

# Drug busts: Charges come with a 'school zone enhancement'

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Merrill and Morris were arrested shortly after the search began. According to the arrest reports, a deputy also briefly detained a female roommate after finding small quantities of heroin and meth on her bedside table.

Downtown, Raymond officer Sean Jarvis escorted Deko, a drug-sniffing German shepherd around the buildings at about 11 a.m., while Long Beach officers Casey Meling, Don Tardiff and Rodney Nawn combed through the jumbled contents of Long Beach Mopeds.

Outside, officers fended off curious members of the public. A family of cyclists warily approached the moped rental office, explaining that the owner had offered to fill their bike tires. They were turned away.

"You're not going to disappoint us, are you?" asked a surprised-looking mom who had just unloaded her family in front of the go-kart ticket office.

"I'm afraid I am," a Washington State Patrol trooper replied. At that point, officers cut the zip-ties that secured a large "OPEN" sign to a telephone pole, and hauled it into the shop.

Investigators pried open lock-boxes, sifted through drawers, and tried to find a path through a dim garage crammed with bikes, mopeds and parts.

An open door at the large, green bumper car building revealed a small front room that had been set up as a makeshift barber shop. The room was littered with empty propane cans, but nothing of obvious interest to police.

## In the bag

At the house, a sheriff's deputy and his canine partner, Ciko, were having better luck. When Ciko caught the scent of something big, Jarvis and Deko came to help out.

In the couple's bedroom, the dogs led investigators to Morris's purse and a metal briefcase that Merrill used to carry cash deposits from the go-kart track to the bank. According to



Natalie St. John/EO Media Group

**Long Beach Mayor Jerry Phillips posted a notice on the door of Long Beach Mopeds and two neighboring businesses during an April 4 drug raid. The city pulled owner Tony Merrill's business licenses, citing unpaid taxes.**

the report, the purse allegedly contained \$826 in cash, about 29 grams of heroin and 4.5 grams of meth.

With tar heroin typically selling for between \$80 and \$100 per gram in Washington state, according to Matlock, that quantity could have a street value of up to \$2,900.

"You can take those amounts and package them as

if you were going to sell," Matlock said.

The metal briefcase allegedly contained about \$1,000 in cash, a "large spoon containing suspected heroin," and a bag of meth. Field tests for both substances were positive.

## More discoveries

When the dogs took an

interest in Merrill's truck, investigators sought an additional search warrant. Inside, they allegedly found Merrill's phone, a digital scale coated in suspected heroin residue, and two more containers of heroin.

The roommate told police that Morris and Merrill had both allegedly provided her with drugs. According to the report, "She said she knows Morris drives around selling to people," something Merrill apparently disliked, but didn't try to stop. The woman also alleged that the couple sometimes allegedly sold drugs at the house.

Later in the day, officers allegedly found several baggies containing prescription pills at the go-kart track. They also allegedly found a Triumph motorcycle in the Krazy Kars building that had been reported stolen in Vancouver. A towing company hauled the motorcycle away.

## Complex business

During the raid, Long Beach Mayor Jerry Phillips

posted notices on the doors of all three businesses, announcing the city had canceled all of Merrill's business licenses due to unpaid taxes.

Matlock said investigators are still studying the ledgers and other business records they found during the search, but they do suspect that the downtown amusement complex may have functioned as a sort of a "drug front." If it turns out that Merrill did funnel drug money through his legitimate businesses, it could take authorities months to fully investigate and determine what to do with his assets.

Merrill and Morris have each been charged with six counts of possession of a controlled substance with intent to deliver. Merrill faces an additional charge of possession of a stolen vehicle.

Matlock said the drug charges come with a "school zone enhancement," because the businesses are located near a school bus stop. If they are convicted, the enhancement means that they could face longer sentences.

# Parks: City Council is looking at a range of possible funding mechanisms to add revenue

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while saving the most money, she presented the council with recommendations on which programs to eliminate.

The first was the drop-in child care at the Astoria Recreation Center, and the CPR and first aid classes, then health-and-wellness programs, such as the Gobbler Gallop, Astoria Wellness Challenge and New Year's Day Fun Run.

Special events at Port of Play — the Family Pumpkin Carving, Easter Egg Dyeing, Valentine's Day Tea and Dr. Seuss Celebration Night — may also wind up on the chopping block.

Other free community and family-based events, such as the Easter Egg Hunt, Father/Daughter Valentine's Day Dance, Monster Bash, Kids' Day in the Park and Summer Movies in the Park may be retired.

Finally, Cosby recommended ending youth and adult athletics, a notion that made a few councilors recoil. "I wish I wasn't proposing that, to be clear," Cosby said.

The Aquatic Center, an expensive facility that nearly shut down during the Great Recession, may eventually have to close without additional revenue streams.

## Cash flow

Meanwhile, the council is looking at a range of possible funding mechanisms to add revenue and boost the department's long-term financial stability.

At a March work session, Cosby and park staff members advocated imposing a utility fee on energy customers. Though city councilors said the idea is worth exploring, the public's reaction was mixed. "There was definitely some pushback from the community," Cosby said.

A utility fee attached to



The Daily Astorian/File Photos

**Astoria may cut programs to save money in the Parks and Recreation Department.**



**Parks and Recreation Director Angela Cosby talks about Violet LaPlante Park during a tour.**

city-controlled water and sewer rates, rather than to electric bills, is now one of several options under consideration.

Others include:

- Business license and gateway fees
- A parks and recreation or cemetery taxing district
- A sales tax on prepared meals and beverages
- An operations levy
- A lodging tax increase

City Councilor Bruce Jones said he would support a strategy that shared the costs among both residents and visitors. "I like the idea of not having the burden be exclusively borne by Astorians — say, through a water-sewer fee exclusively," he said.

City Councilor Zetty Nemlowill, a former member of the parks and recreation master plan citizens advisory group, said that, before the

council considers increased funding, the city needs to create a more manageable parks system. She has advocated for selling underused parkland, such as Tidal Rock Park at Commercial and 15th streets.

Nemlowill said she would not entertain a food and beverage tax because the method does not relate directly to parks. In addition, she believes it would be unfair to foist a sales tax onto small business owners.

However, since Nemlowill works for the Astoria Co-op Grocery and her husband co-owns Fort George Brewery, it is unclear if she would have to recuse herself from a council vote on such a tax.

City Councilor Cindy Price said the council needs more data on each of these options before deciding which ones to pursue. "We can't really talk about them without understanding what they might mean," she said.

The City Council plans to soon discuss the parks budget further.

# Port: Motion to create a new Port Citizen Financial Review Committee passed

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## Stick to the budget

The Port's budget committee, made up of the five Port commissioners and five appointed residents, was short Commissioners Robert Mushen and James Campbell Wednesday, along with Chris Conaway. Present were Fulton, Hunsinger, Commissioner John Raichl, Mary Iverson, Frank Spence, Richard Lee and Cindy Daly.

Knight was the only staff member, relieving employees from what he called an inappropriate meeting.

Hunsinger attempted to add a discussion of the Port's Pier 3 stormwater system. He and Fulton have been critical of overages and delays on the project, as well as staff's plan to pay for it.

Iverson, who works with Fulton as an accountant at Warrenton Fiber, asked Knight to address several concerns raised by Hunsinger about the stormwater project. Knight refused, saying the budget committee is the wrong venue.

"I'm not going to engage in the question-and-answer that are coming from the budget committee," he said. "These are great questions. I'm not trying to be obstinate. I'm not trying to be difficult. From the moment I came to this port, it's really to try to pull this Port together and to do things that are right, and I'm going to continue to do what I believe is the right thing for the staff and for this Port."

## Budget-finance

"Listening to Mr. Knight, he is not participating ... in that process going forward," Fulton said.

"I'm right here,"

Knight responded. "I'm participating."

Fulton said staff seemed to be making a policy decision that is the purview of the Port Commission. He called for the creation of a budget-finance advisory committee made up of the same members of the budget committee to review the agency's financials quarterly, later changing the name to the Port Citizen Financial Review Committee.

"That's my intent, because there seems to be this misunderstanding that the budget committee is exceeding their authority," Fulton said. "This is not a budget committee meeting. This is an advisory committee to the Port of Astoria."

Raichl said having all the same members as the budget committee on the new finance committee could muddy the waters. He suggested an amendment to Fulton's motion that the new finance committee include a smaller membership than the budget committee. Fulton opposed the amendment.

The motion to create a new Port Citizen Financial Review Committee passed 5-1-1, with Raichl abstaining and Spence opposed.

In other news:

- Lee was appointed president of the budget committee for the coming year. He has temporarily replaced former committee Chairman John Lansing, who walked out and quit the committee in November after being called a stooge of Knight by Fulton.

- The budget committee approved a motion to commence budget committee meetings in May, with as many as necessary to present a balanced budget.

# Mosquitoes: Horvath spent some time in Nigeria controlling mosquito populations

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Horvath will use a number of larvicides on the water sources to control the spread of mosquito larvae. Since large sources of water such as Coffenbury Lake contain natural mosquito predators — like fish — Horvath will focus on the smaller water sources. The larvicides are not harmful to pets, people or other animals besides mosquito larvae, Horvath said.

## Survey hints

Fort Stevens hired Horvath for just under \$3,000 this year after a late February survey indicated mosquitoes would be an issue at the park again this year. Horvath completed similar projects in other parks throughout the state. He has also spent time

in Nigeria controlling mosquito populations at hospitals that contained standing-water sources.

"People would come to hospitals for treatment and leave with malaria," he said.

Jacob Horvath, who is home-schooled, often assists his father on projects by inspecting ponds for larvae and carrying equipment.

Horvath had hoped to begin in March to limit the number of adult mosquitoes being hatched early, but the park needed to finish contracting, consult with a biologist and post signs and website information about the project, Parker said.

Adult mosquitoes are already active at the park. Horvath's goal for this summer is to prevent more from growing. That would avoid

having to apply fogging techniques, which typically are used to kill adult mosquitoes.

## Issue with pests

Dating back to Fort Stevens' construction in the latter half of the 19th century, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and then the state parks department redirected water away from buildings and campgrounds. While the tactics allowed for settlements on the land, they did not foresee a future issue with pests.

In addition to controlling larvae spread, Horvath will make recommendations to the park by the end of the summer on how to best create channels for water sources to move. In the meantime, park staff will drain standing water sources where possible.



Danny Miller/The Daily Astorian

**Edward Horvath shows the larvicide used in order to target mosquito larvae.**