

ASTORIA

Budget contains new officer, fee hikes

City manager cautious on revenue options

By **KATIE FRANKOWICZ**
The Daily Astorian

The Astoria Police Department will get a new officer and residents will see a slight increase in sewer and water rates under a budget approved by city councilors Monday night.

The \$40.2 million budget takes effect in July. The spending plan is up from \$37 million this fiscal year.

City Manager Brett Estes noted in his budget message that “resources through state and federal grants are waning,” there are increased regulations on ways the city is able to generate revenue, “interest rates continue to slowly rise and investment oversight is complicated and limiting.”

Nor is the city up-to-date on replacement schedules for all of its aging infrastructure and assets. In some cases, city leaders have deferred replacement. “With this history and a glimpse of things to come, it is imperative for the city to maintain a sharp eye on budgets, programs, projects and funding,” Estes wrote.

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Ticket to ride

Parking officer can use scooter downtown

By **KATIE FRANKOWICZ**
The Daily Astorian

The foot-powered scooter Ronni Harris uses to get around while she enforces parking limits in downtown Astoria was technically illegal — but not anymore.

The Astoria City Council has agreed to amend a city ordinance that bans the use of skateboards, roller skates, coasters and other similar toy vehicles and devices in the central business district. It will allow City Manager Brett Estes to exempt parking control officers from the ban in order to increase “mobility and productivity.”

The Astoria Downtown Historic District Association had been asked if the parking tickets Harris writes as a special police officer for the city and as the downtown association’s community outreach officer were valid since she was breaking the law by riding the scooter.

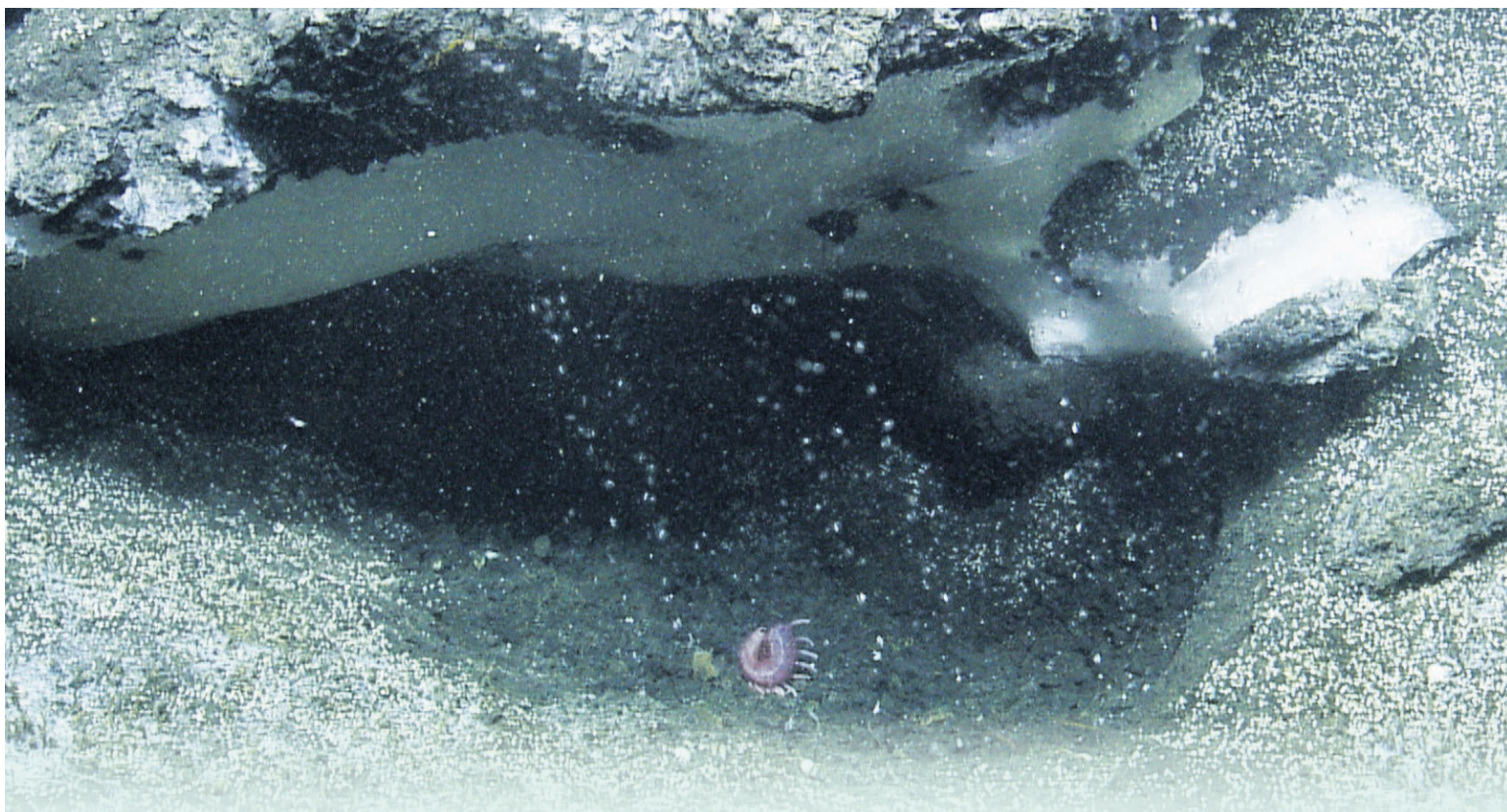
Now Harris can ride in peace with the full force of the law behind her. “I’d never ridden one in my life,” she said of the scooter.

But when she took the community outreach officer job, she needed some way to get around town relatively quickly. She went to Big 5 Sporting Goods and tried out a Razor scooter, riding it around the store.

“Yeah, I think this will work,” she remembered thinking.

“It’s a very friendly vehicle,” she said. And it doesn’t come with the safety concerns a motorized vehicle could create, added Sarah Lu Heath, executive director of the downtown association.

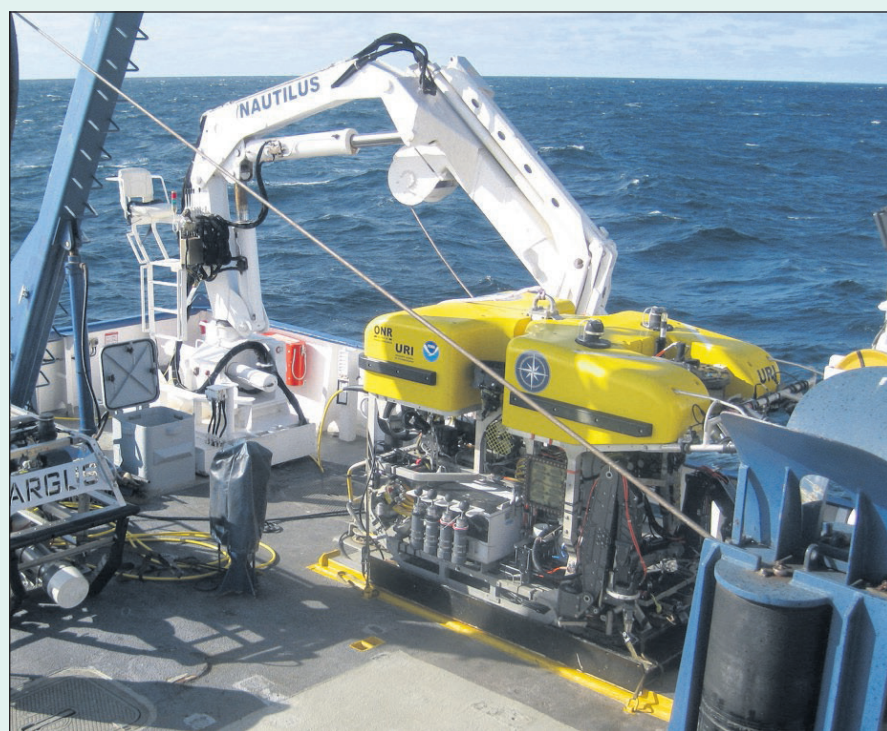
They hope to add decals to the scooter or decorate it in other ways in the future.



Hydrate and methane bubbles from the Astoria canyon floor at a depth of nearly 2,800 feet.

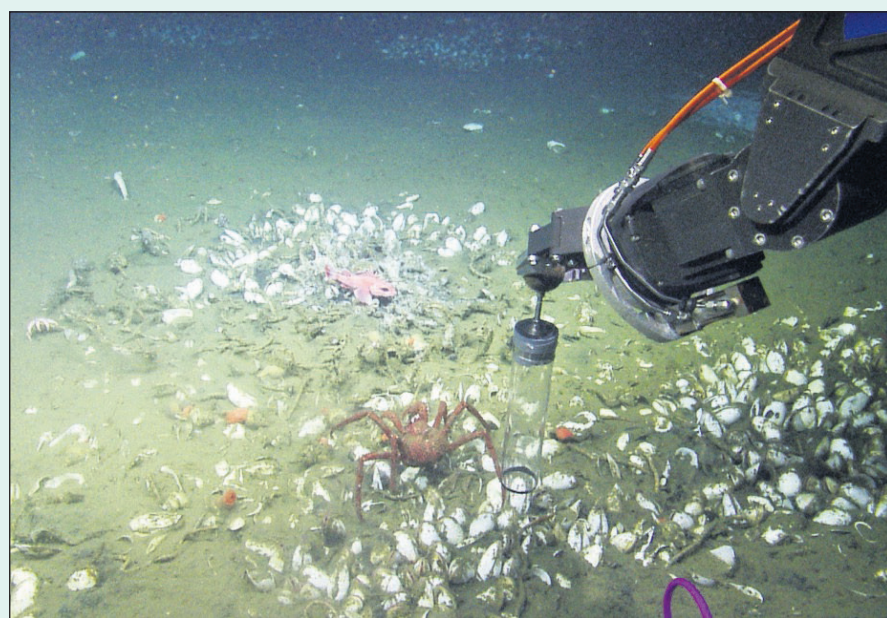
Oregon State University

Researchers scan Cascadia coast for methane gas



Oregon State University

Researchers aboard the Nautilus use the remotely operated submersible robot Hercules to collect samples from around methane seeps on the ocean floor.



Ocean Exploration Trust

The remotely operated underwater robot Hercules used a gas-tight sampler during an expedition in 2016 to collect methane bubbles.

Large concentration found near Astoria

By **EDWARD STRATTON**
The Daily Astorian

Researchers with Oregon State University and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration have documented 1,000 underwater seeps of methane gas along the Pacific Northwest coast between Northern California and the Canadian border over the past two years.

A large concentration was found in the Astoria canyon west of the mouth of the Columbia River.

Next week, a new expedition begins in search of more.

Tectonic activity causes fissures in the sea floor that lead to seeps of hydrocarbon-rich fluids such as hydrogen sulfide and methane, a main component in natural gas. Methane released through the seeps often crystallizes into methane hydrate, an opaque or translucent ice. The releasing methane also takes the form of bubbling gas and can contribute to ocean acidification.

Surveying for methane offshore is a relatively new field, said Susan Merle, an oceanographer who works out of Oregon State’s Hatfield Marine Science Center in Newport, although geologists have long known there should be methane deposits offshore.

The study of methane seeps has both environmental and economic implications. The U.S. Geological Survey has estimated that global methane hydrate deposits could hold twice the natural gas energy as fossil fuels currently available.

Some of the first discoveries of methane seeps in the Cascadia Subduction Zone, a fault line running from Vancouver Island in British Columbia to Cape Mendocino in Northern California, were documented in the late 1980s. Fishermen sometimes spot the seeps as anomalies on their fish-finders — acoustic reflections from bubbling methane gas.

See **METHANE**, Page 4A

Seaside breaks ground on \$15M convention center project

Jason Stegner, Russ Vandenberg, Steve Wright, Jay Barber, Randy Frank, Tita Montero, Patrick Duhachek and Tim Tolan prepare to put shovels to the ground at the Seaside Civic and Convention Center.



R.J. Marx
The Daily Astorian

Shovels hit dirt on renovation

By **R.J. MARX**
The Daily Astorian

SEASIDE — Back in 1970, no one was sure if the \$300,000 construction bond for the Seaside Civic and Convention Center would ever pay off.

“It was very controversial back in the day to invest that kind of money,” Mayor Jay Barber said. “People wondered, ‘Who’s going to come to Seaside?’”

With the formation of a convention center committee,

the building opened its doors the next fall and has entertained thousands of guests. Over the years, there have been two upgrades, in 1986 and 1991.

Without upgrades, the convention center would be unable to compete with other venues throughout the state and Northwest region, general manager Russ Vandenberg told city councilors last summer.

City councilors responded, unanimously approving a hike in the city’s lodging tax from 8 to 10 percent to pay for the \$15 million in 30-year bonds

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