

# Warrenton: ‘We’ve got to start somewhere, and it’s starting now’

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2009. Both have since undergone renovations and expansions. On the heels of their success came Staples, Big 5 Sporting Goods, Dollar Store, O’Reilly Auto Parts. Even more stores followed, filling the gaps between buildings, forming a hub clustered around the Ensign Lane intersection near the lifeline of traffic flowing down U.S. Highway 101.

These developments happened in phases. Recently, it seems like everything is happening at once. It’s kind of like trying to drink through a firehose.

“But it’s a good problem to have,” Balensifer said.

Last year, Astoria Ford left Astoria and joined the other car dealerships in Warrenton while Fort George, another Astoria-based company, plans to build a new distribution center, warehouse and event center nearby. Walmart is on its way and Pacific Coast Seafood plans to reopen its seafood plant next door to Hampton Lumber by the end of the year. And at the start of the summer, Urling estimated there were approximately 500 housing units in the works: homes, apartments, subdivisions. Many of these are large complexes, too — 37 units, 68 units — far larger than the duplexes and four- or six-unit buildings Urling is used to seeing built.

### Fire and water

Anytime a new building goes up, Fire Chief Demers has to think about it on fire. How would his volunteers respond? What equipment would they need to tackle a



Photos by Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian  
**Construction on the new Pacific Seafood processing facility in Warrenton progresses with the aid of a barge docked near the site.**

first, second or third-story fire? Can he turn a fire engine around on this street?

The answer to that last question is “definitely,” “maybe,” or “no” depending on which street you are talking about. As Warrenton fills up, past inconsistencies are becoming more obvious. Some of Warrenton’s streets are as narrow as 20 feet. Cars ride up on the sidewalk to park to keep the roadway clear.

“Any time you start developing, you have to balance the fact that I have to fight fire somewhere with the fact that it has be cost effective for someone to put in a street and people have to be able to park and make it their home,” Demers said. “That’s generally a very conflicted thing.”

Of course, once you get a fire engine down the street,

you have to be able to hook it up to a water supply. Warrenton’s water system is large and robust, Engbretson said, but some parts of the city are still underserved. As more development, particularly housing development, comes in there are ever-increasing demands on infrastructure.

“You begin to start looking at your resources and thinking about how much water can I get here,” Demers said. “It’s the middle of a summer day or its 8 a.m., 7 a.m. and everybody’s taking showers. Can we still maintain fire flows? Those things come into play.”

“At some point, we may have to say, ‘That’s all we’ve got,’” said Engbretson.

The city is in the middle of drafting a water master plan, an overview of the system nobody has taken before —

probably because up until now the city hadn’t really needed to, Demers said.

The Planning Commission and City Commission, at a joint meeting at the end of August, talked to staff about requiring all new city streets to be a minimum of 36 feet across to accommodate off street-parking and provide for fire access.

But this doesn’t mean the old roads are getting torn out or that sidewalks will suddenly blossom. Change will come about gradually, city officials say, development by development or as maintenance issues come up and damaged roads need to be replaced.

### Future

This year, Engbretson started holding weekly development review meetings with



**Workers dig a trench for infrastructure at one of the new housing developments under construction in Warrenton.**

department heads and staff to coordinate early and often as different projects go through the review and permitting process. The City Commission has begun meeting with volunteer boards and commissions. The primary goal in both cases is the same: To make sure everyone is on the same page.

In the weekly meetings, Engbretson and her staff want to make sure they all know what questions remain about a project, what each department needs before they are comfortable signing off on it.

City commissioners have encouraged the other boards, commissions and staff to ask

for more and better things from development coming in. Several years ago, certain requirements did not exist or were not enforced. They expect some developers will be frustrated, arguing — correctly — for instance, that a project completed two years ago didn’t have to include sidewalks along a new road or a community park in subdivisions.

“But we’ve got to start somewhere,” Balensifer said, “and it’s starting now ... You don’t want people to be in a neighborhood (years from now) and go, ‘Who was asleep at the wheel when they came up with this project?’”

# Library: Kickoff event planned to coincide with library’s 50th birthday

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The library’s foundation will be leading the main fundraising efforts and hopes to raise \$3.5 million for renovation work — a doable amount, said Willis Van Dusen, a former mayor who is president of the foundation.

The foundation plans to

hold a kickoff event on Oct. 8, coinciding with the library’s 50th birthday.

In the meantime, Mayor Arline LaMear hopes the Astor Place bake sale will encourage other groups to step forward and hold fundraising events of their own.

For Astor Place residents and staff, the bake sale this

weekend is a way to give back to the community, said Allannah Warren, the assisted living facility’s community relations manager. They will be drawing on family, traditional and favorite recipes, using the facility’s kitchen. Ultimately, they hope to partner with other groups, including the Astoria Senior Center,

to hold frequent community fundraisers.

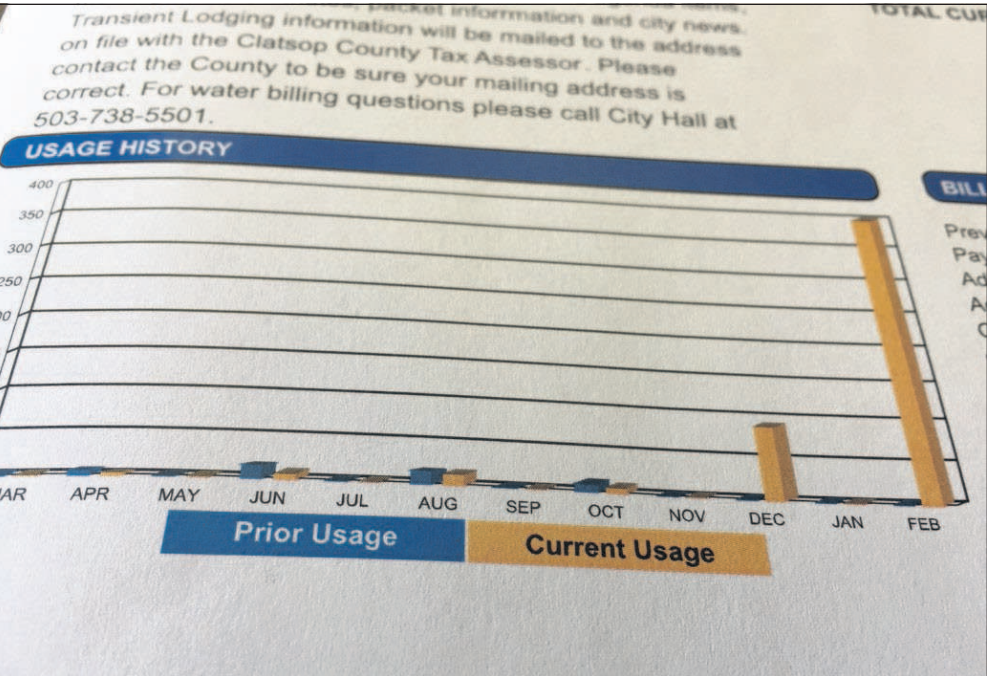
Astor Place resident and former teacher Marlene Bennett has been a lifelong user of libraries, and remembers taking her students to the local library. A library is more than

just a place to find books, she said, it’s a community space.

“I’m just 100 percent for libraries,” she said. “You think of a library as just books. It’s a lot more than that. It’s part of a child’s life. It should be.”

The bake sale will be held

from 2 to 4 p.m. Saturday at Astor Place, located near the Astoria Middle School at 999 Klaskanine Ave. LaMear and Astoria Library Director Jimmy Pearson will be at the fundraiser to answer questions.



R.J. Marx/The Daily Astorian

**Water bill charts homeowner’s spike in usage.**

## Water bill: Cost to city was minimal

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The McCarrons have owned their Gearhart home for 23 years, but had not been to the house since early last fall. “Our water bills of record have been predictably modest and remarkably consistent over the years,” they wrote city councilors.

On a Sunday morning in February, the McCarrons received a call from one of their neighbors in the Highlands section of Gearhart who told them “in somewhat excited terms a water geyser was erupting in our driveway.”

The McCarrons said they immediately contacted their property manager, Tom Thies, who represented the couple at Wednesday’s City Council meeting. Thies showed up within minutes, they wrote. The water valve at the street that controlled the pipe to the house was turned, but not before the pipe had ruptured

almost 20 feet before entry into the house.

While they considered the first water bill a “blip,” the meter reading in February was “essentially off the charts.”

The couple brought their case to the City Council for relief, and received the maximum available — \$1,839. But they were still left with the remainder of almost \$2,900.

They sought further relief after paying to have the water line fixed, City Administrator Chad Sweet said.

“If you do choose to have a reduction, I wouldn’t have an issue with what you chose,” Sweet told councilors.

A 1-inch pinhole leak at 72 pounds per square inch can spill 30,000 gallons in two months. “Water doesn’t stop,” Sweet said. “This was a 3/4-inch pipe that was going for a period of time.”

The cost to the city was minimal.

“I would feel different if it had been dealt with after the first water bill,” City Councilor Dan Jesse said. “But the fact that they let it go to the second water bill ... the fact that he acknowledged there was a ‘blip’ and didn’t do anything about it indicated he was aware of it.”

“It can happen, and this happened in excess to them, and I’d like to just give them their regular bill,” Councilor Sue Lorain said.

After discussion, the City Council unanimously agreed to reduce the bill a further \$2,000, leaving the remaining \$875 for the McCarrons to pay.

McCarron said he appreciated the reduction and plans to pay the adjusted amount. “I should have looked at that bill and gasped also,” he said. “It’s a human story. It could happen to them.”

The lesson? If you see a blip, don’t let it drip.



*Collaboration*

Jennifer Lycette, MD  
Oncologist

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