

Warrenton: ‘Ratchets up our position’

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many of its citizens which has inflicted significant damage to the morale and mental health of many,” the city’s resolution stated.

Antiquated system

The state Employment Department’s dated software has been rife with issues, leaving thousands of workers without benefits while overpaying others. The state declined to waive a laid-off worker’s traditional week of waiting for benefits because of its antiquated computer system. The decision has collectively cost those unemployed around \$100 million worth of the \$600 weekly additional federal payments

approved by Congress, according to a recent article in The Oregonian.

Gov. Kate Brown has said the state will eventually waive the one-week requirement, making it retroactive for laid-off workers to recoup the losses.

The state has added more than 500 people to process unemployment claims. On Tuesday, it started accepting unemployment claims for self-employed, gig and contract workers through the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance program, a month after President Donald Trump made such workers eligible.

City Commissioner Rick Newton criticized the national rollout of expanded

unemployment insurance, saying he has a daughter in Alaska getting more than enough while another in Oregon has applied for and been denied benefits four times.

“I think that this ratchets up our position on an issue that I think is ... probably the most pressing issue for our community,” Balensifer said.

In March, Warrenton was the first city in the county to ban short-term lodging at campgrounds, hotels and vacation rentals during the coronavirus pandemic. The county Board of Commissioners has extended a similar ban through May.

Brown recently released a draft of how counties could petition the state to reopen businesses and public gath-

erings in phases as the symptoms and cases of coronavirus decrease. The state must increase its ability to test and trace the contacts of those infected with the virus, and local hospitals must demonstrate the capacity to treat a surge of patients.

“It makes sense to be in step with the county on that when they reopen, we reopen at the same time,” Balensifer said.

Reopening requirements

By phone, the City Commission heard from Monica Steele, the assistant county manager, and Jennifer Purcell, a North Coast coordinator with Brown’s Regional Solutions Team, about what

reopening requires.

The Oregon Health Authority reported 2,446 cases and 101 deaths from the virus statewide as of Wednesday morning. The health authority tracked 460 test results in Clatsop County, including six positive cases.

“Right now, we understand testing and contact-tracing to really be the Achilles’ heel in our ability to meet the core preparedness measures at the state” level, Purcell said.

Steele said the county is worried about the capacity to test and the availability of protective equipment as more businesses open with heightened sanitation requirements, but has adequate staffing to

trace contacts.

The first phase of reopening could include restaurants and personal services such as salons with limited seating. Future phases would address gyms and larger venues such as theaters. Baldwin said he’d like more types of businesses to open quicker if things look good during initial phases.

Steele cautioned patience, saying the county needs to monitor how opening different industries influences the rate of the coronavirus during its two-week incubation period.

“If all of a sudden we do have that resurgence, we don’t want to take all of those back to ground zero,” Steele said.

Graduation: Cap and gown pickup expected to happen next week

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“It will definitely be memorable and kind of awesome in a way actually,” Jenna Rickenbach, a board member, said. “What other class has gotten to do this?”

The Class of 2020 in Astoria could include upward of 130 graduates, with 111 of the students already considered completed graduates. The remaining students have plans to meet the June 6 deadline or are working under extended plans. The graduating class includes 12 valedictorians.

The school district and high school are working on other ways to honor and celebrate the graduates, as well.

Commercial Street will be decorated with streamers, bunting and window paintings through a partnership with the Astoria Downtown Historic District Association. Yard signs are being purchased for each graduate. The school district hopes to have a processional through downtown.

Cap and gown pickup is expected to occur next week.



Coronavirus concerns prompted changes to Astoria High School’s graduation.

Colin Murphey/The Astorian

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