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CORONAVIRUS

Astoria leaders want freeze on minimum wage

Scheduled to rise in July

By EDWARD STRATTON
The Astorian

Astoria estimates a minimum wage increase from \$11.25 to \$12 an hour in July will cost the city an extra \$62,000 in raises for the small army of part-time staff who run parks programs, along with a similar amount next year.

City leaders, facing dire budget forecasts amid the coronavirus pandemic and a difficult balancing act between providing child care and trying to reopen the heavily subsidized Astoria Aquatic Center, plan to push the state for a reprieve.

Mayor Bruce Jones said Monday that while the minimum wage increases were passed with the best intentions in better economic times, he will reach out to the region's state legislators and Gov. Kate Brown to ask they be canceled for the time being.

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Grant money could help businesses

Astoria, county to partner

By EDWARD STRATTON
The Astorian

Astoria and Clatsop County are applying for \$150,000 worth of small grants for low- and moderate-income businesses and employees, along with another \$50,000 for protective equipment and testing costs amid the coronavirus pandemic.

The city has been working with county and regional partners to prepare and apply for the community development block grants becoming available soon through Business Oregon, the state's economic development agency.

Mary McArthur, the executive director of the Columbia-Pacific Economic Development District, has been overseeing preparation.

"Clatsop County has been extremely hard hit by the restrictions and the closures, and ... 40% of folks making less than \$40,000 a year are currently without income," she said. "This is a perfect set of funding mechanisms to address those people that are most hard hit in Clatsop County right now."

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Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian
Ballots in the May election were counted Tuesday.

Bangs, Toyooka sweep to victory in commission races

Challengers prevail over incumbents

By NICOLE BALES
The Astorian

Courtney Bangs, a Knappa preschool teacher, and John Toyooka, a manager at Lum's Auto Center, have unseated Commissioner Kathleen Sullivan and Commissioner Sarah Nebeker on the Clatsop County Board of Commissioners.

Bangs defeated Sullivan 63% to 37% in District 4, which covers eastern Astoria to Westport. Toyooka prevailed over Nebeker 60% to 40% in District 2, which covers Gearhart, Clatsop Plains and parts of Warrenton and Seaside.

"I am extremely excited for the opportunity to serve my community, and I am grateful that we had so many come out and vote," Bangs said.

Bangs said she has gained more insight through the campaign and appreciates Sullivan's service.

"It takes a lot of heart and it takes a lot of energy and it takes just a lot of willingness, I think," she said. "And so I have a lot of respect for her for being able to do that and for being able to just put her life and her heart out there."

Sullivan conceded Tuesday night after the initial returns were announced.

"I would like to congratulate Courtney Bangs on her hard-fought campaign," Sullivan said in an email. "I wish her the best of luck when she begins her term in January and I will help with the transition every way I



Courtney Bangs

John Toyooka

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Voters approve tax levies for the county fairgrounds and Cannon Beach fire

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am able."

Toyooka said Tuesday night that he felt overwhelmed by the support and confidence that voters have in him. With the victory, he said, there's an "enormous responsibility now to fulfill that commitment."

Nebeker could not immediately be reached for comment.

The county clerk released results Tuesday night based on ballots accepted through 2 p.m. More results were released on Wednesday afternoon. The only remaining outstanding ballots are challenged ballots and ballots dropped off in other counties.

Voter turnout overall was about 48%.

Bangs and Toyooka were first-time candidates and their campaigns drew similar support.

Both were favored by donors from major industries and businesses on the North Coast and were endorsed by Clatsop County Republicans and #TimberUnity.

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Debbie Boothe-Schmidt

Suzanne Weber

Boothe-Schmidt, Weber win state House primaries

Election to replace Mitchell in November

By EDWARD STRATTON
The Astorian

Tillamook Mayor Suzanne Weber and Debbie Boothe-Schmidt, a Clatsop County trial assistant, will square off in the November election to replace state Rep. Tiffany Mitchell in House District 32.

Weber won the Republican primary Tuesday over Vineeta Lower, an online educator in Seaside, 80% to 20%. In the Democratic primary, Boothe-Schmidt defeated George Kiepkke, a former Clatsop County commissioner, 71% to 28%.

Mitchell, D-Astoria, has represented the district covering Clatsop and parts of Tillamook and Washington counties since 2018. She announced shortly before the filing deadline in March that she would not run for reelection, moving to Washington state because of her husband's new job with Pacific Power.

The opening gave Republicans, buoyed by a rural backlash to proposed climate change legislation, one of their best chances to flip a district held by Democrats since 2002.

Weber emerged as the preferred candidate of regional industry, while Boothe-Schmidt is primarily backed by labor unions.

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Cannon Beach looks to help businesses rebound from virus

City could close Hemlock to vehicles

By NICOLE BALES
The Astorian

CANNON BEACH — Eager to help businesses rebound during the coronavirus pandemic, the City Council will allow restaurants to set up tables in parking lots or malls and has asked city staff to draft a plan to close part of Hemlock Street to vehicles.

The idea is to allow restaurants more room to social distance while serving enough customers to pay

for overhead costs and employee wages.

"So this is for the restaurants because the restaurants are required to separate folks so much within the space that they're normally used to," Mayor Sam Steidel said Monday night. "This gives them the chance to expand their square footage enough maybe to make it so they can pay their employees."

"And reduce the number of people that can occupy their space," City Councilor Brandon Ogilvie said. "They're being hurt both ways."

The City Council also asked staff to draft a plan to close part of Hemlock Street to vehicles for a few weeks.

Ideally, the street closure would allow people to practice social dis-



Brenna Visser/The Astorian

Cannon Beach could temporarily close part of Hemlock Street to vehicles.

tancing downtown without crowding sidewalks.

The Cannon Beach Chamber of Commerce is discussing the idea with businesses and the city

expects to review a plan next week.

Jim Paino, the chamber's executive director, said he has spoken to businesses that have also expressed interest in being able to

place merchandise outside.

"As I've traveled around the country and in Europe, the most attractive downtowns have been those that had a pedestrian mall ... without exception, I think," City Councilor Mike Benefield said.

City Manager Bruce St. Denis said he likes the idea, but he wants to make sure any major changes or plans can benefit everyone and avoid unintended consequences.

"What I feel is a civic duty to protect not only our townspeople, but also the guests that come here," Ogilvie said.

"We're a town that attracts people from all over the world and to not be able to create a situation where there's at least room for people to move around — I'd just like us to be able to do something like that."

