

Outbreaks: ‘We have to work in unison’

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ongoing coordination and communication between the agencies and hope to summarize those in a written document soon,” Occhipinti said in an email. “We remain thankful for their partnership as we work together to ensure the safety of our community during this global crisis.”

Disputes

Workplace outbreaks at seafood processors have accounted for a disproportionate share of virus cases in the county during the pandemic.

County leaders have contrasted the response to outbreaks at Bornstein Seafoods and Da Yang Seafood in Warrenton. At Bornstein and Da Yang, the county led the testing, quarantine and contact tracing process.

Pacific Seafood, a Clackamas-based company that is a dominant force in the West Coast fishing industry, has chosen to screen workers through private lab testing.

The Astorian, through emails and other documents obtained through the state’s public records law, has reported that the county and Pacific Seafood clashed after a May outbreak over whether the close contacts of workers who tested positive for the virus had to quarantine or could continue working.

In late June, after a Pacific Seafood worker from Moldova tested positive, the county wanted the contacts of the worker to quarantine, since they had traveled to Warrenton together. But, according to county leaders, the health authority and the company maintained that workers who tested negative and were asymptomatic could continue to work.

After the dispute, the Oregon Health Authority took over contact tracing and other outreach to contain the spread of the virus among Pacific Seafood workers.

The health authority also took the lead in September when Pacific Seafood said 95 workers tested positive for the virus, the largest workplace outbreak in the county during the pandemic.

A surge of virus cases after the Labor Day holiday and the Pacific Seafood outbreak led Gov. Kate Brown to place Clatsop County on the state’s coronavirus watch list.

Bohn said he would like the agreement with Pacific Seafood and the health



Colin Murphey/The Astorian

The county has scrambled after coronavirus outbreaks at seafood processors.

‘WE HAVE TO BE ON THE SAME PAGE. WE HAVE TO BE COMMUNICATING REGULARLY ... THERE IS NO OPTION TO JUST WALK AWAY FROM EACH OTHER.’

Don Bohn | Clatsop County manager

authority to establish how to handle the contacts of workers who might be exposed to the virus.

“And even if the seafood processor wants to bring in an outside testing firm, we want to partner with them because we want to be present when those happen so we can start the interview process, and start getting contact information,” he said. “What we’ve learned is if we’re not there then it slows down the process once we find out who’s actually positive.”

“When you do contact tracing, time is of the essence. So, we would like to have that all be a very coordinated muscle movement activity between us and the seafood processors, which with Da Yang and with Bornstein’s, that did happen.

“But we’re working with Pacific now to kind of iron out how that’s going to work with us. Because having them do it alone doesn’t work as well as it should.”

‘Actionable information’

Commissioner Mark Kujala, who represents Warrenton, said he is optimistic the county and Pacific Seafood can reach an agreement.

“And I really want to see it be county health working with the local plant,” he said. “I think that’s the most conducive to transparency, the most conducive to getting information quickly, and actionable information.”

Records obtained by The

Astorian showed the county was warned early in the pandemic about the potential risk at seafood processors. Bohn said the county has been in informal contact with the seafood plants throughout and has provided consultation.

Seafood processors are considered an essential business charged with maintaining the nation’s food supply and are overseen by the state Department of Agriculture. The Oregon Occupational Safety and Health Administration is responsible for enforcement of workplace safety.

“This has required private sector and public sector to come together and be respectful and attentive to what are sometimes competing interests,” Bohn said.

“And we have to navigate those in a way that is respectful to both sides of the equation, both the community health side, the economic wherewithal side, and that is a dance. And we will be continuing this navigation of relevance between us, meaning the county as a public health agency, and some of these businesses that bring a little bit higher risk during a pandemic.

“I think what is clear to me, and I know it’s clear to Pacific Seafood, is that we have to work in unison. We have to be on the same page. We have to be communicating regularly ... there is no option to just walk away from each other.”

Housing: ‘Great opportunity’ for location

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complained about the potential impacts on the complex’s livability, calling on the city to deny Forcum and first craft live-work codes.

Forcum argued that neighbors’ theoretical concerns are trumped by entrepreneurs actively soliciting him who face the choice between housing themselves or running their business.

He described it as an emergency measure “as well as I think it’s a great opportunity for this location overall.”

Two of Forcum’s potential live-work tenants testified to their need for live-work space. Derroch Cahen,

a mariner located in Portland, said he wants to open a sailing school. Beata Zawadzka, a nurse in Spokane, Washington, said she wants to open a skin care business and eventually retire to Astoria.

The City Council agreed on the need for live-work units amid a severe lack of affordable housing pointed out in a countywide study. City Councilor Jessamyn Grace West recounted her experiences living on ground floors in high-traffic areas and working out of her home.

“I do know a fair amount of people that are in the position where they do have to decide between renting a commercial space or a res-

idential space,” West said. “It’s very, very difficult for most us — and I say us, because that includes me.”

Councilor Joan Herman said she didn’t understand neighbors’ opposition to live-work units, considering the area is already approved for more intensive businesses, such as video arcades, bed-and-breakfasts, seafood processing and boat-building.

“The businesses allowed there now would be far more disruptive,” Herman said. “A live-work unit to me would be relatively quiet, and it also would provide much-needed housing as others have mentioned, as well as business incubator space.”

City Council: ‘The river is our most valuable asset’

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Brownson defended the city’s performance in helping secure state relief grants for businesses. He also praised Jones, a former U.S. Coast Guard commander, he described as an ideal leader for an emergency.

Hilton and Conklin argued for people to buy local to support businesses during the pandemic, while Conklin noted the city’s support in expanding outdoor seating to help restaurants and bars. Morley echoed Holcom’s concerns about a lack of communication regarding emergency planning.

After the approval of a controversial four-story hotel on the waterfront near Uniontown, the City Council updated and tightened building restrictions laid out in the Riverfront Vision Plan, which guides development along the Columbia River.

Candidates were asked their opinions on waterfront development.

Holcom, who owns Pier

39 and has a development interest near the Port’s East Mooring Basin, said he supports keeping a working waterfront. He believes riverfront properties have been neglected because of bad communication on the city’s part.

“Right now we have a huge miscommunication between people who want to come to Astoria and invest and the goals and traditions of what the existing City Council are,” he said. “And that’s why we need to do better.”

Brownson said the City Council has been as busy as ever in regards to land use development, arguing the rules have already been decided by the approval of the Riverfront Vision Plan.

“I think that once a city has established development guidelines, we need to abide by them,” he said. “Developers, wherever they come from, need to know up front what the rules are and be able to tailor their plans and move forward, so that as long as they meet the requirements, they need not be arbitrarily rejected.”

Morley said that while the waterfront shouldn’t be sold to the highest bidder, there are business opportunities that could drive more local and visitor traffic. Conklin called for preserving what the city has on the Riverwalk and requiring new hotels to provide employee housing.

Hilton called the waterfront Astoria’s future and said people ought to be able to develop their property within the city’s rules to help bring in jobs and more tax revenue.

“The river is our most valuable asset,” he said. “If we’re not going to build up, then we need to build out. That river can do a lot for us. We just need to let it happen.”

The forum was moderated by Christopher Breitmeyer, the college president. Streamed on Facebook Live, the event was a collaboration by the American Association of University Women Astoria Branch, Clatsop Community College, The Astorian and Coast Community Radio.

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State House: Neither candidate directly touched on cap-and-trade legislation

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Weber, a Republican who serves as the mayor of Tillamook, said Oregon has a problem with spending rather than with revenue, calling the corporate activity tax a glorified sales tax that has caused anger and anxiety and needs to be overhauled.

“We need to look at the structure of that, and how that is impacting small business, and how that is impacting everyday buyers,” she said.

Weber said a restructure of the tax system also needs to guarantee enough money for education.

Boothe-Schmidt, a Democrat who supports the Student Success Act, argued that it’s time to look at how to make large corporations pay their fair share in taxes.

“I think it’s very important that our large corporations are paying the same as what our small businesses are,” said Boothe-Schmidt, the co-owner of Phog Bounders Antique Mall in Astoria who serves on the Sunset Empire Transportation District board. “As a small business owner, I pay my fair share in taxes.

I can’t afford the accountants to look for loopholes for me like they do (for) big corporations.”

The candidates were asked their opinion on a November ballot measure to make Clatsop County a Second Amendment sanctuary, which would prohibit county resources from being used to enforce local, state and federal gun laws. Sheriff Matt Phillips has come out in opposition to the measure, arguing it is unconstitutional and could face legal challenges if approved.

Weber, who did not answer whether she supported the sanctuary measure, called herself a gun advocate and said people need more education on the effects of the measure.

Boothe-Schmidt, describing her family’s hunting background in Eastern Oregon, said she supports responsible gun ownership but opposes the ballot measure.

“I feel it is important that we have our background checks to make sure that somebody that may hurt themselves or somebody else does not have a weapon,” she said. “I also believe in red-flag laws for

domestic violence.”

Both candidates talked about the need for improved emergency planning for wildfires and a large Cascadia Subduction Zone earthquake and tsunamis.

Neither candidate directly touched on cap-and-trade legislation that has dominated the last two sessions in Salem and led to Republican walkouts, although Boothe-Schmidt made an indirect reference.

“You need to reach out to all stakeholders, talk to folks about all the issues you’re going to be looking at and you stay at that table until you come up with a solution,” she said. “You do not get up and leave.”

The candidates are campaigning to replace Rep. Tiffany Mitchell, D-Astoria, who chose not to run for reelection in House District 32. The district covers Clatsop and parts of Tillamook and Washington counties.

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