

Seaside, developers squabble over sidewalks

Provision could undermine new housing plan

By JACK HEFFERNAN
The Daily Astorian

SEASIDE — The Seaside Planning Commission and local developers are still at odds over a sidewalk requirement for a proposed affordable housing project.

Owners of a 15-acre plot of land on the corner of South Wahanna Road and Avenue S called Blue Heron Pointe plan to build 45 homes priced under \$300,000. But the developers — Ritchie Development Corp. — have said the city's request to have a section of sidewalk built along Avenue S in the first phase of the project would not be feasible.

Commissioners discussed the issue at a meeting Tuesday night. Concerns voiced by the commissioners and members of the public included a 2009 street system plan that calls for sidewalks, bike lanes and foot travel lanes along Avenue S. Drainage concerns from cul-

verts on the property and traffic caused by the lot's proximity to Seaside Heights Elementary School and a future construction site were also mentioned.

Developers presented an adjusted version of phase one of the three-phase plan Tuesday. The plan would call for a wider passageway inside Blue Heron Pointe that would allow more access from Avenue S to Wahanna Road until the exterior sidewalks eventually would be built in phase three.

Meeting attendees expressed concern, though, that developers may delay building the sidewalks if they don't collect the necessary funds after selling lots built in the first two phases of the project.

A number of commissioners proposed including a deadline to have the sidewalks built as part of any future approval. Commissioner Richard Ridout suggested the deadline could parallel the opening of a new high school in the city's East Hills in fall 2020.

"We've got no timeline here for how soon anything is going to happen, so I'd like them to put the sidewalk next

to the property," Ridout said.

But Max Ritchie, one of the owners of the property, said the earliest his company could afford to build the sidewalks would be in phase three. While he doesn't know exactly when that phase would begin, it almost certainly will not be within four years, he said.

Should developers miss the proposed deadline, the city could halt other construction on the property until the sidewalks are built, Commission Chairman Ray Romine said.

Sandra K. Gee, who lives on Cooper Street east of the property, expressed her support for the sidewalk requirement Tuesday night.

"This is a multimillion dollar project," she said. "I don't think the cost of that sidewalk on that curve will make or break it, but it gives the owners an out not to build it if they don't sell all of their houses."

Commissioners will discuss the issue further before voting on it at a public meeting on March 21.

Ritchie said he is not sure yet how the proposed requirement will affect the future of the project.

County unemployment falls to its lowest rate since 1990

Dropped down to 4.2 percent in January

By EDWARD STRATTON
The Daily Astorian

Clatsop County's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate of 4.2 percent in January reached its lowest mark since at least 1990, according to figures from the Oregon Employment Department.

Seasonally adjusted rates account for the annual expansion in employment during the summer and contraction in winter.

The seasonally adjusted unemployment rate in the county dropped by 0.3 percent from December to January and 0.8 percent from the year prior. The county had the state's eighth-lowest rate of unemployment, tied with Sherman County and lower than both the state (4.3 percent) and national (4.8 percent) rates. Five counties posted seasonally adjusted



Area	Jan. 2017	Dec. 2016	1-yr. ago
Clatsop	4.2	4.5	5
Columbia	5.5	5.8	6.5
Tillamook	4.5	4.8	5.3
Oregon	4.3	4.5	5
U.S.	4.8	4.7	4.9

*Preliminary, seasonally adjusted rates. Source: Oregon Employment Department. Daily Astorian graphic

unemployment rates below 4 percent.

Peak employment

Regional economist Erik Knoder, who gathers employment statistics for Clatsop, Columbia, Tillamook and Lincoln counties, said at a recent Columbia Forum that the region has essentially reached peak employment.

"In general, we have a continually approving economy, and this reflects that,"

he said Tuesday of the unemployment rate.

Unemployment is unlikely to go down much further, he said, because the Federal Reserve will eventually raise interest rates to slow inflation.

Knoder also cautioned people to take the news of low unemployment with a grain of salt. "The unemployment rate is probably the least important number we publish," he said.

There needs to be at least three months of similar movement before a change can be considered a trend, he said, and the unemployment rate has an error range of about 0.4 percent in either direction.

"What I tend to look at more is what the non-farm payroll employment is doing," he said.

The county's nonfarm payroll employment in January was 18,430, 400 more than the year prior for a growth rate of 2.3 percent. Employment contracted from 17,620 in 2008 to 16,700 in 2011 during the Great Recession, but has since expanded, passing the pre-recession level in 2015.

Cannon Beach charter school gets a substantial boost

Academy wins \$100,000 grant

By R.J. MARX
The Daily Astorian

CANNON BEACH — The Cannon Beach Academy received good news this week. The charter school, set to open its doors in September, received a recommendation for a \$100,000 award through the Oregon Charter School Program.

Funds will be allocated to curriculum costs, teacher training, classroom equipment and marketing costs, Phil Simmons, director of startup operations for the academy, said Tuesday.

"The planning grant is administered by the Oregon Department of Education and the funds came from the federal government," Simmons said. "The purpose is to help defer the startup costs for charter schools. We applied for the maximum grant amount of \$100,000, and they awarded the grant."

The Seaside School District participated in the grant process by verifying that the academy had been granted a charter to operate in the district and supported their receiving the grant to provide startup funds, Superintendent Sheila Roley said.

"The members of the Cannon Beach Academy

board have worked very hard to make this a reality and we were happy that they received some resources to help them in the process," Roley said.

Charter schools

The state was awarded \$8.7 million for charter school planning, implementation and dissemination grants in October 2015, charter school grant specialist Jennifer Donovan said. "We will award up to 15, \$100,000 planning grants over the three-year term of our federal charter schools program grant," Donovan said.

So far, four planning grants have been awarded, she added.

Simmons said the grant application detailed the school's five-year planning efforts, provided budget details and indicated where funds would be allocated. All costs in the application were approved.

"It's just a matter of us executing the plan and getting reimbursed," Simmons said. "They were quite impressed with our grant, so much so they're making our application a model for future applications."

Where money will go

The largest portion of the grant funds are slated to

be used for training educators in the school's curriculum. Another \$10,000 will go to three months of salaries for the director and English as a Second Language teacher. "This will really allow those two individuals to really iron out any issues with our program and prepare our program for implementation," Simmons said.

As much as \$30,000 will go to classroom equipment and curriculum expenses.

The academy applied for the grant with the assistance of the Seaside School District, a cooperation "which

is not always common," Simmons said. "Often-times there can be friction between a charter school and a district, because the district sees the charter school as taking away a source of revenue. My experience is the district, particularly within the past year, has been incredibly supportive. They're really trying to help us pull this off."

Something 'unique'

Enrollment at Cannon Beach Academy is limited to 22 students. "It's offering something a bit unique," Simmons said.

Get your rear in gear
Colorectal Cancer Is the Cancer You Can Prevent

COLUMBIA MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

Be in the know

A colonoscopy may be your best option for cancer screening and prevention. Talk to your doctor and learn more about your options online at www.columbiamemorial.org.

3 Facts for Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month

1. Colorectal cancer is the second leading cause of cancer death in the U.S. Finding it now could save your life.
2. Everyone over the age of 50 should be screened. Ask your doctor if you should be screened sooner.
3. There are several colorectal cancer screening tests, including affordable, simple, at-home screening options.

Call **503-338-4075** now to make an appointment.

2111 Exchange St., Astoria, Oregon • 503-325-4321
www.columbiamemorial.org • A Planetree-Designated Hospital

Bare Root & Fruit BONANZA

Save 50% while they last!

Small fruits, including strawberries and potted blueberries, raspberries

**APPLES • CHERRIES
PEAR • PLUMS • PEACHES**

David Austin Roses and Weeks Roses are here!

Organic Potting Soils and Compost

Pest and Disease Controls

Bulk and Packaged Seeds

BABY CHICKS

PRUNING TOOLS

SOIL AMENDMENTS

Voted BEST Garden Center
2016 Readers' Choice Awards

DOG AND CAT FOODS
from the best quality brands, including

34963 Hwy 101 Bus., Astoria 1 mile south of old Youngs Bay Bridge 503-325-1562

Open: Mon-Sat • 9am-5:30pm
www.brimsfarmngarden.com

BRIM'S Farm & Garden