

County revised reporting timeline for election results

County clerk cites virus as reason

By NICOLE BALES
The Astorian

Clatsop County typically releases most results on election night. But the county clerk revised the reporting timeline for the May election, citing the coronavirus pandemic as the reason.

The county released results shortly after 8 p.m. on Tuesday based on ballots accepted through 2 p.m.

The next batch of results

— ballots accepted from 2 p.m. through 8 p.m. on Tuesday — were released Wednesday afternoon. The remainder — challenged ballots and ballots dropped off in other counties — will be released later in the week.

County Clerk Tracie Krevanko said she was using only county staff to open ballots instead of the usual practice of bringing in volunteers. She said many of the volunteers are elderly, so she did not want to place them at risk during the pandemic.

“We are not staying and

working late because of the COVID-19,” Krevanko said Tuesday. “We have opted to process as much as we can today and then continue the process again tomorrow morning.”

Andy Davis, the chairman of the Clatsop County Democratic Central Committee, was understanding of the decision.

“While we all want to know the results immediately, the safety of the poll workers is paramount,” he said. “So it makes complete sense that the county would be cautious in their

approach here and taking account of the health of those volunteers.”

In an email, Bob Shortman, the chairman of the Clatsop County Republican Central Committee, thanked county staff. “We wish to thank the (staff) for their hard work, although the suspense is great we all wish (an) accurate count in the election,” he said.

“Good luck to all those who stepped up to run to make a difference. Even losers are winners for having the courage and dedication. We thank them all.”

Wage: Councilors agreed child care should be priority

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“We’re in the middle of the greatest economic crisis possibly since the Great Depression, and the last thing we need the state to do is to mandate that our local businesses and local government have to increase wages across the board in a time of declining revenues,” Jones said.

City Councilor Tom Brownson concurred with Jones, calling on Astoria to bring the issue up with the League of Oregon Cities. The city can’t absorb increased labor costs by raising prices like private businesses, he said.

“I hope that we can help the state go there, and I think that other cities would jump right in on this as well,” said Brownson, who represents Astoria on the League of Oregon Cities.

Schools and cities have been partnering to offer free emergency child care for essential workers during the pandemic. But as those services end in mid-June, the city will need to ramp up its child care offerings through the ‘Lil Sprouts Academy, City Manager Brett Estes said. While child care used to roughly break even, Estes said, it faces the same challenges as the aquatic center with increasing labor costs.

Councilors agreed that child care should be the city’s first priority. But they also wanted to see limited reopening of the aquatic center, the only one in the region aside from the Sunset Pool in Seaside.

The state recently approved Clatsop County to begin the first phase of reopening parts of the economy from virus restrictions. Aquatic centers would not reopen until a third phase, and even then at limited capacity.

The operation of the aquatic center, like many other public indoor pools across the country, is not designed to be profitable. About half of the operating costs are subsidized by money transfers from the general fund and lodging taxes, which have plummeted while hotels are closed to prevent the spread of the virus. The rest comes from user fees, which have disappeared amid the outbreak and will likely be limited when the pool reopens with reduced operating hours and capacity.

The city has furloughed more than 80 part-time employees, mostly in the parks department. Part-time labor costs at the pool alone are more than \$300,000, said Jonah Dart-McLean, the interim parks director. The city will have to better understand the impact of lodging tax losses on cash flow before deciding when and to what degree it can reopen the pool, Estes said.

City Councilor Jessamyn West waxed hopeful that some support will come from the federal government in a fifth coronavirus relief bill after most of the previous municipal relief went to cities of more than 500,000.

The U.S. House recently passed the \$3 trillion Health and Economic Recovery



Katie Frankowicz/The Astorian

Part-time labor at the Astoria Aquatic Center costs the city more than \$300,000 and would increase by more than \$60,000 under a minimum wage increase in July.

Omnibus Emergency Solutions Act, which would include more support for state and local governments. But the bill faces stiff opposition in the Republican-con-

trolled Senate.

“I think that’s something that we’re all hoping for, is that direct relief at the federal level, so we don’t have to hopefully have conver-

sations about not increasing minimum wage,” West said. “I know for myself, I’m hoping to see that relief come from up above, and not down below, so to speak.”

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The Astorian and Astoria Library may follow up with some voicemails for news stories and extended interviews.

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Questions? E-mail Jonathan Williams
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Grants: Would be available in July

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“The other piece is that almost a third of business owners in Clatsop County are sole proprietors and women-owned businesses, and those are other groups that have been significantly impacted by the restrictions and closures related to this pandemic.”

The grants would become available in July and help an estimated 60 to 100 businesses and employees remain solvent through the pandemic, filling cash flow gaps as they scale down, reduce expenses and try to survive. The city, having received previous block grants and met their administrative requirements, would administer the program for the entire county.

Astoria is also applying on behalf of the county for a \$50,000 block grant to buy protective equipment

for emergency responders, and to help cover the cost of testing for low-income residents. City Manager Brett Estes said the supplies would be distributed to the county when emergency responders and other essential services reach out with a need.

The City Council on Monday also voted to give event organizers who had to cancel because of coronavirus restrictions until the end of the year to use their remaining cultural grants from the city to reschedule events.

The events would need to be geared toward tourists and would likely happen in the fall, with the state banning large gatherings through September. The City Council had previously voted to forgive the grant amounts used by events that had to cancel, allowing them to roll over the unused funds to next year.

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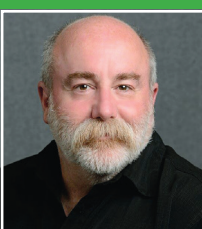
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