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CORONAVIRUS



Photos by Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: A 66-unit apartment complex is planned for the empty lot next to Safeway. The former Waldorf Hotel will be converted to 40 affordable apartments. Developer Chester Trabucco is planning to build 70 two-bedroom apartments from storage containers in Uniontown. Contractors have renovated the old Waldorf Hotel.

HOUSING OPTIONS IN THE WORKS

Hundreds of apartment units on the drawing board

By EDWARD STRATTON
The Astorian

Astoria's population peaked a century ago at around 14,000 people, driven by the region's fishing and logging economy and military presence. The city's population has since shrunk to 9,675, according to the most recent estimates from Portland State University.

Astoria City Councilor Roger Rocka touched on the city's past while calling for a renewed focus on workforce housing.

"People who work here should be able to live here," Rocka said at a City Council meeting in December. "... Surely we can find housing now for 10,000 people."

Several multifamily housing projects, one nearing completion and others that could begin construction this year, promise to increase the apartment stock.

Contractors have streamed in and out of the former Waldorf Hotel, also known as the Merwyn. They're working at a feverish pace to finish 40 affordable studio apartments that the nonprofit Innovative Housing hopes to make available by mid- to late-February.

Innovative Housing Inc. is working with Consejo Hispano and the Astoria Downtown Historic District Association to find local blue-collar workers earning 50% to 60% of the region's median income. But demand is expected to vastly outstrip supply.

"Forty units is great," said Julie Garver, the director of housing for the Portland nonprofit. "However, I've heard people describe it as a drop in

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Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

A look inside the former Waldorf Hotel during construction.

Affordable housing project looks for downtown workers

By KATIE FRANKOWICZ
The Astorian

A new affordable housing project expected to open in the next few months will prioritize downtown workers.

Managers of the former Waldorf Hotel, also known as the Merwyn, are seeking 15 referrals through the Astoria Downtown Historic District Association. They have set aside units specifically for

people who work downtown and who want to preapply for housing, said Leah Cooper, the director of operations with Innovative Housing Inc.

The Portland nonprofit owns the building and has spent the past year renovating the long-empty hotel.

After the initial referrals are processed and the applications

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Wyden hopeful of expanded virus relief

Oregon Democrat calls for a sharper focus

By GARY WARNER
Oregon Capital Bureau

With Democrats in control of Congress and Joe Biden as president, Americans can expect a large, long-term package of aid to help get through the coronavirus pandemic, U.S. Sen. Ron. Wyden said.

In an interview Friday, the Oregon Democrat said he was supporting efforts to get President Donald Trump to resign or be removed from office after the riot at the U.S. Capitol sparked by Trump's speech to protesters. The senator also called for the resignations of U.S. Sen. Ted Cruz, a Republican from Texas, and U.S. Sen. Josh Hawley, a Republican from Missouri, for their roles in encouraging protesters and objecting to the Electoral College vote counts.

"Any senator exhorting such an assault violates their sworn oath and is unworthy of holding federal office," Wyden said. "There must be consequences for senators who would foment a violent mob for personal gain."

But the senator said the focus also has to be sharp on what to do after Trump is gone.

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Sen. Ron Wyden

Gearhart advances downtown zoning amendments

Restrictions on hard liquor

By R.J. MARX
The Astorian

GEARHART — Some of the city's most prestigious streets are nicknamed "Gin Ridge" for the summertime cocktail culture of early residents.

But the City Council has opted to keep downtown limited to beer and wine under zoning amendments designed to support local businesses and, in some cases, bring them up to compliance.

The council made one last tweak, at the request of City Councilor Kerry Smith, modifying language pertaining to alcohol sales at neighborhood cafes.

While hard liquor may be sold in the commercial area along U.S. Highway 101, downtown stores should not sell spirits, Smith said. "I do not want to see people walking outside with a cocktail to-go cup. I do not want liquor sold in our C-1 zone," he said at a meeting Wednesday. "We've never had a hard liquor establishment in downtown Gearhart and I'm opposed to having one starting now."

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Couple moves closer to home during pandemic

A food cart that specializes in tots

By EDWARD STRATTON
The Astorian

Things looked up in the summer of 2019 for Emily and Jordan Gagnon.

The young couple from Astoria and Ridgefield, Washington, took over On Tots, an established food



cart topping seasoned Tater Tots with various entrees. They inherited a route of festivals to serve and put a down payment in August to join a massive new food cart pod in southeast Portland.

But when the coronavirus pandemic canceled public gatherings, and the new pod was held up, the Gagnons instead moved On Tots

to Astoria, opening Friday in the courtyard outside Reach Break Brewing.

The Gagnons, both in their early 20s, married shortly after graduating high school. Jordan Gagnon trained to be a firefighter before getting hurt and said his interest in entrepreneurship was kindled while working for Sundial Travel in Astoria.

"When I was in high school, we had our senior project where we had to write out our five-year plan," Emily Gagnon said. "And the only things I remember from it

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Edward Stratton/The Astorian

Jordan and Emily Gagnon recently moved their food cart, On Tots, from Portland to the courtyard outside Reach Break Brewing.