

Kujala to step down as Warrenton mayor

Warrenton Mayor Mark Kujala speaks during a ceremony celebrating the Astoria Bridge in August. Danny Miller/The Daily Astorian



By ERICK BENDEL
The Daily Astorian

WARRENTON — Mayor Mark Kujala announced Tuesday night that he will step down as mayor.

His final City Commission meeting later this month will conclude Kujala's 12-year stretch on the City Commission, five of them as mayor.

"This has been a really difficult deci-

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sion," he said at the close of the commission meeting. He made the decision, he said, after speaking with his wife and family.

Kujala has served on the City Commission since 2005. When he first ran, "I was single and had free time," he said.

"My life's a little different now with my family, and, certainly, I have to kind of think about them, and think about the future," he said. "And so it's with a really heavy heart that I am going to step down at the next meeting."

In addition, Kujala, the owner of Skipanon Brand Seafood, said he needed to devote more time to his business.

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FRESH STARTS HELPS STUDENTS BLOOM

MASTER GARDENERS TEACH YOUTH ABOUT GREENERY



By EDWARD STRATTON
The Daily Astorian

A spot of Portland cement mix on her cheek, Astoria High School freshman Brandi Higgins excitedly filled in the base of the hypertufa rock planter she was molding inside a cardboard box Tuesday.

She pointed with pride behind her in the high school's greenhouse to a counter laden with petunias and daisies, some she had planted, along with a sedum wreath she crafted.

Higgins is one of several students in the Fresh Starts program, a unique partnership with Clatsop County Master Gardeners Association that puts student-created greenery into the community each spring and supports horticulture on campus.

In the coming months, Higgins will market her creations around campus, enticing buyers for a Mother's Day plant sale to support the greenhouse and a coffee stand students operate in the high school's commons.

Growing on campus

Pamela Holen, a master gardener with Oregon State University's Extension Service and co-chairwoman of the Fresh Starts

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Photos by Danny Miller/The Daily Astorian

ABOVE: Clatsop County Master Gardener Pamela Holen instructs students in the Fresh Starts program in Astoria High School's greenhouse. TOP: Clatsop County Master Gardener Linda Holmes helps students make hypertufa flower pots on Tuesday in Astoria High School's greenhouse.

Gearhart issues 911 for station

City seeks replacement of 59-year-old firehouse

By R.J. MARX
The Daily Astorian

GEARHART — Members of Gearhart's firehouse committee presented findings Tuesday night and left the audience with life-and-death questions to ponder.

Goals of the committee are to replace the 59-year-old firehouse, built of unreinforced masonry and considered inadequate by modern standards, at a cost voters will approve.

Of nine locations studied, the committee narrowed the choices down to three: Gearhart Park; the current site at 670 Pacific Way; and Trail's End, directly across from the fire station on the south side of Pacific Way.

Sites north and east of the city were considered but rejected from primary consideration.

'When you're looking at the Big One, there's no perfect location.'

Jay Speakman
firehouse committee co-chairman

"We're really dealing with the best of a series of bad scenarios," firehouse committee co-chairman Jay Speakman said. "We have no perfect answer, so we came up with what we thought as a group was a lot of bad choices. I hate to put it that way — but when you're looking at the Big One, there's no perfect location."

A change of plan

A 2006 plan which included a firehouse building with a City Hall component was defeated by voters, City Administrator Chad Sweet said. "That was a large building with beautiful pictures, 17,000 square feet. People said, 'That's not needed around here. That's too big.'"

This time around, committee members eliminated the City Hall component and reduced the size of the public safety building to 12,760 square feet.

Estimated costs for the building and construction run to nearly \$5 million, Sweet said, with an additional \$2.7 million in interest.

Potential property tax increases were estimated at \$.78 per \$1,000 of assessed value. For a \$300,000 home, that would figure \$234 a year. A \$500,000 home would see taxes increase about \$390 per year.

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Oregon electoral votes may go to top US winner

Renewed interest after Trump's win

By CLAIRE WITHYCOMBE
Capital Bureau

SALEM — Among the proposed laws before the Legislature this session, state Rep. Dan Rayfield says he has gotten the most feedback from constituents on a proposal to have Oregon join a compact of states awarding their Electoral College votes to the winner of the national popular vote.

The Corvallis Democrat admits interest in the measure has grown since Donald Trump received the Electoral College votes required by the Constitution to win the presidency while losing the popular vote in November to Hillary Clinton.



Rep. Dan Rayfield

"I certainly think that the national context has given momentum to the movement," Rayfield said.

But, he said, the effort has been in the works long before Trump's victory. House members got a sense of the high local interest in the Electoral College Tuesday as the Rules Committee took testimony on the revived proposal.

To win the presidency, a candidate must win a majority of the 538 electoral votes.

Each state has one elector for each of its U.S. senators and representatives, and can determine the system for appointing those votes.

In line with the state's current rules, all of Oregon's seven electors were awarded to Clinton, the winner of the statewide popular vote.

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Mark Ylen/Albany Democrat-Herald

Magnolia Mayers, 6, and Dagny Keltner, 14, watch as Electoral College members vote at the state Capitol on Dec. 19 in Salem. Oregon's seven electoral votes went to Hillary Clinton.

