

Astoria fights to keep bridges open

Temporary fixes needed before project

By KATIE FRANKOWICZ
The Daily Astorian

Astoria engineers hope to avoid closing all six of the city's waterfront bridges to vehicle traffic by repairing some and closing others.

The Oregon Department of Transportation has suggested around \$131,000 worth of repairs and improvements for the bridges before September — temporary fixes to keep the structures at the bases of Sixth Street to 11th Street open until the city can replace them as scheduled over the next two years. Replacement work is set to begin on the Seventh, Ninth and 11th street bridges in October.

At a City Council meeting Monday, Cindy Moore, assistant city engineer, recommended \$25,000 worth of repairs on two of the bridges: the Eighth Street bridge, which will provide important access for Buoy Beer Co. when the odd-numbered bridges close for replacement this year; and the 10th Street bridge, which will provide alternative access for businesses impacted by the closure of 11th Street.

She expects the repair work to cost the city \$19,000 at Eighth Street and around \$6,000 at 10th Street.

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Gearhart gets its first pot shop

Sweet Relief could open by mid-July

By BRENN A VISSER
The Daily Astorian

GEARHART — Gearhart will get its first marijuana shop.

Sweet Relief, a family-owned chain of dispensaries, is scheduled to open on U.S. Highway 101 next to Gearhart Liquor Store by July 16. This will be the fourth location in Oregon and the second in Clatsop County for Sweet Relief, which opened its first shop four years ago in Astoria.

"We picked Gearhart because we love small towns," Sweet Relief co-owner Oscar Nelson said. "We feel Gearhart is a great location for both locals and tourists."

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Photos by Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

The new community development director in Astoria will be tasked with dealing with the open pit near the Garden of Surging Waves.

DOWN A PLANNING HOLE

ASTORIA STRUGGLES WITH AN OPEN PIT DOWNTOWN

By KATIE FRANKOWICZ
The Daily Astorian

A hole in the heart of downtown Astoria will turn eight this year.

Some Astoria leaders believe they are in a better position now to deal with the open pit and surrounding property than they were in the past, when plans to build a community college campus and then a new library with housing failed to launch.

Not everyone agrees.

The redevelopment of Heritage Square continues to be a City Council goal. City councilors asked staff to craft a request for proposals this year asking developers what projects they believe might suit the underutilized city block. The councilors have yet to specify the types of projects they'd be interested in seeing.

Still, said City Manager Brett Estes, "I think there is probably the most clarity in terms of where to move forward on that piece of property."

In recent years, the city had hoped to get redevelopment rolling and potentially build a new library at the former Safeway property. But last year, the City Council opted to renovate the existing library instead.

"When the plans didn't go through for the library, we kind of just dropped it for a while and put it on the back burner," Mayor Arline LaMear said.

The mayor hears divided opinions in the community and on the council as to what should happen there: housing, retail, parking. Amid concerns about how much any kind of new housing could cost renters, some city councilors have said they're interested in investigating more general public-private partnerships.



Astoria city leaders toured a section of tunnel in October next to the pit.

The task of coming up with new ideas for what could fill the hole or be built around it will fall to the city's new community development director — a position that has been vacant since last October.

Estes hoped to find someone to fill the position months ago. Instead, he had to repost the job this spring after interviews with two potential candidates did not produce a clear prospect. He whittled down a list of new candidates and has started phone interviews. He hopes to have a final group of three or four candidates lined up for more formal interviews by late July or early August, he said Monday when City Councilor Bruce Jones asked for an update on the search.

City Councilor Zetty Nemlowill asked for an update on the twin issue:

Heritage Square.

"I just wanted to bring it up because I don't think we should forget it," she said. "It's been a priority of this city and the citizens of Astoria for a long time — for at least a decade and a half — to redevelop that area."

Down a planning hole

The hole, in particular, has been a conundrum for the city since it first showed up eight years ago. It was once covered by a concrete slab, all that remained from a Safeway store demolished in 2005. The slab began to fail in August 2010, then cracked and caved after a period of heavy rains that December.

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Seaside celebrates groundbreaking of new campus



Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

Phil Broome of Hoffman Construction provides information to visitors Monday about the new Seaside school construction site.

The \$100 million school project underway

By R.J. MARX
The Daily Astorian

SEASIDE — The school bus headed up the logging trails Monday beyond Beerman Creek Road and onto the rocky and rutted hills to the Seaside School District's new middle and high school campus.

"I used to play out here when I was a child," Steve Phillips, chairman of the school district's board of directors, said as

excavators nudged and shuttled soil not far away.

A state Department of Environmental Quality permit, received last week, triggered a site permit from the city for grading, excavation, utility work and erosion control, project manager Jim Henry said.

The campus will bring students from three schools located in the tsunami inundation zone to the new location on 89 acres just southeast of Seaside Heights Elementary School.

Gearhart Elementary School students will attend a renovated and expanded Seaside Heights.

A new two-story building

will house middle and high school students.

Superintendent Sheila Roley directed groups of school board members, administrators, city staff and the construction team for the groundbreaking, what she described as a "soft opening," with a more formal event planned for later in the year.

Former Superintendent Doug Dougherty was among those attending the event. Dougherty, who retired in 2016, is widely credited for helping to bring the project to fruition through decades of advocacy.

"It's amazing to finally see that the project is starting," he said.

