

Homelessness task force in Astoria still looking for direction



Volunteers help prepare the Helping Hands facility in Uniontown in June.

Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

Some see victories, while others want more than talk

By KATIE FRANKOWICZ
The Daily Astorian

A task force created over a year ago to address homelessness in Astoria feels like it can claim some victories.

But not everyone agrees there is progress. Under the leadership of a new mayor, the group is now examining what remains to be done and what is even possible.

The task force's meetings have exposed gaps and brought social service, business and advocacy groups together. The discussions deepened the understanding of the possibilities and limitations of the city's role.

Last year, the task force provided important support to a new Helping Hands project in Uniontown. The non-profit, based in Seaside, offers emergency shelter, transitional housing and re-entry programs.

One of the most visible actions the task force participated in was the dismantling of homeless camps in the woods last fall.

A subcommittee helped the City Council and police determine the best way to humanely address removal of the camps and the campers. The subcommittee developed a list of recommendations and policy procedures, and tried to connect people to services ahead of the sweep.

But the decision to move campers was controversial and not everyone believes the city should claim it as a



John Nordquist, left, receives a notice prohibiting camping in an area near Astoria from homeless liaison officer Kenny Hansen in November.

Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

success.

The camps were dismantled right before winter and before the Astoria Warming Center was open for the season. Many of the campers did not find housing. Despite efforts by Clatsop Community Action to talk to people directly, only a few campers went to the agency's office to seek services. Some campers simply moved deeper into the woods; others now sleep downtown.

Critics have accused the homeless-

ness solutions task force of being all talk and no action. This perception was something former Mayor Arline LaMear explicitly wanted to avoid when she formed the task force with Police Chief Geoff Spalding at the end of 2017.

But some who had been skeptical about what the task force could accomplish now say the connections formed between social service

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JUSTICE REINVESTMENT

Release policy shows promise

Data analyzed after first year

By DERRICK DePLEDGE
The Daily Astorian

One of the biggest fears of pretrial release is that criminal defendants who get out of jail will commit new crimes.

In the year after Clatsop County created a pretrial release policy that takes a scientific approach to measuring risk, the initial data is reassuring.

From September 2017 through August, 4.1 percent of defendants who were released pending trial committed new crimes, and the figure dropped to 1.5 percent over the past few months.

More defendants are also showing up for court. The failure to appear rate for the first year was 27 percent, the county estimates, down from 32 percent.

"It shows that the decisions we're making are pretty good," said Lt. Matt Phillips, the jail commander.

The new policy has yet to make a difference in the high share of inmates who are in custody awaiting trial — about 70 percent — but it has started to relieve pressure on overcrowding at the 60-bed jail in Astoria.

The county was forced to release 324 inmates because of overcrowding from September 2017 through August, down from 573 inmates the previous year. The inmates who get out because

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Supreme Court backs sentencing reform law

Ruling finds in favor of state Legislature

By PARIS ACHEN
Oregon Capital Bureau

The Oregon Supreme Court on Thursday upheld a law to decrease prison sentences for repeat property thieves.

In a unanimous decision, justices agreed that the Legislature's change to state sentencing laws, which included reducing the base sentence for first-degree theft from 18 months to 13 months, was done according to state requirements.

Lawmakers made the change in 2017 — via House Bill 3078 — in response to addiction-driven property crime and to help prevent the need to open a second state women's prison.

The new law put the Legislature at odds with many in Oregon's law enforcement and judicial communities. Across



John Foote

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Hospital to open new clinic in Seaside

Columbia Memorial expands operations

By EDWARD STRATTON
The Daily Astorian



'OUR MISSION IS TO PROVIDE LOCAL, HIGH QUALITY AND CONVENIENT CARE IN THE COMMUNITIES WE SERVE.'

Erik Thorsen, the hospital's CEO

Columbia Memorial Hospital is expanding into Seaside with a new urgent care and multispecialty clinic to open later this year.

"Our mission is to provide local, high quality and convenient care in the communities we serve," Erik Thorsen, the hospital's CEO, said in a news release. "The most recently completed Community Health Needs Assessment shows access to care remains a significant concern in the region.

"The addition of a Seaside loca-

tion will help meet this need and offer a convenient location for our patients who currently travel from south Clatsop County."

Providence Medical Group operates a primary care clinic on the main campus of Providence Seaside Hospital off of Wahanna Road.

Columbia Memorial declined to give the location in Seaside of its clinic, which will be located in an existing building and approximately

10,000 square feet. The hospital will begin construction in the summer, with an expected opening in winter.

The clinic will include primary, specialty, urgent and virtual care, along with diagnostics such as imaging and lab work.

The announcement of a Seaside clinic comes amid a period of continued expansion for Columbia Memorial.

The hospital opened its first pri-

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mary care clinic in the Warrenton Highlands shopping center in 2013 and added another clinic in Astoria's Park Medical building last year.

Last year also saw the opening of the Knight Cancer Collaborative, a partnership with Oregon Health and Science University for chemotherapy and radiation therapy, next to the hospital's main campus in Astoria.

Clatsop County recently agreed to sell the hospital nearly 8 acres in the North Coast Business Park, where it will relocate and expand the Warrenton primary care clinic.

