

## CORONAVIRUS

# Astoria to delay reopening schools

New virus cases at middle school

By KATIE FRANKOWICZ  
*The Astorian*

With three new cases of the coronavirus at Astoria Middle School and ongoing concerns about health and safety, the Astoria School District will delay a return to school buildings.

School leaders had hoped to begin phasing students back into buildings for more regular in-person instruction later this month and in early February. But at a special meeting Thursday night, school board members voted to follow a recommendation by Superintendent Craig Hoppes and delay

fully reopening schools until local metrics begin to improve.

The school district was notified about the three new virus cases at Astoria Middle School between Jan. 15 and Tuesday. Hoppes declined to say whether the people who are sick are staff or students. All three people are resting at home, he told The Astorian.

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# State gives a lifeline to hotel project

City will review permit extension

By EDWARD STRATTON  
*The Astorian*

The state Land Use Board of Appeals has sent the denial of building permit extensions for a four-story hotel on the Columbia River back to Astoria for further review, finding the city did not adequately address the developer's claims of poor economic conditions amid the coronavirus pandemic.

Mark Hollander received approval from the city in December 2018 to build a Fairfield Inn and Suites at Second Street and Marine Drive. But the developer did not make substantial progress on the project before his building permits expired in December.

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Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

Hilary Levine and her newborn, Nickel Briggs-Levine.

# Pregnancy in a time of coronavirus

New moms reflect on a difficult and bewildering year

By KATIE FRANKOWICZ  
*The Astorian*

In the final weeks of her pregnancy, Lisa Schuyler would walk past a mirror and realize with a jolt, “Oh, I’m really pregnant. I forgot.”

The coronavirus pandemic — and 2020, in general — had been very distracting, a difficult and bewildering time for many people on the North Coast.

For pregnant women, the pandemic shaped many of their decisions and options. No one knew what effect COVID-19 might have on pregnancy and hospital policies changed often to adapt to new information about the disease.

Though the women The Astorian spoke with had planned for their pregnancies, none had expected the many turns the year would take.

Schuyler fielded calls at the front desk of the Clatsop County Public Health Department, answering questions, many of them related to the virus, and directing people to resources. She attended regular briefings and scoured social media to see what kinds of questions were popping up about the disease so the department could be prepared.

It felt good to help people in this way and she had support for her pregnancy at work. She tried to push down her own anxiety, but a significant part of each day was spent contemplating and analyzing a still unknown disease as it spread across the country and into her own community.

For some, with so much of life shut down, it was nice to avoid the uncomfortable interactions with strangers that pregnant women often endure — the probing questions or the unwanted touch to your swelling belly.

But the usual ways to mark moments and emotionally prepare for the baby were also absent — something Schuy-



Columbia Memorial Hospital

Columbia Memorial Hospital nurse Laura Brown helps Amanda Harlackner with her son in the early months after his birth in 2020.

ler felt keenly ahead of the arrival of her second child.

For many women, baby showers happened over Zoom or other video chats or became drive-thrus, people shouting congratulations from their cars. Pregnancies advanced in relative solitude with visits from family members and friends often being highly organized affairs requiring complicated plans of isolation or quarantine ahead of time.

Schuyler believed hospitals were safe, but she decided to go with a home birth. She wanted to be where she was comfortable, surrounded with people she had chosen.

When the pandemic became a reality on the coast, Nehalem-based midwife Jennifer Childress wondered if she’d see a boom in families seeking home birth. Local hospitals had tightened policies around who could be in the room during labor and delivery. Some women faced child care dilemmas if a younger child

couldn’t accompany them to the hospital for the birth.

A boom didn’t materialize. But some women transferred to Childress’ care who had been planning to go to the hospital before the pandemic hit. Home birth was something they had previously considered, she said, but the pandemic “tipped them over.”

“I strongly feel people need to birth where they feel safest and that is different for everyone,” Childress said. “It’s challenging birthing in the hospitals right now, but it is the right place for a lot of people and the same with the birth center (in Astoria). All of those choices are really good choices.”

In some ways, the Astoria Birth Center, which opened last summer, was well-suited to operate during a pandemic, said owner Rebeckah Orton. It was never intended to be a high-volume facility

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# Astoria wants to expand lighting on Riverwalk

State and federal money could help finance project

By EDWARD STRATTON  
*The Astorian*

Astoria is hoping a new state and federal partnership will help the city expand lighting on the Astoria Riverwalk from the Columbia River Maritime Museum to Pier 39.

Bollard-style lights line portions of the Riverwalk from the Port of Astoria to the west side of the museum. The city hopes to extend the lighting east to 39th Street.

Late last year, the city learned of the Oregon Community Paths program offering a mix of state and federal transportation money to improve multiuse paths. The city notified the state of its intent to apply for a \$941,000 project to extend the bollard lights east about 1 mile to 39th Street.



Edward Stratton/The Astorian

Astoria wants to extend the bollard-style lights on the Astoria Riverwalk from the Columbia River Maritime Museum east to Pier 39.

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# Astoria Aquatic Center could reopen by spring

Pool closed as a virus precaution

By EDWARD STRATTON  
*The Astorian*

The Astoria Aquatic Center could reopen to reservations as soon as March if coronavirus conditions allow.

The City Council on Wednesday signaled support for a plan by parks staff to open 26 hours a

week, offering 45-minute reserved time slots of 36 people at a time.

Pools, gyms and other indoor recreation centers are prohibited from operating while Clatsop County is in the state’s extreme risk category. Indoor recreation can allow up to 25% capacity or 50 people at a time, whichever is lower, when a county is in the high-risk designation.

Terra Patterson, the

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