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Police chief addresses defunding, use of force

Calls for service up in Astoria

By NICOLE BALES
The Astorian

Calls for service have doubled over the past decade at the Astoria Police Department, Police Chief Geoff Spalding said, while the city has only added one new police officer position.

The job of a police officer has become more complex, with pressure to respond to social issues such as homelessness, mental illness and substance abuse.

Spalding believes some of those types of calls may be better handled by social service agencies, which need more resources. But shifting money from police to social services — part of the Black Lives Matter movement’s call to defund police — may be better suited for larger cities, he said, not smaller towns like Astoria.

“We continue to make adjustments. We take feedback from our community. We take feedback from councilors, mayor and city manager, and we’re always looking for ways to improve,” the police chief said at a City Council meeting on Monday night.

“We’re not perfect, but we try, and we’re always learning. And I’d like to say that I think we do a pretty good job in our community. And I say that because that’s what I hear from the community.”

The killing of George Floyd, a black man, by a white Minneapolis police officer, has prompted a national conversation on police misconduct and race. Protests have erupted around the world, including in Astoria, a predominantly white city with no recent history of police abuses.

Out of nearly 18,000 calls for service in 2019, Spalding said, Astoria police reported 31 instances involving the use of force. The instances include situations where the use of force was initiated but not carried out.

Chokeholds, a method of restraint that has come under national scrutiny, are not authorized for Astoria police.

Spalding said every instance of use of force is reviewed to determine whether it was consistent with department policy. The department also examines a year-end use of force report to look for trends or identify whether additional training is needed.

Many of the recent questions Spalding has received involve how police handle altercations during protests.

Several Black Lives Matter protests have been held in Astoria over the past few weeks, including some that have drawn counterprotesters carrying weapons. Police are investigating a physical altercation between protesters and counterprotesters at one demonstration in June.

“One of the things we do try to avoid is actually engaging with people who are in many cases the counterprotesters or those that have in some cases violent tendencies. And there are different types of low-level offenses that we have made a



Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

Tourists are returning to Cannon Beach as coronavirus restrictions are lifted.

Cannon Beach tries to create ‘culture of safety’

Tourists are starting to return

By NICOLE BALES
The Astorian

CANNON BEACH — The tourist season is starting to look a bit more normal since hotels and vacation rentals have opened and coronavirus restrictions have loosened.

The city opened hotels to full capacity after Memorial Day weekend and local leaders are trying to keep businesses operating while balancing safety. However, concern has spiked among locals after seeing more tourists downtown without masks and without social distancing.

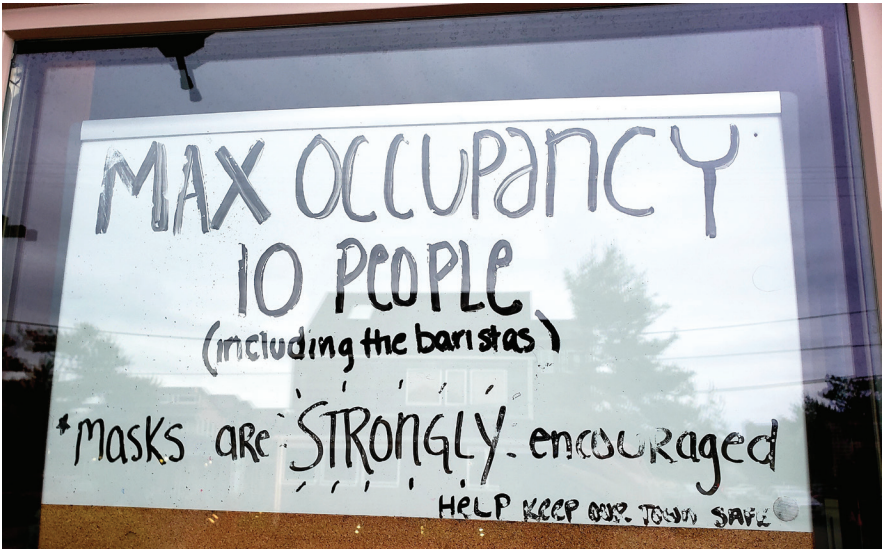
Mayor Sam Steidel said that after about two months of adjusting to a sparse city, the uptick in visitors has been a shock to many.

“It would be kind of fascinating to see a couple of cars on Hemlock downtown pass each other, and all of a sudden now we have a fairly normal summer day with crowds that we’re accustomed to,” he said. “That’s a shock to folks seeing that change.”

Locals expressed concern about the lack of precautions taken by tourists during ‘Coffee With the Councilors’ on Monday with City Councilor Nancy McCarthy and Councilor Robin Risley.

“I think we need to start really focusing on people wearing masks and social distancing. And it needs to be a culture within our community

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Photos by Nicole Bales/The Astorian

ABOVE: The sign at Insomnia Coffee Co. in Cannon Beach strongly encourages customers to wear face masks. BELOW: Signs are posted around the city featuring elk and bunnies wearing masks to remind visitors to do the same.



Cronin to leave Warrenton for Mount Angel city manager post

By EDWARD STRATTON
The Astorian

WARRENTON — Kevin Cronin, the assistant city manager of Warrenton and the former community development director in Astoria, has been hired as the city manager of Mount Angel.

The City Council in Mount Angel, a Bavarian-themed city in

Marion County, voted Tuesday to hire Cronin starting in July. His last day in Warrenton will be June 25.

Cronin was hired by Astoria in 2015 as community development director. He left in October 2017 and became a planning consultant for Warrenton, where he was eventually named the community development director and assistant city manager.

“When I started working in Warrenton as their consultant, I was like, ‘There’s no way I’m going back into

the public sector.’ But if I’m going to do it, this is the reason why I’d do it, is so I can become, eventually, a city manager,” he said.

Cronin has been commuting between Warrenton and Portland, where he owns a house and his children live. He considered the closer proximity in taking the Mount Angel job.

“Not being able to see my kids as much, that’s been weighing on me over the last 2 1/2 years,” he said. “It feels good to know that I’ll be able

to come home every night.”

Cronin has overseen several major projects in Warrenton, from a transportation system plan to addressing nuisance properties. He has also guided numerous code amendments, including an expansion of the types and density of housing in the quickly growing city.

He helped craft a master plan for Chelsea Gardens, an area between U.S. Highway 101 and state Highway 104 where the city hopes property owners and developers can create a cohesive, higher-density neighborhood of commercial and

residential spaces.

“I really feel great about the work that we’ve done as a team out there, and just feels good to move on, too,” Cronin said.

Linda Engbretson, the Warrenton city manager, said the city has hired consultant Mark Barnes, the former city planner for Cannon Beach, to fill in part time and will begin immediately recruiting for a replacement.

“Kevin’s energy, smarts and drive will be missed,” Engbretson said. “Those are some big shoes to fill. He’s been a great member of the Warrenton team.”



Kevin Cronin

