

Sewer surcharge will rise in new Astoria budget

Customers will see 6 percent hike for project

By **KATIE FRANKOWICZ**
The Daily Astorian

The Astoria City Council approved a \$37 million budget Monday night that, once again, includes increases to the sewer surcharge.

The budget reflects a high demand on city services coupled with increased rates for Oregon's public pension fund. Appropriations for the general fund — the "meat of the

budget," as one city councilor described it — have increased.

In his budget message for the fiscal year that begins in July, City Manager Brett Estes said, "The city needs to continue evaluating all service levels with a mindset toward long-term sustainability," adding, "it is imperative for the city to maintain a sharp eye on budgets, programs, projects and funding."

Next year's budget is slightly down from the this fiscal year's spending plan of \$37.7 million, itself down from the year before that.

A sewer surcharge will rise by 6 percent. The surcharge

helps finance the multimillion-dollar sewer improvement project to reduce wastewater into the Columbia River and meet federal Clean Water Act standards.

The city negotiated an extension on both the project completion dates and loan payable dates, keeping the surcharge increases slightly lower, but around for a longer period of time. The project is expected to be completed by 2028.

The City Council also approved modifying a framework used to size water meters. Unlike this fiscal year, there were no increases to water rates.

Astoria, like other cities across Oregon, has seen resources such as state and federal grants wane coupled with increased limitations on how cities can generate revenue, Estes said.

A measure on the ballot last year for a 3 percent tax on the sale of recreational marijuana in Astoria was one way to address the challenge. Voters approved the measure, but Estes said the city is still not sure what sort of revenue the tax will generate. Those figures were not available Monday night and were not included in the approved budget.

The budget also reflected the need for building sustain-

ability into certain departments, particularly the beleaguered Parks and Recreation Department. That department faced both a budget shortfall and a history of shortages that have forced it to cut some programs this year while struggling to maintain remaining programs with a bare-bones staff.

Parks operations, which have not been a part of the general fund since fiscal year 2012-13, have a budget of \$1.1 million for aquatic, recreation/administration and maintenance. As in years past, the city opted to transfer money from the general fund to make up the rest of the

necessary funding for parks operations.

City councilors and staff this year have been looking at ways to avoid such transfers in the future. For months they have been discussing how to establish more reliable funding sources to keep parks sustainable and bring it to a point where the department can begin to hire more staff to address its wide-ranging and growing list of responsibilities.

Estes noted in his budget message that the adjustments for this year "do not address long-term staffing and budget issues which need to be addressed sooner rather than later."

Transportation funding hearing keys on transit

Payroll tax one of several finance options

By **PARIS ACHEN**
Capital Bureau



Capital Bureau

The Legislature Monday began three-days of hearings on an \$8 billion transportation package.

dents, who use transit at disproportionately higher rates and already pay fares.

The tax would cost minimum wage workers about \$20 per year.

The tax would raise an estimated \$107 million per year for transit.

Provisions in the bill prohibit the revenue from being used on light rail improvements.

Oregon is provincial in its development of rail compared with Washington state and California, said speakers with the Association of Oregon Rail and Transit Advocates. Rail lines have only single tracks, making efficient commuting almost impossible. Washington state and California have moved to double and triple-track lines, said Dan McFarland of the rail and transit group.

Rural lawmakers also have criticized the tax, as some areas

are too scarcely populated to have transit.

During discussions on what should be included in the bill, state Sen. Fred Girod, R-Stayton, suggested levying the tax only on workers who live in transit districts.

"To ask somebody out in the country to pay 0.1 percent ... to try to justify it to those people the first thing they're going to say is, 'This is Portland money,'" Girod said last month.

Local officials, however, said new revenue from the payroll tax would enable local districts to fund programs that give public transportation tickets to low-income individuals without charge.

The majority of nearly 30 speakers Monday expressed overwhelming support for the bill.

The bill's harsher critics were largely absent from Monday's hearing. Attendees spoke by invitation only and were selected for their role in a workgroup that helped craft the bill.

The plan identifies a few specific projects to ease congestion, but other projects would be prioritized by the Oregon Transportation Commission. Specific projects would:

- Add lanes on Interstate 5 near Portland's Rose Quarter from Interstate 84 to Interstate 405.

- Add northbound and southbound lanes on Highway 217 through the Portland metro area.

- Widen Interstate 205 to six lanes from Oregon City to Stafford Road.

- Widen and seismically reinforce Interstate 205's Abernethy Bridge.

The plan raises an average of about \$800 million per year in additional transportation funding.

The money would come from increases in the gas tax and vehicle fees and a set of new taxes over the next 10 years, including:

- Gradual gas tax increase from 30 cents to 42 cents by 2025.
- Tiered increase in title and registration fees, depending on type of vehicle. Surcharge of \$100 for electric vehicles, and \$15 for other vehicles.
- Statewide payroll tax of 0.1 percent to pay for mass transit.
- Tolls to be determined.
- Bicycle excise tax of 3 percent.
- Dealer privilege tax of 0.75 percent on new and used vehicle purchases.

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

WANTED
Alder and Maple Saw Logs & Standing Timber
Northwest Hardwoods • Longview, WA
Contact: John Anderson • 360-269-2500

THANK YOU

ALL FOR MAKING MY
84TH BIRTHDAY
PARTY VERY SPECIAL!

Max and Judy Bigby
Jason, Trixie, Lillian and Max Bigby
Judy Zell
Tom and Joanne Alfonse
Christi Payne and Greg Darms
Mike and Tami Aho
Cheryl and Larry Lockett
Sara and Skip Hauke
Marilynn Knowlson

KIND REGARDS,
ART JOHNSON



Team members: Jason, Jeana and Christie

LifeCare

Become a member today to protect your family from unexpected emergency expenses.

only
\$59
per year

Why Should I Join LifeCare?

Insurance rarely covers the full cost of an ambulance transport, even after you pay your deductible. When you become a **LifeCare member**, you receive **peace of mind** in knowing that your emergency medical transportation **costs are covered**, even if you are uninsured.

LifeCare is an Incredible Value.

Protect yourself from a high ambulance transport bill for **less than \$5 per month**. As a LifeCare member, you don't have to worry — you have **no out-of-pocket costs, no copays and no deductibles**, all for one low price. When you compare the cost of an annual LifeCare membership (\$59) to the average cost of an ambulance ride (\$1,500) or an out-of-pocket deductible (\$2,000), **LifeCare is a great deal!**

Enroll Today!

Visit AmbulanceMembership.com/Medix or call **503.861.5558**



GRAND OPENING SPECIALS

**CELEBRATING:
A NEW CLINIC AND A
NEW WEBSITE**

All adult patient exam, x-rays and cleanings receive:

- **FREE TOOTH WHITENING (\$100 value)**
- **FREE SUPER DENTAL HEALTH BOOK (\$20 value)**
- **FREE CONSULTATION (\$100 value)**

Children 13 years old and under with x-rays and fluoride treatment receive:

- **FREE EXAMINATION (\$65 value)**

Visit Our Website At:
dentalcentralnw.com

DENTAL CENTRAL NW
RODNEY KATAYAMA DDS
65 North Highway 101, Suite 212
Warrenton, OR 97146
503 325 2031

*Where Experience Meets
Modern Dentistry*

Appointments must be scheduled by June 30, 2017 to qualify for specials. OHP excluded.