

# Astoria police: Halverson taking over until interim chief is found

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“There’s some frustration ... with regards to the fact of rising call levels and the staffing levels we have now,” Estes said.

“We know that, internally, those stressors are providing some level of frustration,” he added, “and so now is the time to be able to focus on some sort of internal strategic planning process ... to say how do we address this while at the same time looking at what sort of qualities do we need in a new chief to be able to lead this department forward in the future.”

Johnston, who has not returned messages seeking comment on his departure, resigned as assistant city manager in July and retired as police chief on Wednesday.

Estes said he did not ask for Johnston’s resignation or retirement. The city manager also could not say what role, if any, the independent assessment played in Johnston’s decision to leave the police department after 25 years.

## Filling the gaps

Deputy Chief Eric Halverson is now juggling both his regular duties and Johnston’s until an interim chief is found. He has taken on hiring, union negotiations, supervising sergeants and patrol officers and other day-to-day operations as a part of his new responsibilities.

The police department is in the middle of conducting background checks on three potential new hires to replace three officers who left earlier this year — one resigned, two went to work for the Clatsop County Sheriff’s Office. Halverson hopes to make three conditional offers by next week.

“I’m working on moving those people forward,” Halverson said. “That’s going to continue regardless of the chief’s retirement.”

## Caught by surprise

Mayor Arline LaMear commended Halverson for taking on the extra responsibilities.

City councilors said they had been told of Johnston’s retirement Wednesday night. They said the news was sudden and caught them by surprise. They also said they were sorry to see Johnston go.

“I’ve always enjoyed my working relationship with (Johnston) and wish him well with whatever he decides to do,” LaMear said.

“We know that the department is important to the safety and welfare of the city,” said Councilor Tom Brownson. “We need to make sure we do everything we can to support it.”

## Assistant city manager

Several weeks before Johnston retired, the former police chief stepped down as assistant city manager. Estes said Johnston told him he was resigning to focus more on the police department and staffing issues there.

The title of assistant city manager did not come with a pay increase, nor is it a role the city consistently has someone fill. Estes said there has only been three assistant city managers who were also heads of other departments. Estes was one of them, Johnston was another. The third was Paul Benoit, a former community development director and city manager.

Estes does not plan to advertise a dual police chief and assistant city manager job.

“Honestly, I’m not looking at filling an assistant city manager role at any point in time,” Estes said. “It’s all based upon fit.”

If Estes needs someone to fill in for him due to a temporary absence, he can call on any of the city’s department heads, he said. Public Works Director Ken Cook has served as acting city manager multiple times over the years.

*Jack Heffernan contributed to this report.*

# Dollar General: More than 13,000 locations nationwide

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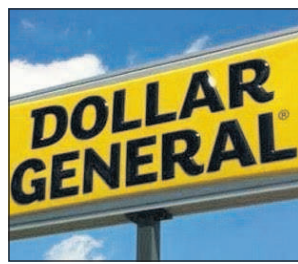
Only three of the five Design Review Committee members were present at the meeting — Vice President LJ Gunderson, Hilarie Phelps and Leanne Hensley. They all commended Ferber for her thorough report and voted unanimously to deny the application.

“It feels to me like there is a lot missing from you folks on this,” Gunderson told Stults.

“We’re really proud of our town here,” she continued. “When I see this kind of packet and I’m looking at the design and I hear you saying you’re willing to do some things, I don’t know if you can do enough to really make it fit this community here. Everything I see here looks like a retail box and there’s no character to it.”

Phelps and Hensley agreed. Hensley remarked that the developers have been discussing their application with Ferber for two months; she wondered how they hadn’t been able to figure out ways to adapt their vision to Astoria’s requirements in that time.

The application only came to the design committee for review because the property falls within the Civic Greenway Overlay zone that extends from 16th Street to 41st Street and the Gateway Overlay zone. Both zones are intended, in



Wikimedia Commons

**Dollar General will have to rethink the design for a proposed store in the Mill Pond neighborhood of Astoria.**

part, to preserve the character of Astoria, protecting views and access to the Columbia River and complementing downtown and the community as a whole. The Design Review Committee was the only city panel that reviewed an application from the business. The land is zoned local service development and a retail use is allowed outright.

Dollar General has more than 13,000 locations nationwide and sells a variety of goods. Stults said the company is dedicated to becoming a “good neighbor” to the community.

“We’re not here to dictate what the (city) staff needs or what you need, we just want to work with you,” he told the committee.

If the developers decide not to resubmit an application, they will have 15 days to appeal the Design Review Committee’s decision to the City Council.

## WORLD IN BRIEF

Associated Press

### AP source: Mueller using grand jury in DC in Russia probe

WASHINGTON — Special Counsel Robert Mueller is using a grand jury in Washington as part of an investigation into potential coordination between the Trump campaign and Russia, a person familiar with the probe says.

The use of a grand jury, a standard prosecution tool in criminal investigations, suggests that Mueller and his team of investigators are likely to hear from witnesses and demand documents in the coming weeks and months.

The person who confirmed to The Associated Press that Mueller had turned to a grand jury was not authorized to discuss the investigation by name and spoke on condition of anonymity.

The Wall Street Journal first reported the use of a grand jury. Grand juries are common vehicles to subpoena witnesses and records and to present evidence, though they do not suggest any criminal charges are near or will necessarily be sought. It was not immediately clear how or whether the Washington grand jury was connected to the work of a separate one in Alexandria, Virginia. That panel has been used to gather information on Michael Flynn, Trump’s former national security adviser.

### Cities baffled as Jeff Sessions targets them on immigration

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. — Attorney General Jeff Sessions took new steps Thursday to punish cities he believes are not cooperating with federal immigration agents in a move that was met with bewilderment by local officials who said they did not know why they were being singled out.

The Justice Department sent letters to four cities struggling with gun violence, telling them they would not be eligible for a program that provides money to combat drug trafficking and gang crime unless they give federal immigration authorities access to jails and notify agents before releasing inmates wanted on immigration violations.

Baltimore, Albuquerque, and Stockton and San Bernardino in California all expressed interest in the Justice Department’s Public Safety Partnership, which enlists federal agents, analysts and technology to help communities find solutions to crime.

None of the four has declared itself a “sanctuary city,” a mostly symbolic term that nevertheless is strongly associated with ordinances aimed at shielding illegal immigrants.

Regardless, “by taking simple, commonsense considerations into account, we are encouraging every jurisdiction in this country to cooperate with federal law enforcement,” Sessions said in a statement that accompanied the letters. “That will ultimately make all of us safer — especially law enforcement on our streets.”

The threat marks Sessions’ latest effort to force local authorities to help federal agents detain and deport people living in the country illegally as part of a push to reduce crime he believes is linked to illegal immigration. The attorney general has repeatedly vowed to withhold federal money from cities that do not cooperate, similar to how previous administrations have held back highway funds during debates over the speed limit and drinking age.

But it was not immediately clear to some of the cities why they were targeted.

### APNewsBreak: Flynn details tie to data firm, transition pay

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump’s former national security adviser, Michael Flynn, is revealing a brief advisory role with a firm related to a controversial data analysis company that aided the Trump campaign, The Associated Press has learned.

The disclosure of Flynn’s link to Cambridge Analytica will come in an amended public financial filing in which the retired U.S. Army lieutenant general also discloses income that includes payments from the Trump transition team, according to a person close to Flynn who spoke to AP on condition of anonymity Thursday to describe details of the filing made to the White House.

The amended disclosure shows that just before the end of the campaign, Flynn entered into a consulting agreement with SCL Group, a Virginia-based company related to Cambridge Analytica, the data mining and analysis firm that worked with Trump’s campaign.

The person said Flynn didn’t perform work or accept payment as part of the agreement with SCL Group. The details of Flynn’s role with SCL weren’t fully laid out, the person said, noting that Flynn terminated his involvement shortly after Trump won the presidency.

Cambridge Analytica was heavily funded by the family of Robert Mercer, a hedge fund manager who also backed the campaign and other conservative candidates and causes. Cambridge Analytica also worked for the successful pro-Brexit campaign in 2016 to pull Britain out of the European Union. Trump administration chief strategist Steve Bannon was a vice president of Cambridge Analytica before he joined the Trump campaign.

# Pink: Drug’s potency can vary from pill to pill

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“There’s no controls,” Giuliani said. “They are fly-by-night, unmonitored, so they’ll do whatever they want.”

Officials have often compared consuming the drug to playing a game of Russian roulette. In the same batch, the drug’s potency can vary from pill to pill.

“It has the same effects as any other opiate, it’s just stronger than some of them,” Giuliani said. “You might be able to take one pill and do whatever it is to get you high. But the next time, it might have triple the amount in there and you’ll die.”

After dozens of overdose deaths on the East Coast from late 2015 to late 2016, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration listed the drug as a Schedule I substance.

As in many regions throughout the country, prescription drug and heroin overdoses have been a nagging problem for Clatsop County in recent years. Since 2014,

at least 12 people have died from these overdoses. Now, though, the arrival of synthetic opiates represents a potential amplification.

“Yeah, have they existed? I guess so, but not on our radar,” Giuliani said of the synthetic drugs.

## The victims

Because the synthetic drugs often are nearly identical to regular opiates, like OxyContin or Percocet, young people who purchase the drugs may not always be aware of what they are consuming. This scenario is what most scares Giuliani.

“If you want to play Russian roulette, that’s fine. I’m talking about the unsuspecting person who buys this from somebody else and doesn’t know what it is,” she said.

The young man who died in April — officials are withholding his identity to maintain his family’s privacy — likely was not aware of what he was taking, Giuliani said. He had spent the night at a friend’s



AP Photo/J. Scott Applewhite

**Special Counsel Robert Mueller departs after a closed-door meeting with members of the Senate Judiciary Committee about Russian meddling in the election at the Capitol in Washington.**

### Fire put out at 86-story residential skyscraper in Dubai

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — Police in Dubai have reopened the streets around one of the world’s tallest residential skyscrapers after firefighters put out a blaze that erupted early today in the high-rise, forcing residents to evacuate in the middle of the night and sending chunks of debris plummeting below.

No major injuries had been reported. A few people were treated for smoke inhalation, according to Dubai’s Gulf News website.

Several residents said the fire broke out just after 1 a.m. at the 86-story Torch Tower — a more than 1,100-foot-tall (335 meters) residential building in Dubai’s popular waterfront Marina district. The same building had also caught fire just two-and-a-half years earlier.

The cause of the fire on was not immediately known but in the past, such infernos in Dubai have been linked to highly flammable building cladding — as was the devastating June tower fire in London that killed at least 80 people.

“You never think it’s going to happen to you,” said Alireza Aletomeh, a resident of the tower. “I had cash in there, furniture, paintings. ... Many things that are very valuable to me.”

### All-powerful Venezuelan assembly to open amid protests

CARACAS, Venezuela — Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro is heading toward a showdown with his political foes, promising to seat a new constituent assembly today that will rewrite the country’s constitution and hold powers that override all other government branches.

Leaders of the opposition urged Venezuelans to fill the streets of the capital today, hoping to provide a strong showing that many people object to the assembly.

The body’s 545 delegates were expected to be installed at the legislative palace in a room just yards (meters) from the chamber where the opposition-controlled National Assembly meets. Maduro, who has said he will use the assembly to punish his opponents, planned to attend the opening session.

The legislature building has been the scene of bloody clashes in recent weeks and the installation of the all-powerful assembly will intensify a political struggle that has brought three months of bloody anti-government protests to Venezuela. Maduro vows the assembly will strip opposition lawmakers of their constitutional immunity from prosecution, while members of congress say they will only be removed by force.

“The only way they’ll get us out of here is by killing us,” declared Freddy Guevara, the National Assembly’s first vice president. “They will never have the seat that the people of Venezuela gave us.”

### A journalist’s murder underscores growing threat in Mexico

MEXICO CITY — The staff of the weekly newspaper Riodoce normally meets on Wednesdays to review their plans for coverage of the most recent mayhem wrought in Sinaloa state by organized crime, corrupt officials and ceaseless drug wars. But on this day, in the shadow of their own tragedy, they’ve come together to talk about security.

It’s important to change their routines, they are told. Be more careful with social media. Don’t leave colleagues alone in the office at night. Two senior journalists discuss what feels safer: to take their children with them to the office, which was the target of a grenade attack in 2009, or to leave them at home.

Security experts have written three words on a blackboard at the front of the room: adversaries, neutrals, allies. They ask the reporters to suggest names for each column — no proof is needed, perceptions and gut feelings are enough.

Allies are crucial. In an emergency, they would need a friend, a lawyer, an activist to call.

house taking drugs, fell asleep on the couch and never awoke.

“Since it’s so new to me, I can’t imagine he had the realization of what he was dealing with,” said Giuliani, who has investigated hundreds of overdose deaths in her 15 years as the county medical examiner.

## Hard to prosecute

Though families of those who die of overdoses tend to focus their attention on finding the dealer, prosecuting these cases can be harder than usual when synthetic opiates are involved, Giuliani said.

They do not lead to positive opiate results during the initial tests Giuliani conducts. Therefore, the state medical examiner’s lab must conduct further testing to determine the true cause. Due to a high volume of cases that are processed on a first-come, first-served basis, these results can take months.

“I don’t even know what I’m dealing with,” Giuliani said. “That puts us right behind the eight ball from the very beginning.”

Law enforcement is unable to make any arrests until they know what drug is the main cause of death. The lengthy waiting period provides dealers more time to hide their tracks. Because clear evidence such as text messages — rather than hearsay from family members, friends or associates — are required for prosecution, these cases often do not lead to many arrests or convictions.

“We have to be able to show a clear path,” Giuliani said. “They do whatever they can to throw us off the scent.”

## Concerned, alert

For a veteran medical examiner such as Giuliani, the recent overdose death raised a number of questions while she waited for the test results. Now that she knows the results, she is concerned, but alert.

“It blew me away when I got a negative opiate on this gentleman because I’ve started doubting my ability to discern what’s going on,” Giuliani said. “We’ve all had our antennas raised.”