

Wastewater: ‘This is big’

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storage pond and installing a new headworks to filter out grit and other solids. The hope is to stave off the need for a newer, mechanically driven plant estimated at anywhere between \$40 million and \$60 million.

With Fort George and Buoy Beer both headed toward significant expansions, the city is also creating an industrial pretreatment program to limit solids. Some in the beer world fear the new regulations and wastewater fees could make further expansion in Astoria too costly.

Fort George and Buoy Beer jointly hired John Mercer, a brewery wastewater consultant, to improve treatment. Mercer presented a side-streaming plan for Fort George’s new brewery at Astoria Warehousing to divert some of the heaviest effluent into tanks that would be taken to local farms for supplemental cattle feed.

Buoy Beer plans to install a similar system. The breweries expect the side-streaming to come online next year and reduce the current output of solids by about two-thirds, even after expansion.

“This is big for even a bigger brewery,” Mercer said of the side-streaming systems. “So the breweries really recognize the limitations that the city has.”

New investments

Fort George has invested in Astoria Warehousing, a former canning and labeling complex where the brewery is building an expanded brewhouse, canning line, cold storage, distribution center and pub.

Buoy Beer is also looking to expand.

Chris Nemlowill, the co-owner of Fort George, shared his concerns with the proposed industrial pretreatment program. He said breweries and the city need more time to collect data on brewery runoff and find innovative ways to reduce the impact, even with cash flows decimated by the loss of business because of the coronavirus pandemic.

“Fort George alone is going to be spending upwards of \$300,000 that we had not planned on in our project at all on this system,” Nemlowill said of side-streaming. “And I imagine Buoy Beer is going to be spending a comparable amount, if not even maybe more, because they’re out over the water trying to implement this.”

City staff proposed allocating a certain amount of the treatment capacity over the next five years for breweries, whose side-streaming of heavier waste will hopefully buy more time to look at innovative solutions, said Cindy Moore, assistant city engineer. The plan assumes

the city would also figure out how to fund the \$5 million expansion in the next five years, by which point breweries could be bumping up against their maximum wastewater treatment allocation.

“We feel comfortable moving forward with this strategy, because there is going to be an immediate improvement as soon as the side-streaming is implemented,” Moore said. “It does give us the opportunity, as we mentioned, to get more data. So, as your public works staff, this would be a way to support the industries and still protect the public infrastructure.”

Fast-tracking permits

The city is designing an industrial pretreatment program and figuring out how to charge different commercial users with varying strength and volumes of wastewater. City staff plan on fast-tracking permits before the program for Fort George and Buoy Beer to keep up with their expansions.

Fort George’s permit will come before the City Council for approval next month. The City Council’s approval would allow Fort George to exceed a previously agreed-upon level of solids in its wastewater and keep on a timeline to make beer at Astoria Warehousing by the end of the year, City Manager Brett Estes said.

Conservancy: Wetland is intact

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coordinator for the land conservancy.

The land conservancy owns 507 acres in the Warrenton area.

The addition of the Ninth Street wetlands to properties in this area owned by the land conservancy and others means there is now an almost unbroken wildlife corridor from the headwaters of Alder Creek — which crosses the wetlands — to where the creek empties into the Columbia River, said Jon Wickersham, associate director of the land conservancy.

The area is used by elk, smaller mammals, birds and other creatures. The Ninth Street wetlands are located downstream from land with rearing habitat for lower Columbia salmon, including coho.

Though there are established neighborhoods nearby, the wetland itself has not been split apart or seen massive alterations. It is intact, healthy and functioning, Wickersham said.

This type of land’s ability to absorb water helps mitigate the effects of flooding or storm surges as low-lying areas in Warrenton continue to develop. Protecting these spaces could ultimately protect human settlement nearby, Wickersham said.

Because of its intended use as wetland mitigation for another property, the Ninth Street wetlands came to the land conservancy with deed restrictions. However, given the pristine condition of the property, Wickersham



Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian
Alder Creek winds through Warrenton north of Ninth Street.

said the organization’s strategy for the site would have been preservation anyway.

He expects they may have to deal with invasive plants, but he does not anticipate undertaking any other types of active restoration work.

For now, the property is generally closed to public access. The Warrenton Grade School is located nearby, however. In the future, there may be opportunities for educational outreach on the land, Wickersham said.

Grants: Emergency Board will decide

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Kevin Leahy, the executive director of Clatsop Economic Development Resources, came before the Astoria City Council seeking \$40,000 to help fill the gap.

“The great majority of businesses that apply — I want to say 95% — were at the \$5,000 level,” Leahy told the City Council. “... I believe the largest ask was something like \$28,000 or \$30,000.”

The City Council agreed to give \$40,000 in relief funds to the business grants. The Clatsop County Board of Commissioners will decide early next month whether to add another \$50,000.

Leahy said Seaside was tapped out on relief funds. Warrenton is directing some of its relief funds to Clatsop Community Action to help people with food, rent and utilities.

Grant agencies have until mid-November to allocate the unspent coronavirus relief grants or return the money to the state, which in turn has until the end of the year to spend the money before returning the rest to the federal government.

Mary McArthur, who recently retired as executive director of the Columbia-Pacific Economic Development District, has been reaching out to other cities and counties in the region and said about half the gap has been filled.

The frustrating part for McArthur is the approximately \$350,000 she said the economic district has sitting from three prior rounds of relief grants that can’t go to any business that received prior federal support. This round of funding can go to businesses that received less than \$100,000 in prior federal support.

“We have about \$350,000 that we are ostensibly going to have to return to the state,” she said. “And what we’re really trying to (ask) is, ‘Can we repurpose that money under the round four guidelines, which they removed that requirement, because we do have that \$600,000 gap?’”

McArthur said the decision is up to Oregon’s Emergency Board, a bicameral body in the state Legislature that decides on the rules surrounding the distribution of federal funds. State Sen. Betsy Johnson, D-Scappoose, is a member of the board and said she supports loosening restrictions on

prior federal business relief funds.

“We probably need to go back and revisit those impediments to see if we can still responsibly distribute the money, rather than having it revert to the federal government,” Johnson said. “And by responsibly distribute, I mean that the money that

comes from the federal government to Oregon has to be dispersed out in ways that are auditable and accountable.”

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