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Astoria eliminates student activity fees

By EDWARD STRATTON
The Astorian

Astoria will eliminate or reduce most extracurricular activity fees to increase student participation in sports and music.

The Astoria School Board on

Wednesday night approved a \$21.5 million operating budget for the next school year, a \$1.5 million increase from this year's budget. The budget eliminates most student fees, including \$125 per student for high school sports.

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State takes on oversight of developmental disability

New contract in July

By DERRICK DePLEDGE
The Astorian

Clatsop County will no longer have an oversight role over intellectual and developmental disabilities, as the responsibility for people with autism, cerebral palsy, Down syndrome and epilepsy shifts entirely to the state.

The state Department of Human Services will contract with Clatsop Behavioral Healthcare, a private nonprofit, to provide services and work with adult foster homes, group homes and supported living to help about 230 people in need.

The shift, which takes effect in July, will come a few months after Clatsop Behavioral Healthcare completed a corrective action plan to improve monitoring.

The state will issue the new contract under an emergency procurement process. Sherryl Hoar, a spokeswoman for the Department of Human Services, said it is too early to know whether or when the state will put the contract up for competitive bid.

"We have had conversations with Clatsop County about problems with its Community Developmental Disabilities Program," Hoar said in an email. "As part of those discussions we noted our ability to have more control over the quality of the programs we contract with directly and did suggest that the county had the option to not be the state contractor."

Michael Shipley, the communications and quality metrics coordinator for Clatsop Behavioral Healthcare, said the agency is awaiting details of the new contract. "We're committed to continuing to provide services in the community, and ensuring that there's not going to be an interruption of the services," he said.

The Astorian reported in February that the state nearly pulled the \$1.7 million contract last fall. Investigations into abuse and neglect at adult foster homes had uncovered a troubling lack of oversight. The newspaper, using the state's public records law, obtained documents that detailed the state's concern over management of the program and the agency's response. The program's manager was removed last year.

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Astoria delves into housing study



Colin Murphey/The Astorian

City leaders are looking at their options after discussing the results of a countywide housing study.

Need for affordable and workforce housing

By KATIE FRANKOWICZ
The Astorian

Though Astoria has plenty of places for people to live, the city's housing stock is not fully serving residents, a countywide housing study concluded.

The city remains short of affordable and workforce housing, as well as land that's open and available to build new houses and apartments.

At a City Council work session Thursday, consultants recommended a number of strategies, such as code and zoning changes the city could implement to encourage diverse types of development. There are also incentives Astoria could consider to coax developers into building the kind of housing city leaders want to see.

The city is already in the process of reviewing codes dealing with accessory dwelling units — separate structures on the same lots as single-family homes that can be rented out. The

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Bruce Jones | Astoria mayor

city is also curbing illegal vacation rentals. Other refinements are in the works.

But there is more that could be done, city councilors believe. And they believe they may have to make some difficult decisions down the road, especially in neighborhoods that

have resisted apartment or townhouse projects.

During his campaign for mayor last year, Bruce Jones talked about the need to create more flexibility in city codes and find areas for higher-density housing.

Following Thursday's meeting, the mayor reaffirmed his desire to "consider what incentives the city can offer to encourage development of these areas for housing and particularly affordable housing."

"There is no silver bullet," Jones added. "We need to look at a whole package of options to increase the number of residential units and minimize the use of these as second homes for nonpermanent residents."

Mapped out

On Thursday, consultants displayed a map of the vacant and partially vacant acres available in Astoria. These sections were lit up in pale yellow and electric green, while developed areas were colored gray. Nonresidential zones were a dusty pink.

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Seaside fights chronic absenteeism

School attendance tied to success

By R.J. MARX
The Astorian

SEASIDE — The numbers were startling: 35% of Seaside High School students were identified last year as chronically absent, or missing more than 18 days in a school year.

"That was a jaw-dropper," said Jason Boyd, the assistant principal. "I had no idea. Right now we're sitting at 25%, 30%. Our goal is all kids will attend 95% of school days

by 2024."

For students, there's a correlation between attendance and success in school. "Kids who miss school more regularly are more likely to struggle," he said.

Boyd, speaking at the Chamber of Commerce this month, said he plans to get attendance rates up "in the same way you would eat an elephant — one bite at a time."

Boyd, a former teacher and athletic director who became assistant principal in September, said schools are taking a new approach to absenteeism. "As assistant principal, how am I going to improve attendance in school so that kids will leave here with the skills they need to enter the workforce?" he said.

Detention and suspension are giving way to positive reinforcement and personalized attention for

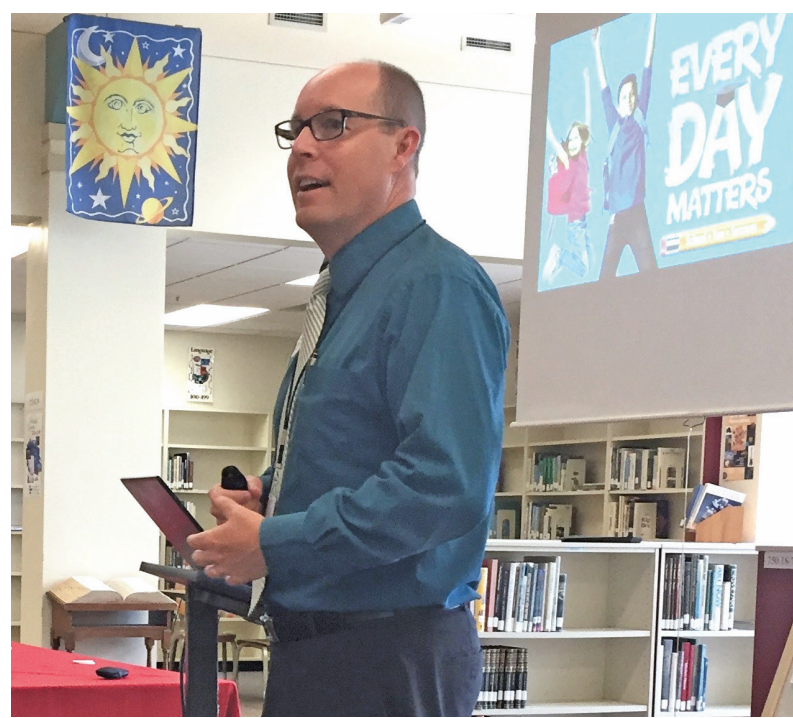
students, "finding creative ways to keep them in the building and keep them here."

Transportation is key — providing options before and after school.

Absenteeism is an issue statewide. Poverty, homelessness and other forms of trauma can lead to stress that can cause students to miss classes.

With 1 in 6 students in Oregon chronically absent in the 2015-2016 school year, the state created the Every Day Matters program to address the root causes of absenteeism, with a focus on local context.

In Seaside, a "keep track of time" chart offers a way for students to track missed days. Counselors work with students one-on-one and in groups to build confidence.



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Assistant principal Jason Boyd aims to improve student attendance.



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