

# Classrooms: Teachers have already begun to receive vaccine doses

Continued from Page A1

Wednesday, adding, “I am more dedicated to that than I am to anything else right now.”

Students from the east side of Astoria would return to classrooms beginning Feb. 11, followed by students from other areas over the next week. All elementary school students would be in classrooms by Feb. 18.

Though local case metrics are now advisory rather than mandatory for school districts when it comes to making reopening decisions, the Astoria School District has chosen to continue to follow them. As Feb. 11 nears, district administrators will review the number of local coronavirus cases and the rate of infection. If both numbers go up, the elementary students’ return could be delayed.

Under the school district’s original reopening plans, students were only going to be



Astoria School District

Elementary school students could return to class by Feb. 11.

in classrooms for two hours a day. Board member Jenna Rickenbach pushed for more time in class.

“In this situation there are no perfect answers, I know that,” she said in a statement Wednesday night, acknowledging the near even split among families about whether the school board

should reopen to students.

But if students are going back and the school district is already operating under strict safety protocols, they should have as much time in classrooms as possible, she said.

“The kids are there and if we can do it, do it,” board member Jeanette Sampson agreed.

For now, the school district’s transportation plan will not be able to accommodate anything more than three hours, Hoppes said.

The school district opted to separate students into cohorts by geographical area rather than grade. Not only did this approach help with organizing transporta-

tion, in earlier meetings district administrators noted it groups children together who may already be interacting with each other regularly in neighborhoods and at local parks.

But students who are not in the same household still must maintain required distances from each other while on school buses. Capacity on a single bus would be limited to around 18 students at a time. Drivers also need to account for the time it will take to disinfect buses between trips.

Not all elementary students will be returning, however.

Hoppes noted he will have to hire two additional teachers for remote learning for students who would normally attend Lewis and Clark Elementary to keep online class sizes low. Some families have told the school district they will continue with online learning for their children even if schools reopen.

Others have indicated that their children will not return to school until they have access to the vaccine.

Teachers and other school staff also have mixed feelings about a return to school. School board members acknowledged that reopening puts them “on the front line” of possible exposure to the coronavirus.

Teachers who wanted vaccines for the coronavirus have already begun to receive doses, with many slated to be vaccinated starting next week.

Gov. Kate Brown has prioritized vaccinations for educators in the hopes of reopening schools across the state to in-person classes in February.

The Biden administration has also prioritized reopening schools. The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has said the evidence indicates in-person classes can be held safely with precautions such as masks and social distancing.

# Windows: A response is due by late February

Continued from Page A1

“The same building materials that were available in the 19th century are no longer available,” he said. “You can’t get clear white pine anymore, and if you could get clear white pine, it would be ridiculously expensive.”

State law requires cities to make a decision on such land use applications within 120 days. City staff initially recommended denial, calling on the Levys to repair the windows or use historically accurate materials. Hearings on the project lasted three months while staff gathered more information from the Levys and

in not following a city ordinance that prioritizes repair of the windows first.

“People move to Astoria from other areas, and they buy historic homes, and they do so because they want to live in and own a historic home,” said Thompson, who used to serve on the City Council. “And Astoria doesn’t look the way it does by accident. That’s why we’ve had this ordinance on the books for more than a quarter of a century.”

The city scheduled an appeals hearing for Jan. 19, one business day beyond the 120-day deadline. Missing the deadline allowed the Levys to file a writ of mandamus, a legal remedy asking the Circuit Court to compel the city to finalize the Historic Landmarks Commission’s approval of replacing the windows, and to pay their attorney fees.

City Attorney Blair Henningsgaard said he does not believe Astoria will defend against the writ of mandamus. City Manager Brett Estes said there has been no decision yet on what to do.

“The appellants in this case, the Lower Columbia Preservation Society, will have the opportunity to come in and participate and defend the suit if they want,” he said. “That’s kind of where it sits.”

Henningsgaard said a response is due by late February. Thompson said the board for the preservation society would meet with their attorney before deciding whether to defend against the writ.

The court’s ruling on the Levys’ application would not be a land use decision, Henningsgaard said, and would not create a precedent for other historic properties.

Priscilla Levy said there should be disclosures by real estate companies about the ramifications of buying a historic home and financial support for people being forced to make historically accurate repairs.

Thompson argued that such resources exist, such as special assessments to freeze the value of historic properties while they undergo repairs. He argued that repairing the existing windows or replacing them with the original materials would ultimately cost less than using Fibrex.

“There are resources available locally, but it does require an effort on the part of the homeowner to kind of sweat the details,” Thompson said. “Seemingly, the path of least resistance — albeit the more expensive one — is out with the old and in with the new.”

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**Doug Thompson** | chairman of the board for the preservation society

the window manufacturer. The Historic Landmarks Commission ultimately approved the newer window materials in December, finding the old windows beyond repair and Fibrex a suitable replacement. The approval required the Levys to match the old style of windows precisely.

The preservation society, a nonprofit promoting historical architecture, appealed the approval to the City Council. Doug Thompson, the chairman of the board for the preservation society, said they believe the Historic Landmarks Commission erred



Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

The state disclosed a workplace outbreak of the coronavirus at Columbia Memorial Hospital.

# Hospital: Region’s leading health care provider

Continued from Page A1

“This small cluster met OHA’s definition of an outbreak,” she said in an email. “CMH immediately communicated this information to Clatsop County Health Department. CMH then worked closely with the county health department to perform appropriate contact tracing.

“The remaining 22 cases have occurred sporadically over a two-month period of time and are not related to the original cluster. Through contact tracing, these 22 cases were determined to have been acquired outside of work. CMH appropriately quarantined those affected to protect both our caregivers and patients.

“Front-line CMH caregivers continue to be at the highest risk of exposure,” Long said. “CMH is routinely test-

## County reports six new virus cases

The Astorian

Clatsop County on Thursday reported six new coronavirus cases.

The cases include two males and a female between the ages of 10 and 19 and two men in their 70s living in the northern part of the county. A woman in her 20s living in the southern part of the county also tested positive.

One person was hospitalized and the rest were recovering at home.

The county has recorded 744 cases since March. According to the county, 17 were hospitalized and five have died.

ing and caring for COVID positive patients. Through proper utilization of PPE (personal protective equipment) and screening proce-

dures, we consider our prevalence of COVID-19 to be low.

“Caregiver and patient safety is paramount. We are

proud of our caregiver’s diligence and attention to constantly changing procedures and risks. We will continue to be a space where sick people can come for help and take our dedication to heal seriously.”

The hospital is the region’s leading health care provider and one of the largest employers in the county. The 27 virus cases described by the state is among the largest workplace outbreaks in the county during the pandemic.

The health authority’s weekly report also detailed three recent virus cases at Astoria Middle School as two students and one staffer.

The Astoria School District disclosed the three virus cases during a school board meeting last week. Superintendent Craig Hoppes had declined to say at the time whether the positive cases were staff or students.

# Masks: ‘We’re in this for the long haul’

Continued from Page A1

Oregon OSHA cited one business in the county — a Seaside liquor store — in August for not ensuring that employees were wearing face masks.

“We’re in this for the long haul,” Spalding said. “Even once vaccinations become more commonplace, we’re still going to be wearing masks. So it isn’t a short-term thing and people need to get used to it. I’m supportive of it, I wear a mask. I just wish everybody would and we might get this thing over with sooner.”

Warrenton Police Chief Mathew Workman said his department has responded to eight incidents since June related to wearing masks — all at big-box stores.

Although there have been

no Warrenton police citations issued specifically over the mask mandate, an Astoria man was arrested in January at Fred Meyer for disorderly conduct in the second degree after a tense interaction that began over a mask.

Police say the man’s mask was reportedly down near his chin and not being worn properly. When another customer asked him to pull it up, the man reportedly began yelling, threatening and cursing at her and pushed her cart.

Some retailers and grocery stores have strict, zero-tolerance mask policies, like the Astoria Co+op, while others still allow customers to shop.

“We respect and acknowledge that some customers, due to medical reasons, may not be able to

wear a mask (small children are exempt),” a Fred Meyer spokesman said in an email.

“We encourage those customers to consider an alternative option like a face shield or facial covering. If they’re unable to wear a mask or an alternative design, we request that they use our e-commerce services like pickup or delivery. To support all households during the COVID-19 pandemic, our grocery pickup service remains free (generally a \$4.95 fee). Our associates have been instructed to escalate mask compliance

concerns to the manager on duty, who has been empowered to address respective situations directly.”

Workman said that given the limited number of police calls, he believes compliance in Warrenton — the region’s retail hub — is good overall.

“I am sure there are negative interactions and issues at businesses that the police are not called on, but I think they are isolated,” he said. “Even those who are not thrilled with the mask requirements are wearing them in businesses.”

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