

Water rates may rise for out-of-town customers

Decision expected by Astoria in December

By **KATIE FRANKOWICZ**
The Daily Astorian

Rates could be going up for water customers outside of Astoria's city limits — but not as high as originally proposed.

At a meeting Monday night, the City Council walked back from a proposal by Public Works staff that would have gradually raised the percentage out-of-town water users pay on top of their regular water bills from 10 percent to 25 percent over the next three years. A 5 percent increase would have gone into effect starting next July.

After hearing the concerns of outside water customers and water district and association members, the council asked staff to come back in December with a 2.5 percent increase starting next summer.

Water customers outside the city limits include a handful of small water districts and associations and other users like Tongue Point Job Corps Center.

The average out-of-town water customer would have paid an additional \$2.35 a month, or \$28.25 a year, for each 5 percent increase recommended by city staff. But water district and water association groups maintain their own infrastructure off a city main and often must pass these costs on to customers. The groups also pay for any water lost due to leaks or burst pipes.

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Three finalists compete to lead Cannon Beach

Questions asked about tourism, community, emergency response

By **BRENNA VISSER**
The Daily Astorian

CANNON BEACH — Dozens of people came with questions about community engagement, tourism and emergency preparedness Monday night for the three finalists for Cannon Beach city manager.

The public forum held at the Surfsand Resort was one step out of the many it takes to hire a new city manager. The process started four months ago after Brant Kucera left the position for a job in Sisters.

Thirty-three people applied, with only three making it to the final stages: Bruce St. Denis, former city manager of Longboat Key, Florida; Peter M. Jankowski, former city manager of Cave Creek, Arizona; and Kevin Greenwood, former general manager of the Port of Newport.

City councilors anticipate making a final decision Wednesday after considering feedback from staff and the community. Comments from two panels will also be considered. One panel represents the Cannon Beach Chamber of Commerce, the hospitality and arts communities, and environmental

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SEEKING HIGHER GROUND

Photos by Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

Gary Aspmo looks out over a piece of property his family owns near Warrenton and one that is being considered for the new site of the Lewis and Clark Rural Fire Department's main station, which currently sits in a tsunami inundation zone.



The main station of the Lewis and Clark Rural Fire Department currently sits in a tsunami inundation zone and authorities worry if a disaster were to occur, first responders would be unable to access all of their equipment and vehicles.



Gary Aspmo closes the gate to his family's property near Warrenton that could be the site of the new main station for the Lewis and Clark Rural Fire Department. The current station lies in a tsunami inundation zone near Youngs Bay.

Lewis and Clark fire looks to move out of tsunami zone

By **JACK HEFFERNAN**
The Daily Astorian

If a Cascadia Subduction Zone earthquake and tsunami struck the North Coast today, the Lewis and Clark Rural Fire Department would be almost entirely incapacitated.

The department's main fire station at 34571 U.S. Highway 101 Business — one of two in the small, unincorporated community — is located less than a mile away from the Lewis and Clark River and well within the tsunami inundation zone.

In response, the department has eyed a plot on an 85-acre property southeast of Lyngstad Heights for nearly two years. But the property is the subject of a 12-year legal battle over development.

"We're basically going to lose our apparatus; we're going to lose our equipment," said Gus Fennerty, a Lewis and Clark Rural Fire Protection District director. "We are not going to have the capability of responding to the emergencies that are bound to come up from a serious earthquake."

The proposed new location sits in an elevated area roughly a mile away from the inundation zone. It is also centrally located near other critical infrastructure outside of flood areas — Lewis and Clark Elementary School, a number of potential houses, a water reservoir, sewer access and Pacific Power's substation.

"Our equipment would be safe, our emergency supplies would be safe. If somebody had an emergency route, they'd

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'WE ARE NOT GOING TO HAVE THE CAPABILITY OF RESPONDING TO THE EMERGENCIES THAT ARE BOUND TO COME UP FROM A SERIOUS EARTHQUAKE.'

Gus Fennerty | a Lewis and Clark Rural Fire Protection District director

Unclear why state leaders weren't told of health care overpayments

State overpaid providers by \$74 million

By **CLAIRE WITCOMBE**
Capital Bureau

SALEM — The Oregon Health Authority can't say who the federal government told in 2016 that it wanted repayment of \$74 million in health care funds, or why that information wasn't shared with top managers or the governor until last month.

In 2016 the Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Services notified the health

authority that the state had since 2014 mistakenly categorized people who were eligible for both Medicare and Medicaid. The mistake resulted in Oregon receiving excess federal funding with which it overpaid providers by about \$74 million.

The state was able to quietly recoup \$10.1 million from providers in 2016. The state could be on the hook for all of the remaining \$64 million, unless the Medicare program shares the tab.

Nevertheless, it was a state mistake that caused the overpayment. Improper data entry and software flaws on the health authority's end led to patients getting improperly

coded and paid for, officials say.

Neither Gov. Kate Brown or her then-health care policy adviser were alerted to the problem when the federal government notified the health authority in 2016. Brown learned of the issue late last month.

It's unclear why Brown was not notified sooner.

"I don't know what informed the decision to share and not to share," said Robb Cowie, a health authority spokesman.

Cowie said Monday that new leadership at the agency, including Director Patrick Allen and Chief Financial Officer Laura Robison, are

trying to get to the bottom of the problems, including how much the state may owe to the federal government and whether they can claw it back from Medicaid providers.

This latest issue occurs in the wake of controversy over the state's handling of the Medicaid expansion under the Affordable Care Act.

Two months ago, former Oregon Health Authority Director Lynne Saxton resigned after revelations about an internal plan to publicly discredit a Portland-area Medicaid provider network. That announcement followed several months of tension over the state's hiccups in verifying that Oregonians

on Medicaid were indeed still eligible for the program.

The state's woes around Medicaid implementation began, though, in 2014 with the failure of Cover Oregon, a massive technology project that was supposed to become a state health care exchange.

The public-facing website never went live, but the state ended up using some Cover Oregon databases internally, which the health authority says led to problems that are being aired now in the wake of reporting and public-records requests by The Oregonian.

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