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Community energy bill pitched in Legislature



Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

John Orr, left, helps load solar panels onto the roof of the Judge Guy Boyington Building in downtown Astoria.

An alternative to private utilities

By EDWARD STRATTON
The Daily Astorian

Community choice aggregation, an effort to allow communities in Oregon to buy electricity separate from investor-funded utilities like PacifiCorp, recently became a bill introduced in the state Legislature.

With the legislative effort beginning, community choice advocate Alan Hickenbottom made his pitch Tuesday night at the Columbia Forum in Astoria for why the model can create more renewable energy innovation, cost savings and economic development.

Under community choice aggregation, a concept so far approved by eight states, authorities created by cities, counties and other local governments buy their own energy and pay exit fees to utilities to make up for the loss of customer base. Existing utilities continue to deliver power, maintain the electrical grid and provide billing and other services.

Hickenbottom, the Oregon project manager for Local Energy Aggregation Network, has pitched the idea as a modern shake-up on an antiquated energy delivery system that can lower already competitive energy rates for customers and drive innovation not



Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

Alan Hickenbottom speaks about community choice aggregation during a Columbia Forum event in Astoria.

possible under utilities seeking the cheapest power.

"If you can move economic and political decision-making power to the community, all sorts of interesting things may be able to happen," he said.

He pointed to the Redwood Coast Energy Authority, an aggregator buying power for Humboldt County, California.

Humboldt experience
Redwood, formed in 2003 in

response to rolling blackouts to promote energy efficiency initiatives, became an aggregator for the county of about 136,000 people in 2017. It now purchases power for 93 percent of electric accounts in the county, said Richard Engel, Redwood's director of power resources.

"For us, one of the drivers for it was reducing greenhouse gas emissions locally," he said. "It also slightly reduces retail costs for customers."

See Energy, Page A7

Methadone treatment planned for Seaside

New clinic will fill a need in three counties

By R.J. MARX
The Daily Astorian

SEASIDE — A new clinic that will provide methadone to treat heroin and prescription opioid addiction could open this fall.

CODA, a Portland-based drug treatment provider, is negotiating a lease with Terry Lowenberg for a former real estate office on South Holladay Drive off U.S. Highway 101.

The clinic could treat up to 300 people, said Tim Hartnett, CODA's executive director. Along with methadone, people could receive other federally approved medication-assisted treatment for drug abuse, such as buprenorphine or naltrexone.

"We help people in the deep end of the pool," Hartnett said at a City Council meeting Monday night. "We help people who not only have drug and alcohol problems, but are tangled up in poverty, tangled up in the criminal justice system, the child welfare system. We work with a very complicated caseload."

'WE HELP PEOPLE IN THE DEEP END OF THE POOL. ... WE WORK WITH A VERY COMPLICATED CASELOAD.'

Tim Hartnett | executive director of a Portland-based drug treatment provider

The Columbia Pacific Coordinated Care Organization, which oversees the Oregon Health Plan in Clatsop, Columbia and Tillamook counties, has sought a local methadone treatment option because of the high cost of paying for people to get help in the Portland metro area.

Andy Mendenhall, the chief medical officer at Central City Concern, which works on homeless, poverty and addiction issues in Portland, said there is a lack of treatment in rural areas. Hospitalizations associated with opioid abuse in the three counties are well above the state-wide average.

"Part of the opportunity presented by the CODA continuum here in the Seaside community is to provide a hub for patients to receive treatment," he said.

"I see an opportunity to close the treatment gap, and allow people to get treatment locally, and that's good for those individuals, their families and the community."

When the prospect for a methadone clinic on the North Coast surfaced last summer, city leaders in Astoria and Warrenton recognized the need but were cool to the idea of a location in their cities.

See Clinic, Page A7

Warrenton might expand nuisance property rules

City wants to add nuisance and flexibility

By KATIE FRANKOWICZ
The Daily Astorian

WARRENTON — Last year, city leaders declared more properties in Warrenton nuisances than they ever had before.

Now the city is examining changes to the nuisance property rule to add nuance and flexibility.

"We can condemn a building or declare it a nuisance, but we don't have anything in the middle," City Commissioner Rick Newton said at a meeting Tuesday.

The City Commission consid-

ered a draft ordinance that would define and address chronic nuisances, derelict buildings and junk cars. The new sections would also define property maintenance standards.

The basic nuisance ordinance has allowed the city to begin dealing with properties that had long been an issue, but the staff hopes to tackle even more problem areas with the expanded code.

Mayor Henry Balensifer, while indicating he approves of the changes overall, said he was concerned about making it clear that the intent of the law is not to become a sort of "Big Brother," policing



Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

See Rules, Page A7

Warrenton is concerned about nuisance properties.

