

Broadband: There are also topographic challenges

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“Those bills were essentially a way of creating state funding that can then go in towards basically help lay that last mile, which is a problem in a lot of communities, is that you’ll have internet access in kind of the larger area because that’s where it financially makes sense for companies to invest, but not necessarily in places like say, Knappa, because there aren’t a whole lot of people out there,” Mitchell said. “So there’s no financial incentive for a company to go out and do that and maintain those lines.”

There are also topographic challenges.

Mitchell held a meeting in March to discuss the issue with Clatsop and Tillamook county commissioners, along with others who have shown interest in addressing the problem. “My office is really trying to be a conduit for these conversations to start happening because this is such an issue out here,” she said.

Mitchell said after the initial conversation, her office was able to connect a few people in both Tillamook and Clatsop counties with resources to try to help find workarounds, including a Knappa man, Stephen Shumaker.

Shumaker works from home as an information technology professional and teaches high school students at Clatsop Community College through the Upward Bound program.

He is working with

Althea, an internet service provider startup based in Clatskanie, to improve internet access in Knappa and Svensen.

Instead of putting up a large tower and laying fiber, Althea sets up a hub antenna that is tapped into a fiber line that beams to multiple antennas placed at homes, farms and businesses. Those antennas then beam onto other antennas, creating an extended network.

“Basically, it’s kind of like buying it at wholesale rates. So we’ll buy one connection off this fiber line in Knappa and probably a second one in Svensen and then everybody who joins those networks, we all share that one connection,” Shumaker said.

He said internet speed will be much faster and service will be cheaper for the vast majority of users.

In Clatskanie, the founders of Althea set up a legal cooperative. People pay a \$10 per month membership fee and then pay for what they use. The Clatskanie Co-op has about 95 members who pay an average of \$30 to \$40 per month, said Deborah Simpier, the chief executive officer of Althea.

Simpier said the structure may look a little bit different in Knappa and Westport because it depends on how people want to set it up.

The company also has pilot networks in Tacoma, Washington, Denver, Colorado, and even Nigeria and Ghana.

Simpier said the solution can be attractive to governments in rural areas.

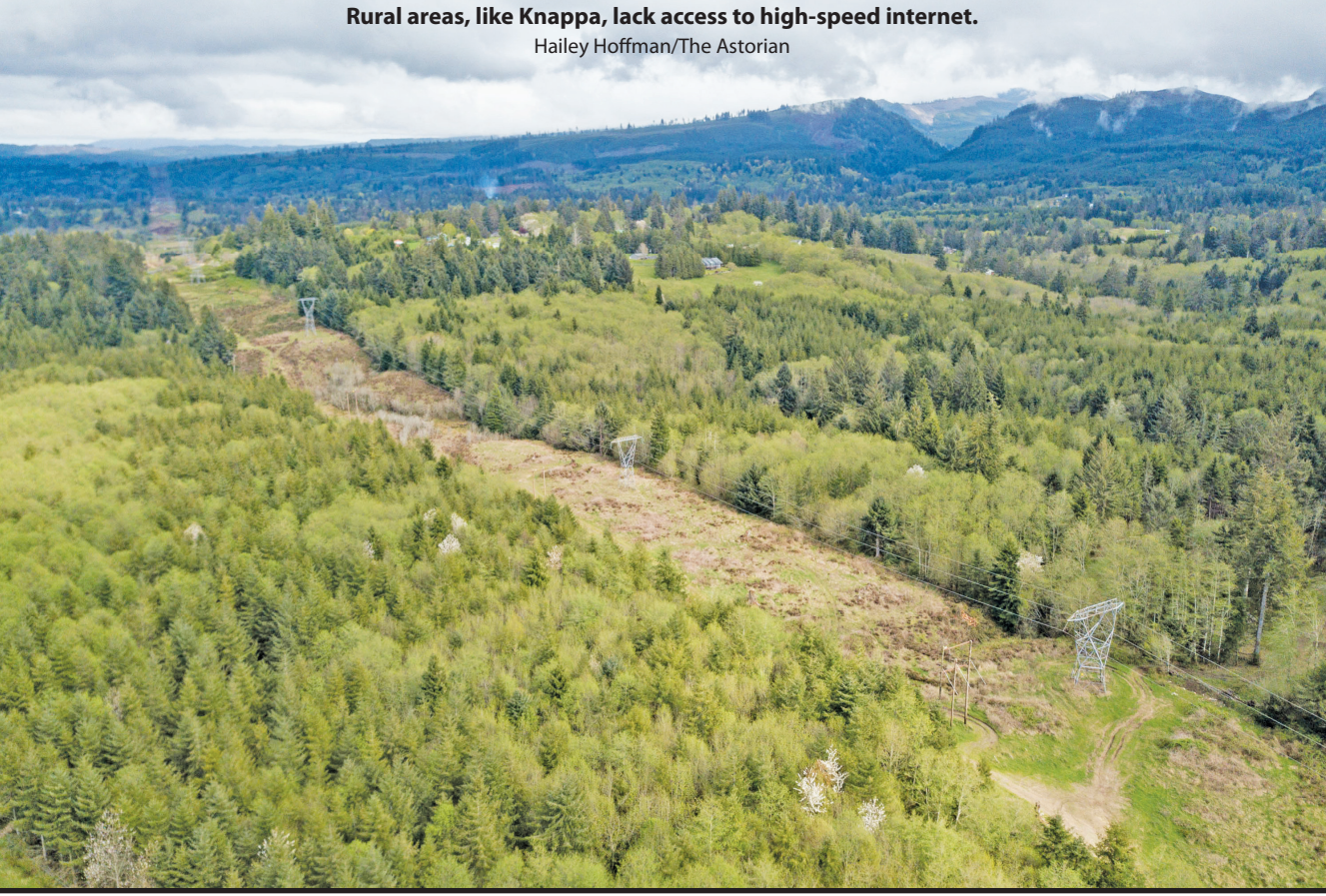
“If you have to tear up a street or if you have to put some fiber or something on a pole then that can be a long process, it can be expensive, there’s a lot of permitting — it’s a lot of friction and a lot of money,” she said. “So this sort of eliminates all of that by communities kind of building it up together.”

Simpier believes the coronavirus will permanently change the way people work and live, and that these types of solutions are timely. She believes there has not been enough focus on long-term sustainability in federal funding and grant money for rural broadband.

Kathleen Sullivan, the chairwoman of the Clatsop County Board of Commissioners, who represents Knappa, wonders how increasing reliable broadband connection can help diversify the economy. She said broadband is a priority the county plans to address in a new strategic plan.

“What’s become so obvious during this COVID-19 outbreak is the digital divide and the inequities that come with that,” she said. “And that’s a real problem.”

‘WHAT’S BECOME SO OBVIOUS DURING THIS COVID-19 OUTBREAK IS THE DIGITAL DIVIDE AND THE INEQUITIES THAT COME WITH THAT. AND THAT’S A REAL PROBLEM.’



Rural areas, like Knappa, lack access to high-speed internet.
Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

Child porn: Hall had at least four victims

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Brown said Hall had at least four victims between the ages of 10 and 14 years old living in different parts of the county.

“I do appreciate the fact that Mr. Hall has chosen to plead no contest,” the district attorney said. “At least he’s not forcing us to put on a trial with this kind of thing where ... it can cause post-traumatic stress to the jurors, judges and everyone else who has to deal with this kind of child pornography and this topic.”

Brown recommended a 25-year sentence because of Hall’s criminal history involving children.

Hall was sentenced to more than 12 years in prison in 2000 after he was convicted of second-degree sodomy, first-degree sexual abuse, delivery of a controlled substance to a minor and endangering the welfare of a minor. Brown said he was delivering methamphetamine to children.

Hall’s sentencing was conducted via telecon-

ference Tuesday because of restrictions in place at Circuit Court due to the coronavirus.

Brown, Hall’s attorney, victims and others participated by phone. Hall participated by video from the Clatsop County Jail. Judge Cindee Matyas presided from the courtroom.

Two women spoke on behalf of their daughters and said they have been impacted by the experience. One mother said her daughter did not know better and believed she was

talking to a young boy.

“It takes a lot of guts for these young women to be part of an investigation which reveals the kind of conduct that you were involved in,” Matyas said prior to Hall’s sentencing.

“And it changes them. It will change them forever. No longer will they be as trusting. A lot of the innocence of childhood is lost,” the judge said. “And without the support of friends and family, that truly have their best interest at heart, it takes a lot to recover.”

Standards: Grant requires city to finish all public involvement by the end of June

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“We can say things like ‘avoid the hazard completely,’” she said. “However ... that’s not a viable answer for Astoria, because we have quite a few hazards here in Astoria, and we want to continue development.”

City staff has recommended that geotechnical reports be required in medium- to high-risk hillsides depending on how risky the activity. Something like a deck with no pilings or excavation no deeper than 2 feet wouldn’t warrant a report, Fryer said, but something deeper with pilings would be a trigger. Higher-risk activities include decks more than 30 inches above grade, pile-supported foundations, movement of more than 20 cubic yards of soil or installing a hot tub.

“The addition of that additional weight could trigger the need for the geotechnical investigation to make sure it will not cause additional slippage of the material underneath,” she said.

Mayor Bruce Jones wondered what the average geotechnical report costs. The reports can range between \$2,000 and \$8,000, Fryer said, while a full investigation for a riskier activity can cost even more. Public Works Director Jeff Harrington said he’s seen much cheaper reports for smaller projects.

City Manager Brett Estes pointed out recent landslides related to development near Safeway, U.S. Coast Guard housing and

the Uniontown neighborhood in which the city was listed in lawsuits. The ordinance is about trying to protect property owners and the city from such liability, he said.

“It’s also trying to be able to gauge how much risk are we able to accept as a community,” Estes said.

He pointed to liability agreements as a tool to make property owners accept liability for building in higher-risk areas. The city has discussed the option with one property owner wanting to build on particularly vulnerable land.

Whether or not someone should build in a certain place isn’t a decision for city staff, but for the city as a whole in balancing safety and development, said Nathan Crater, the city’s engineer.

“It’s a tough balance to achieve,” he said. “I hope we can get there by getting good council input, and good public feedback, and to strike that balance.”

Getting public feedback on the draft ordinance has been tougher amid the coronavirus pandemic.

The City Council was awarded a \$10,000 grant from the state Department of Land Conservation and Development to create an online open house and other information for the public to learn about landslide risks and provide feedback. Fryer hopes to have the open house online in mid to late May.

The grant requires the city to finish all public involvement by the end of June.

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Food carts: ‘I’m OK with spending some extra money to make it right’

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food cart, the more it attracts people, because it creates some options.”

Balensifer called on city staff to speak with users in the lot — only Tres Bro’s at the moment — about what they want.

Colby said paving the lot and creating utility hookups are the major issues. “Until it’s paved, it’s not really feasible to have another truck in here,” he said.

The gravel lot is owned by the city’s Urban Renewal

Agency and an advisory board recommends how to spend money from the city’s urban renewal fund. The city’s urban renewal plan has put a \$100,000 budget on paving the lot.

City Manager Linda Engbretson has cautioned that the lot is meant for a new fire station. The city likely lacks the money to expand its fire hall in the next five years, she said, but it needs to remain flexible with the lot.

“But in the meantime, the fact that it could generate money and bring people

downtown I think is a great thing,” Engbretson said.

City Commissioner Mark Baldwin, a contractor, argued that it will cost well over \$100,000 to include Balensifer’s upgrades. But he agreed with him that the city needs to follow its own standards for providing

infrastructure.

Balensifer asked city staff to get a budget estimate for the project with a recommendation from the urban renewal advisory board to the City Commission.

“I’m OK with spending some extra money to make it right,” he said.

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