

IN BRIEF

Pacific County surpasses 400 virus cases

SOUTH BEND, Wash. — Another 20 cases of COVID-19 were reported in Pacific County on Wednesday as the county's 14-day case rate exceeded quadruple digits and surpassed 400 cases, milestones most locals would have considered unthinkable earlier this month.

With the new reported cases included, coming just a day after 55 more positive cases had been identified on Nov. 24, Pacific County's case count sits at 415 since the beginning of the pandemic.

The county's case rate per 100,000 people over a two-week rolling average stands at 1,077. That figure stood at 180 just seven days ago, and was as low as 23 on Nov. 4.

— *Chinook Observer*

Pearl Harbor Day events canceled in Seaside

SEASIDE — Pearl Harbor Day events are canceled this year due to coronavirus restrictions, Seaside American Legion Post 99 adjutant Lou Neubecker announced.

The annual events, marking the anniversary of the Dec. 7, 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor by the Japanese, bring the community together to reflect on the strike that led the U.S. into World War II.

— *The Astorian*

Portland proposes new fees for air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions

Portland is taking public comments on a proposal to charge millions of dollars in fees for greenhouse gas emissions and hazardous air pollution through its Clean Air, Healthy Climate program.

The proposal would raise about \$11 million a year to help the city reduce air pollution — including the greenhouse gases that contribute to climate change.

It would charge two different fees, a healthy climate fee and a clean air protection fee, to about 80 of the city's biggest polluters, including manufacturers, hospitals and universities. The fees range from \$15,000 to \$2.6 million.

Andrea Durbin, the director of the Portland Bureau of Planning and Sustainability, said the program creates a new incentive for those entities because the fees would be based on emission levels, and they would be adjusted if pollution levels drop.

"If they want to pay less, or not pay at all, the way that they do that is to reduce that pollution," she said. "We hope that there's an opportunity to reduce that pollution overall and take steps to cut pollution impacts in our community."

The city would use the money to encourage energy efficiency, electric vehicles and renewables with the goal of addressing climate change and reducing air pollution — especially for Black and indigenous people and communities of color.

The proposal comes as the city is gearing up to offer the first round of grant funding through the Portland Clean Energy Fund, which has similar climate goals focused on communities of color and those with low income. It follows years of unsuccessful efforts by the Oregon Legislature and Gov. Kate Brown to create a cap-and-trade system to charge polluters for their greenhouse gas emissions.

Andrew Hoan, the president and CEO of the Portland Business Alliance, said the business community supports the goals of the program but was not included in its development and now has a very short timeline for providing input.

— *Oregon Public Broadcasting*

DEATHS

Nov. 26, 2020

SCOTT, Emma L., 81, of Ocean Park, Washington, died in Ocean Park. Ocean View Funeral & Cremation Service of Astoria is in charge of the arrangements.

SIMMONS, K'Renee, 69, of Seaside, died in Seaside. Caldwell's Funeral &

Cremation Arrangement Center of Seaside is in charge of the arrangements.

Nov. 24, 2020

SNABEL, John Roy, 74, of Seaside, died in Portland. Caldwell's Funeral & Cremation Arrangement Center of Seaside is in charge of the arrangements.

PUBLIC MEETINGS

TUESDAY

Community Center Commission, 10 a.m., Bob Chisholm Community Center, 1225 Avenue A, Seaside.

Clatsop County Board of Commissioners, noon, work session, (electronic meeting).

Port of Astoria Commission, 4 p.m., (electronic meeting).

Seaside Library Board, 4:30 p.m., Seaside Public Library, 1131 Broadway.

Astoria Library Board, 5:30 p.m., Astoria Library, Flag Room, 450 10th St.

Seaside Planning Commission, 6 p.m., City Hall, 989 Broadway.

Miles Crossing Sanitary Sewer District Board, 6 p.m., 34583 U.S. Highway 101 Business.

the Astorian

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HOLIDAY PREP

Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

Sarah Woods prepares a pie crust at her bakery, Gathered Bakeshop and Market, for Thanksgiving. Woods planned to bake 16 special pumpkin and bourbon maple pies, with the proceeds going to the Native American Youth and Family Center in Portland.

State Legislature scrambles to head off end of rent moratorium

By GARY WARNER
Oregon Capital Bureau

Oregon's ban on evicting tenants from their homes expires at the end of the year unless the Legislature can go into special session amid a deadly pandemic.

A bipartisan bill extending the moratorium through June has been written. It also creates a \$100 million fund to reimburse landlords for some of their tenants' back rent.

The landlord-based assistance program is a compromise hammered out between Rep. Julie Fahey, D-Eugene, the chairwoman of the House Interim Housing Committee, and Rep. Jack Zika, R-Redmond, with input from landlord and tenant advocates.

It's ready to be fast-tracked in a December special session of the Legislature.

The main problem: No special session has been scheduled. The regular session of the Legislature does not start until Jan. 19.

Waiting would allow the eviction moratorium and other key unemployment and health care programs to expire. When the deadlines were set, many lawmakers thought COVID-19 would be under control if not cured. Instead, the virus is spreading at a faster rate than any time this year.

"We had no idea the pandemic would continue into 2021," said Rep. Paul Holvey, D-Eugene.

With hoped-for federal aid never arriving, the only way to head off the chaos of a sudden end to programs is for the state to step in with a stopgap fix.

Gov. Kate Brown could call a special session, the third of 2020. Lawmakers have twice come to the Capitol despite risks of infection. But with case rates skyrocketing across Oregon, testing their luck a third time would be difficult and dangerous, not only for lawmakers, but for even a pared down version of the usual army of staffers and workers required when the Legislature meets.

Brown could take the unprecedented move of declaring COVID-19 a "catastrophic disaster," which could allow lawmakers to hold a remote session without coming to the Capitol.

Primary goal

House Speaker Tina Kotek, D-Portland, has said rent stabilization is a primary goal of any special session.

The state projects more than 82% of tenants have

paid rent during the crisis. Nationally, the amount owed by the average renter is \$2,700.

Conservative estimates put the amount of back rent owed landlords in Oregon at more than \$250 million. As it now stands, rent would again be due Jan. 1, evictions would again be allowed, and tenants would have to pay all back rent by March 31.

With the economy expected to be hobbled at least until spring, when a hoped-for vaccine will become available to a growing number of Oregonians,

not have to give any more information to landlords beyond the declaration.

The landlord would submit an application for benefits on behalf of their tenants to Oregon Department of Housing and Community Services. The landlord would be paid 80% of the rent due, while forgiving the tenant 20%. Tax credits for that portion might be possible, lawmakers said. The program is voluntary, but landlords choosing not to take part would still be under the eviction moratorium until the end of June.

even homelessness.

Priorities

The \$100 million fund would be prioritized to go to landlords of smaller properties, with a higher percentage of total rent in arrears. The funds cannot be used to cover rent paid by the landlord's immediate family.

The lawmakers said the plan has safeguards against false declarations and duplicate applications by tenants. It will also have penalties for intentional mismanagement of the application by landlords or putting in for payments for unoccupied units.

"We anticipate that there are bad actors on both sides — not a lot, but some," said John VanLandingham, of the Oregon Law Center, which helped shape the legislation. "Our goal here was not to be perfect, because we didn't think we could achieve perfection."

The funds would also be doled out so that one region did not drain the fund all by itself.

Lawmakers said a separate plan to stop some residential foreclosures will be ready for review next week.

"We really want to keep people housed during this pandemic," Holvey said. "Sometimes this isn't just about renters, it's about homeowners."

Gov. Kate Brown and both of Oregon's U.S. senators, Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley, issued a joint statement Monday calling for a "lame duck" session of Congress before the end of the year to replace the \$2.2 trillion CARES Act funds, which expire Dec. 31.

"Just as we enter what is proving to be the most trying period of the pandemic so far, federal dollars quite literally dry up," the statement said.

The Oregon Capital Bureau is a collaboration between EO Media Group and Pamplin Media Group.

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most Democrats and Republicans agreed on the need to push out the deadline until the end of June. Back rent would be due July 1. It would also extend the timeline on notice of eviction from 72 hours to 15 days.

Zika said lawmakers know \$100 million will be gobbled up quickly. By June, back rent due could hit \$500 million or more.

"It's a drop in the bucket," Zika said.

But the proposed bill creates a system for repayment fair to renters and property owners, Zika said. The Legislature could add additional funds to the plan or come up with alternative rental assistance aid when it convenes in January.

The proposed June 30 rent moratorium deadline would coincide with the scheduled end of the Legislature's 2021 session, allowing for any changes in programs to be made prior to final adjournment.

Under the plan, tenants would give their landlord a signed declaration that they could not pay their rent each month due to financial hardships such as unemployment, medical bills, lack of child care and limited other reasons. Under the current moratorium, no such declaration is required. If the new plan is approved, tenants would

Advocates for landlords said income from rental properties was all the cash flow that owners of a small number of units have to meet their families' needs. Without hope of getting rents soon, they will either sell their buildings or convert to other uses, which could take thousands of units off the already tight Oregon rental market.

While recognizing the strain on many landlords, advocates for tenants said that at least they had alternatives, such as selling the property. For those living in rental units, removing the moratorium would mean moving in with others, risking a higher chance of COVID-19 infection, or

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