

# Clatsop Care: ‘You’ve got to see improvement right off the bat’

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## Compounding struggles

The health district encompasses all of the Clatsop County except the cities of Gearhart, Seaside and Cannon Beach. It oversees Clatsop Care Center, Clatsop Retirement Village in Astoria and Clatsop Memory Care Center in Warrenton, and provides in-home care.

The district, and the care center especially, have faced compounding struggles in recent years.

A state law passed in 2013 sought to reduce the number of nursing home beds by relocating patients and residents from nursing homes into less costly community-based care settings.

But, statewide, nursing homes could not sufficiently reduce beds, so facilities like Clatsop Care Center saw cuts in Medicaid reimbursements, which make up a sizable portion of the care center’s budget. Facilities that could not withstand the cuts closed, including Providence Seaside Hospital’s long-term care unit in 2014.

In addition, the state faces a shortage of certified nursing assistants, a staffing limitation that forced Clatsop Care Center to downsize its long-term resident population last year.

One Clatsop Care patient, Ron Meyer, said “the nursing has been good, but the good nurses leave. There’s been a tremendous turnover in this operation.”

Board member Heather Reynolds said she believes Aidan has the wherewithal to attract patients and nurses to the district, and advocate on the district’s behalf.

Aidan’s fees will be 5 percent of patient care revenues for the first six months, then 6 percent thereafter. Based on current figures, this will cost an average of \$31,900 a

month, then \$38,280, according to Amanda Hascall, the district finance director.

Aidan manages seven long-term care facilities: six in Oregon, one in Nevada.

## Hiring and firing

When Williams gave her notice in December, she recommended that the board contract with a management company that specializes in nonprofits and long-term care. The CEO job, she said, had grown too complex and cumbersome for one person.

The board reached out to auditors, Oregon Health Care Association, and LeadingAge — an advocacy group for public long-term care facilities — to compile a list of companies to consider. A board subcommittee narrowed the options down to three.

“Aidan was, far and above, the better option than the two that we did interview,” board member Roy Little said.

Board members visited Aidan’s other sites and contacted references, including “a public long-term care district that, frankly, asked them to leave,” Board Chairwoman Karen Burke said.

In that situation, Burke learned from an administrator that the changes Aidan made at a health district in Eastern Oregon were not popular with the district’s board of directors, which let Aidan go after a year. Burke added, however, that she did not speak with the board members themselves.

Burke said the Clatsop County Health District Board chose not to issue a request for proposal because “there was not enough competition out there that met our needs to justify going through the RFP process.”

The employees will remain district employees. Aidan will answer to the board. “Make no mistake: We’re not the boss here. The board is our boss,”



Danny Miller/The Daily Astorian

The Clatsop Care Center is struggling financially.

Remley said.

Section 5 of the contract allows either party to terminate the agreement with 30 days written notice “with cause.” The district can terminate the agreement with 48 hours written notice “in the event of any situation involving immediate jeopardy to resident health and safety that is not cured within such 48-hour period.”

Asked how Aidan would run the district differently than Williams, Remley said he isn’t familiar with Williams’ work.

According to Burke, Remley told the board “it will take (Aidan) a minimum of six months of really evaluating the district’s operations and each of the facilities to determine what kind of cost-effective measures can be done, how we can maximize census, how we can maximize revenues.

“So I think (Remley is) holding back on making any commitment about what they will do until they’ve actually had an opportunity to study what is.”

## Standard of care

District employees past and present expressed anxiety at Friday’s meeting toward what they view as a partial privatization of the district’s operations, and whether the move will impact quality of care.

Burke said she would not use the term “privatization” to characterize the agreement.

“I think that we remain a public tax-supported not-for-profit district, and the district board remains in charge of the district and what happens within the district,” she said after the meeting. “We’re simply hiring a management firm to fill those responsibilities of the CEO.”

The board, she said, does not view Aidan as a temporary solution. As would happen with any hire, Aidan will stay “as long as the relationship between the CEO and the board of directors is working, and as long as the district is well-managed.”

Thanking Rohlfs for his comments, Little said the board will meet with Aidan regularly about the quality of care being provided.

“I was actually a nurse’s aide at one time. I know what you do for a living. I’ve done it; I don’t do it now. It’s hard work, and it’s not paid enough,” Little told Rohlfs. “But we support what you do, and we support what you do to make the lives of our residents better. And that’s what we want to do with this contract.”

Remley said that, since Aidan will have a presence at monthly board district meetings, the company must earn its contract every 30 days.

“You’ve got to see improvement, obviously, right off the bat to ensure the long-term success of the contract,” he said.

## ‘Don’t blindly trust me’

Pamela Wev, of Astoria, told the board she felt the contract’s initial 26-month term was excessive.

Originally, the contract stipulated a term of 14 months, to end in June 2018. Aidan requested a June 30, 2019, end date instead. Board

member Mike Aho questioned why the shorter contract didn’t work for Aidan.

Burke said she agrees with Aidan that 14 months may not be a reasonable time frame to turn the care center around, and to show the district how well Aidan can perform as a management company.

“This didn’t happen overnight, that the health district got into the financial situation that it’s in ... I don’t know if 14 months is realistic, given all the factors that have contributed to where it is now, and that will contribute in the future,” she said.

Little said reasonable people can disagree about whether an initial term length is appropriate. “We think that that’s the right way to give Aidan a chance to do what we want them to do.”

After the meeting, Remley said that, with the district under Aidan’s management, “in the first term, I would hope that you would see the district not only be able to stand on its own two feet, but that it will give the board choice in how they move forward from there.”

Remley said Rohlfs “basically hit the nail on the head.”

“We’re going to have to earn his trust over a long period of time,” he said, adding that he has told board members: “Don’t blindly trust me. I’ve got to earn that over time,” he said.

In other communities the company serves, Aidan contracts with third-party companies to conduct customer-satisfaction surveys. Burke said Aidan will do this in Clatsop Care Health District, as well.

“You’ve got to reserve judgment on me,” Remley said. “I can say all the things in the world, of what I want to do and what I want to accomplish. But until I perform, it just doesn’t really mean anything.”

# Pot lab: Sharp divisions in Jewell

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During a January meeting, Jewell School Board members roundly criticized Plew’s proposed development, without realizing he was sitting in front of them. After surprising the board members, Plew provided an explanation of his project, albeit with little support.

Referencing a Daily Astorian article on the meeting Friday, Plew said he has found the school board’s comments offensive and bordering on discrimination, considering he is trying to bring jobs and tax revenue to the area. He repeated that there are many other marijuana operations around Jewell School, and that the district has staff, students and families involved in the industry.

## Too close

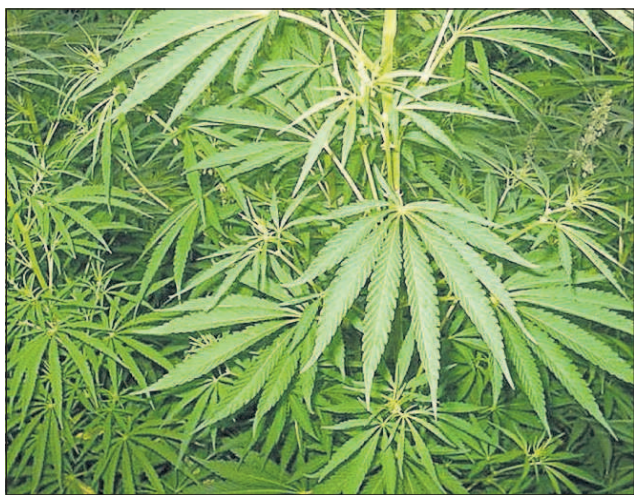
Jewell School representatives have opposed the proposed plant’s close proximity to the K-12 schoolhouse and a nearby flood plain.

Joseph Voboril, an attorney for the school district on its appeal, admitted Plew’s site is more than 1,000 feet from the school property, but that there are two bus stops within 150 and 850 feet of his property, respectively, for a school in which 95 percent of students take the bus.

Superintendent Alice Hunsaker said the retail portion of Plew’s operation could distract students and cause congestion on the roadways around the school. In addition, she said, the site is at least 30 minutes from emergency and medical services.

“I’m unwilling to have our students’, faculty’s and families’ safety compromised if an accident were to happen at the marijuana facility,” Hunsaker said. “Further, our students will receive constant visual messaging about marijuana while on our buses.”

Echoing Hunsaker’s sentiments, School Board Chairman Brian Meier also argued that any potential runoff from Plew’s operation would enter Fishhawk, and eventually Beneke, creeks, potentially



Submitted Photo

A proposed marijuana laboratory less than a mile from Jewell School has set off controversy in the district.

affecting the district’s nearby water supply.

## In the details

Voboril and the district argued Plew’s application doesn’t provide enough detail on how his operation can be made suitable, and how he’ll safely provide for sewage on the site without impacting the school district’s water source.

Voboril said the southern third of the site is in a mapped floodway off Fishhawk Creek, and is further restrained by environmental setbacks. “The staff report acknowledges that there might not be an adequate amount of unrestricted land upon which Mr. Plew can build his proposed building and the necessary parking areas.”

County Land Use Planner Bart Catching said staff found that the site could handle a building larger than the 1,600-square-foot building Plew has proposed.

“If the uses are allowed in the zone, and we make good-faith findings that the applicable criteria are met, then we would be getting into a different discussion about illegally limiting a legal use of property that meets the zone,” he said.

Catching said the site will likely face more in-depth scrutiny over flood plain and other issues beyond a conditional land use appeal.

## For and against

Plew’s proposal has uncovered sharp divisions in Jewell regarding marijuana and its

place in the community.

Karl Meier, a self-described fourth-generation farmer in the valley who owns property near Plew’s, said it’s crazy that the project has gone this far. He said the land has been vacant so long because it’s not a fit place to put anything more than trees.

“To put this kind of facility within 300 feet of a family residence is unacceptable,” he said. “I hope you heard that; it’s unacceptable.”

Joe Anderson, who’s lived in Jewell the past decade, owns property next to Plew’s project, Anderson was recently named the first state-approved commercial grow site in the county for recreational retailers. He said there has been discrimination against the cannabis industry, even though it’s bringing jobs and tax revenue.

“No laws are being broken,” Anderson said. “If anything, we’re going above-board to prevent kids from having any access to cannabis. That’s what this is all about. You know, the real dangerous substances that these kids have close to them is alcohol, probably prescription drugs in every one of these people’s medicine cabinets.”

Olsen agreed to keep taking written materials on Plew’s conditional land use application until 4 p.m. Friday, after which there is a weeklong period to rebut any new material. Plew can then request a final week to rebut any new materials before the hearing closes.

# Harold: Missed interaction with kids

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“Where the Wild Things Are.”

Harold, 43, took over the part-time position in early January, following Patty Skinner’s 17-year tenure. She is continuing the storytime sessions for “movers and shakers” (aged birth to age 2) and preschoolers.

She recently launched two new programs: an all-ages, once-a-month family storytime, which kicked off Saturday and includes a craft and snack, and “Read to the Dog!,” where kids can read to (and pet) Maisie, a certified therapy dog who acts as a receptive, nonjudgmental audience. “You can mess up, or not be sure of the words; Maisie doesn’t care,” Harold said.

These activities cultivate “preliteracy skills,” she said. “At it’s core, it’s giving children the skills that they need, so that, when they go to school, they’re ready to learn how to read.”

It exposes them to thousands of words — such as “frolicked” and “wiggle-waggle” — that kids don’t encounter every day and enriches their growing vocabulary. And later, as they begin learning complex ideas, they have a ready-made mental space for the ideas to live, Harold said.

## ‘The child’s truth’

Harold moved to Astoria from Portland with her husband and two children about 3 1/2 years ago.

A former staff member of Multnomah County Library, Harold reviews picture books for School Library Journal and chapter books for Booklist Online.

In 2010, she served on the committee for the Caldecott Medal — the American Library Association’s annual award to the artist of the most distinguished picture book — which that year went to Jerry Pinkney’s “The Lion and the Mouse.”

“We must have looked at somewhere between 700 and 800 picture books that year that came to our houses,” she recalled.

She also coordinates Libraries Reading Outreach in Clatsop County, a program that provides free library cards to kids who live outside Astoria, Warrenton and Seaside’s library service areas.

Having consumed hundreds, possibly thousands, of children’s books, Harold has an idea of what makes the great ones great.

First, the book needs to reflect reality as children understand it. “It needs to resonate with the child’s truth. It can’t be an adult’s idea of what life is like to be a kid,” she said.

Second, “it either needs to be sincerely funny, or it needs to reflect their sincere feelings,” she said.

Take “Where the Wild Things Are”: It is a fantasy about a child in his room who imagines adventuring with wild creatures.

But it isn’t smarmy chil-

dren’s fare; there’s darkness, too. “It’s also about getting really angry, and getting sent to your room,” which children can relate to, Harold said.

The wild child “returns” to a bowl of warm soup that his parents left out for him. The feelings of love and safety that parents give their children — “that tends to be really compelling, too.”

## ‘A lifeline’

Harold, who earned a master’s degree in library science from Syracuse University, was born in Astoria and grew up in Tillamook.

“For me,” she said, “the library was a lifeline — it was a chance to see a world bigger than the world that I was growing up in, and a way to escape.”

She studied Russian language, literature and history at a liberal arts college in Iowa, and spent her final semester in Russia. “And I don’t know, without having been exposed to so many worlds through reading, if that would have felt possible,” she said.

Though she has been substitute teaching in Astoria and surrounding communities, “I was itching to get back into a library.”

“I missed that daily interaction with kids. I’d been doing a lot of subbing in the schools, I was kind of getting my kid fix there, but I love it in the library,” she said. “You’re just there to have fun, and to get them excited about books.”

— Erick Bengel

# Storms: Area schools affected

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without reporting the accident. He was later located and arrested by the Warrenton Police Department for failure to perform the duties of a driver, failure to carry and present and driving without a license.

Just after 9 a.m. today, a dark Ford Ranger was involved in a single-vehicle accident on

Highway 26. One injury was reported. About an hour earlier, a garbage truck slid off the roadway on U.S. Highway 101 Business, but no injuries were reported.

Since the inclement weather began, cities have been working to keep the streets safe during the snow-hail-sleet event.

The Astoria Public Works Department applied sanding

gravel in the higher elevations of Astoria on Saturday and this morning.

Snow in March is “very unusual,” Astoria Public Works Director Ken Cook said.

Knappa and Jewell school districts closed today. Astoria schools were delayed three hours and Clatsop Community College opened at noon.