed a lot since 2012. In the beginning, she said, the hospital had a "rescue relationship" with PeaceHealth, and relied on the organization for frequent consulting services. Now that the hospital is more stable, it is more of an "operating relationship".

As a result, leaders at both Ocean Beach and PeaceHealth are trying to decide whether it makes sense to continue the relationship. If Ocean Beach leaders do continue to work with PeaceHealth, the new agreement will need to focus on controlling costs and offering more services to patients, rather than on providing qualified administrators, Gorshe said.

Over the last year, the hospital has also considered working with several other organizations, including Providence, Columbia Memorial Hospital and Oregon Health Sciences University, Sawa said. One likely short-term option is to work with several larger health systems who would each work with the hospital to deliver specific services.

"We'll continue to collaborate where collaboration makes sense," Sawa said. "That doesn't provide us with any type of affiliation agreement but it keeps us moving forward with our strategic plan, which is to keep building upon existing service lines."

At the moment, there are no plans to pursue a formal affiliation PeaceHealth or with any other organization, Sawa said, but joining a larger system is still one of the leadership team's major goals.

"We still feel like three to five years from now, we would like to see ourselves more affiliated with an organization. That's been the trend across the country, but it's hard to say when that will happen," Sawa said.

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