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ONE DOLLAR

## Life Flight, Port close in on new airport base

A bond failed this year

By EDWARD STRATTON  
*The Daily Astorian*

The Port of Astoria and Life Flight Network are close to finalizing a lease to build a permanent crew quarters and hangar at the Astoria Regional Airport.

Port staff is aiming to bring a 20-year lease with the medevac service to the Port Commission next month.

"I'm happy to see it come together," said Jim Knight, the Port's executive director. "It's not the location I was hoping for."

The Port attempted to pass a bond measure in May to develop about 10 acres at the southern end of the airport, including a pad for Life Flight to build a new hangar. Life Flight received a \$665,000 ConnectOregon infrastructure grant to pay for the hangar, along with an internal investment of \$285,000. Despite broad support among Clatsop County's political leadership, the bond measure was narrowly rejected by voters.

"At the end of the day, the cost of development at the south end was more than any of us could have afforded" without outside support, Knight said.

After the bond failed, Life Flight began pursuing a deal to build in its current location near the 12th Place entrance to the airport. The Port's Airport Advisory Committee had found the location unsuitable because of conflicts with surrounding aviators.

"It's going to meet our needs," Life Flight Regional Director Jacob Dalstra said of the current location. "We've been working with the Port to mitigate any of those concerns."

Dalstra and Warrenton Base Manager Dan Travers expressed their frustration to the Port Commission last month about trying to reach a deal with the agency's staff on a final location before Life Flight needed to get another extension on its grant with the state. The Port Commission directed staff to work out a solution.

The Port is hoping to have the new lease executed by the end of the year to avoid Life Flight needing another extension with the state on its grant, Knight said. He said Life Flight has agreed to take on all the infrastructure costs for developing at the current location.

Life Flight has no timeline on when construction might start, Dalstra said.



Life Flight Network

The hangar and crew quarters Life Flight Network is planning to have built at the Astoria Regional Airport is similar to bases the medevac service has in other locations, such as Pendleton.

# LOCKED IN A TIGHT SPOT

As county looks at jail relocation, deputies grapple with the quirks of a 37-year-old lockup downtown



Photos by Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

Clatsop County Sheriff Tom Bergin, right, checks in on inmates at the county jail in Astoria Tuesday.

By JACK HEFFERNAN  
*The Daily Astorian*

Inmates at Clatsop County Jail typically eat week-old frozen dinners shipped from eastern Washington because there is no kitchen. But when the food service recently encountered problems bringing meals, sheriff's deputies had to make pizza runs to Papa Murphy's.

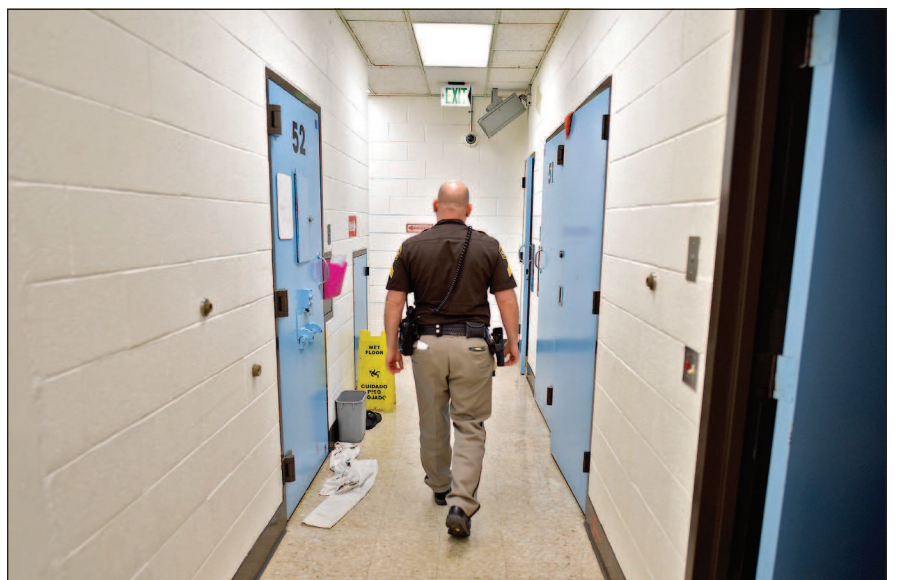
A recent meeting between an inmate and a visitor went awry when another inmate — sitting in the same small room — pounced on him.

More than 60 inmates occupy the jail in Astoria, which was originally designed to hold 29 inmates when built in 1980. From January to late September, an average of six inmates awaiting trial per week were released early due to overcrowding.

The two dozen sheriff's deputies who work at the jail point to necessary upgrades that would make their jobs easier.

"There's just a lot of huge constraint issues," Sheriff Tom Bergin said. "It's a pain in the butt."

In another attempt to address overcrowding, the sheriff's office may — for the third time in the past two decades — seek a bond measure. This time, the jail would be relocated to the site of the former North Coast Youth Correctional Facility in Warrenton, which closed in October due to state budget cuts. Bergin has said he would need a consensus from county commissioners before moving forward with a bond.



Sgt. Aaron Parks patrols the halls of the Clatsop County jail Tuesday.

Proposals to redesign the former youth facility into a modern adult jail range from \$18 million to \$28 million. The number of inmates held there would range from 148 to 200 with the potential to expand to 252 in the future.

The other key feature of a potential new jail, which would have a more modern, podular design, would be the ability for deputies to supervise inmates more directly.

### 'Cramped up'

When people are arrested and taken to the jail, they check in at a booking room,

where they are greeted by two deputies. The roughly 150 square-foot room and a single holding cell can often overwhelm the deputies on weekends or spring break nights.

"It can get cramped up, but we can only do so much for officers' safety," Sgt. Aaron Parks said.

The jail's design does not allow deputies to directly supervise inmates. Before entering a room, they must ask a technician located in a control room to unlock the door.

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## Audit faults Oregon's inability to detect improper Medicaid payments

### State also initially withheld information

By CLAIRE WITHYCOMBE  
*Capital Bureau*

SALEM — Following news that the state may have improperly paid or allocated about \$186.4 million in Medicaid funds, a state audit has found that the Oregon Health Authority lacks sufficient processes to detect and prevent improper payments.

It also recommends possible fixes, saying that, among other findings, the health authority should adopt certain best practices, improve data matching and integrity, and boost oversight of Medicaid providers.

The long-anticipated review was

released Wednesday morning by the Oregon Secretary of State's Office after months of negative news about the health agency's handling of eligibility and payment issues in the Medicaid program.

Medicaid is a health care program for the poor and disabled jointly funded by the state and federal government. Although the federal government shoulders much of the costs, it's up to the states to administer the program, which is used by 1 million Oregonians.

The audit also found that the agency doesn't have "well-defined, consistent and agencywide processes" to detect improper payments, especially in the state's system of coordinated care.

Additionally, auditors found that gaps in detecting and preventing

improper payments may also make it more challenging for the payments to get recovered.

Most recipients of Medicaid in Oregon are enrolled in what's called a coordinated care organization, or CCO. A CCO is essentially a regional network of care providers who see Medicaid patients. The state pays the CCO on a per-patient basis every month.

In late October, news emerged of \$74 million in possible overpayments to the CCOs between 2014 and 2016. The health authority has already recouped \$10.1 million of that. The errors are likely due to misclassification of certain patients who were also eligible for Medicare, the federal health care program for the elderly, and it's not clear how much of the money the state must repay the

federal government.

In a statement Wednesday, Secretary of State Dennis Richardson said that the \$74 million possible overpayment was unrelated to issues identified in Wednesday's audit. Further, that issue was not reported to auditors, but made public when The Oregonian requested relevant public records.

The week before Thanksgiving, the agency identified a litany of additional problems, ranging from misallocation of funds to possible overpayment, that could total about \$112.4 million more.

The Oregon Health Authority has been under the microscope since May, as it worked through a backlog of about 115,000 patients whose qualifications for Medicaid were unclear.

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