

Trash: Cans fill up with carryout containers

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walk. The cans fill up quickly with carryout food containers in particular, said Jonah Dart-McLean, the city’s parks and recreation director. “There’s definitely a lot more garbage out there,” he said.

Uptick in wipes
Many city sewer systems across the county are also dealing with a significant uptick in wipes. Health officials had advocated the use of wipes to easily and quickly sanitize hands and surfaces, but the wipes are not flushable — no matter what it says on the packaging, said Jeff Harrington, the director for the Astoria Public Works Department. When they are flushed away, the wipes plug up sewage pumps at the city’s wastewater treatment plant. To try to stem the tide, the city recently fabricated and installed a new screen at a manhole at a pump station near state Highway 202 and Ninth Street.

Crews clean the screen twice a week, Harrington said. It is a process that requires three people and takes about three hours. “(It is) more of an inconvenience and is additional work that we never had to do in the past before wipes became popular,” he said. But, he added, cleaning the screen is far easier than cleaning the pumps. The city is considering installing new pumps that do not plug as easily. In Cannon Beach, the wipes stress the system and necessitated altered or increased maintenance routines at the treatment plant, La Bonte said.

Overall, the city is taking on additional costs for this work, along with extra signage, hand sanitizer, masks, modified work schedules to minimize exposure between employees and more overtime. All together, this required significant budget adjustments, La Bonte said. She remains philosophical about the situation. The Public Works Department experiences few slow months anyway and the challenge of keeping the city aesthetically pleasing and waste systems in good operational order is part of what makes the work exciting to La Bonte. “Of course, when you throw in a pandemic, it adds challenge to that journey,” she said, “but if it weren’t the COVID, it would probably be something else.”

Masks
Single-use and plastic items were already a concern to environmentalists. Their concerns have grown as precautions around the corona-



A disposable surgical mask lays on the ground at parks property in Astoria.

Katie Frankowicz/The Astorian

virus increase the use of such items as businesses and individuals try to limit possible sources of contamination and exposure. Single-use plastic shopping bags, barely out of stores for six months after a statewide ban hailed by environmentalists went into effect earlier this year, returned to the North Coast during the pandemic. Supply chain issues and temporary restrictions on reusable bags at some stores left many stores short on paper bags. Meanwhile, disposable masks are well on their way to becoming the new marine debris, said Jesse Jones, the Astoria-based volunteer coordinator for CoastWatch, a program where volunteers adopt segments of the Oregon shoreline to monitor for natural and human-caused impacts.

any recyclable masks on the market. **Crush of visitors**
Pandemic-specific trash has become a significant problem at state parks on the North Coast. Most of the parks reopened in June and were immediately hit with a crush of visitors — a tide that has yet to ebb. Along with the high visitor numbers, park managers are seeing even more trash this year. Masks and takeout containers are everywhere. Wipes and bits of used toilet paper litter the sides of popular trails. “Pleas to pack-it-in, pack-it-out are being ignored,” said Ben Cox, Nehalem Bay unit manager for the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department. “Pleas to tread lightly on the land and don’t overcrowd are similarly ignored.”

funded by state lottery dollars, faces a potential budget shortfall of \$22 million between now and June. In addition to staff layoffs, the budget restrictions meant many seasonal workers were not hired. Local parks are operating with skeleton crews, park managers say. The department last week announced it will charge out-of-state residents higher fees for overnight stays through the rest of the year “to remind people to stay as close to home as possible while enjoying the outdoors and to provide much-needed support for the Oregon state park system” according to a statement from Lisa Sumption, the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department director. However, the fee change will not discourage visitors to the overtaxed parks and recreational sites like Oswald West and Hug Point that do not offer camping and require no entrance fee. “Oswald West, Arcadia Beach and Hug Point are constantly jammed,” Cox said. Once the parking lots are full, he said, people park wherever they can find room.

The Oregon Department of Transportation erected barriers and strung “Do not enter” and “Caution” tape along highway shoulders ahead of parking lot entrances to keep people from parking there if the lots are full. “People just park a little farther away,” Cox said. At Short Sand Beach in Oswald West State Park last Monday, groups maneuvered around each other on the Falcon Cove trail above the beach, some slipped on masks as they passed, others carried no masks at all. Several discarded masks hung in ferns off to the side of the trail. The tiny trash can at the trailhead was already overwhelmed with trash, topped by a collection of empty plastic Starbucks cups.

The parks department,

Cases: ‘The virus spreads – as it has all along – by people congregating’

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Michael McNickle, the county’s public health director, said the lack of precautions taken by locals and visitors has resulted in community spread, which is the reason the county is seeing an increase in cases. “Clatsop County is no different than anywhere else where mask wearing is only partially observed; and there are throngs of people coming to the coast on the weekend and congregating,” McNickle said in an email. “The virus spreads – as it has all along – by people congregating and not following social distancing and mask wearing protocols.”

Ellen Heinitz, a naturopathic physician and the county’s community health project manager, said that most people who have tested positive for the virus have been symptomatic. “People are getting sick from visiting friends and family,” Heinitz said in an email. “There has been a combination of our local folks traveling to visit friends and family and or friends and family coming here to spread it.” The Oregon Health Authority reported 21,488 virus cases and 357 deaths statewide as of Monday afternoon. The health authority tracked 3,945 test results in Clatsop County, including 85 of the positive cases. The county began drive-thru community testing for the coronavirus in May with the hope of testing anybody

who wanted to be tested for the virus. The goal was to test 300 people every week. “Also, we were trying to get an idea of how widespread it was in our community and because of that initial testing on demand we found that the vast majority of positive cases were in people who currently or very recently had the symptoms of COVID-19,” McNickle said. However, the weekly testing total for people dropping in has averaged about 20 over the past several weeks, according to the county. Columbia Memorial Hospital in Astoria and Providence Seaside Hospital have conducted most of the testing. McNickle said there was not enough interest from the community to conduct 300 tests a week, and since then, the county has limited testing to people showing symptoms and people who are contacts of positive cases. “Recently our testing supplies dwindled and we were being denied access to more, so we limited appointments to those with symptoms,” McNickle said. “During that same period of time there was a huge surge in demand for testing nationally and the time lag in receiving results made testing almost worthless from a communicable disease management perspective. “To help manage that crisis all providers were asked to prioritize testing for symptomatic individuals so we are doing our part.”

Holloway: ‘We’re looking forward to a lot of fun here’

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running their first business during the coronavirus. “We try to keep it as clean as possible,” Mason Quashnick-Holloway said. “I go over every day, pretty much, at least once or twice — maybe more, depending on how many people we get.” The business is a first for the incoming sophomore at Astoria High School. It’s a side hustle for his older brother, Chris, who recently returned from fishing for salmon in Alaska with his grandfather and is studying maritime sciences at Clatsop Community College in hopes of working on tugboats. Game stores have faced some unique difficulties in

Astoria. Amazing Stories, a board game and comic shop formerly located in the John Jacob Astor Building, closed after a fire in one of the apartments above set off sprinklers that drenched the store’s collection. The Arc Arcade closed after owner Brad Smithart amassed a large amount of unpaid lodging taxes at the Astoria Riverwalk Inn before relocating to the East Coast. The Quashnick-Holloway family hopes to expand the storefront farther into the storeroom, creating space for socially distanced game nights and becoming a hangout spot. “It’s exciting,” Holloway said about bringing a game shop back to Astoria. “We’re looking forward to a lot of fun here.”

Dry cleaner: ‘The only reason I knew the building was for sale was a customer showed me on Craigslist’

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“We’ve been hurting since 2008, but not as bad as it is now,” Shinabery said. “This is like the icing on the cake.” Spot Business Systems, a cloud software provider for dry cleaners, noted that its customers around the U.S. saw retail sales drop by 80% in mid-April compared to a year ago. The industry has since clawed back to about half its usual sales. “People aren’t wearing clothes that you have to dry clean or press,” Shinabery said. “... So many of my customers are working out of their homes, I guess.” Shinabery, 72, has been dry cleaning since she was 17. She said she would try to hold on but isn’t certain how long she’ll have at the current location. About six weeks ago, she got a phone call that a Realtor would be coming to check out the building, which has been listed for more than

seven months online. “The only reason I knew the building was for sale was a customer showed me on Craigslist,” she said. The building is owned by David Bodway, the city finance director for Sherwood. Bodway could not be reached for comment, but Lovekesh Kumar, the owner of several Super Mart convenience stores throughout the region, confirmed they have been in negotiations on the Marine Drive location. Shinabery hasn’t started informing her customers, expecting to eventually be evicted but not knowing when. She wants to retire but has been trying to entice someone to take on a scaled-back business of running a local laundry service and shuttling dry cleaning orders to and from Longview. “I feel terrible,” she said about the imminent closure. “If there was another dry cleaners here, I would not feel bad about closing.”



ABOVE: Astoria Cleaners on Marine Drive faces an uncertain future.

LEFT: Karen Shinabery has owned Astoria Cleaners with partner Rob Tikkala since 2001.

Photos by Edward Stratton/The Astorian