

IN BRIEF

County to distribute free face masks to help against virus

Clatsop County will distribute free KN95 face masks Thursday to help prevent the spread of the coronavirus. The drive-thru handout events will take place between 2 and 4 p.m. at Elsie-Vinemapple Fire Station, Seaside Fire Station, Astoria Aquatic Center, Cannon Beach City Hall, Knappa Fire Station, Warrenton Fire Station, Lewis & Clark Fire Station and Gearhart Fire Station. When people drive to the front of the line, they will be asked to stay in their car, hold up fingers to show the number of masks needed and roll down the window to receive the bag of masks.

— The Astorian

Wave energy project moves a step closer to construction

The federal government has approved a lease for a wave energy test site off the Oregon Coast. An Oregon State University-led project called PacWave has worked for years to build an offshore facility to test wave energy devices. The lease from the federal Bureau of Ocean Energy Management moves the project one step closer to construction, which could begin as early as this summer. Wave energy is quickly becoming a key piece to the renewable energy puzzle. Waves are relatively more consistent and predictable than other renewable energy sources like wind and solar, which gives them enormous potential.

"We like to think of wave as the slow and steady tortoise complement to the full speed and stop character of wind and solar," said Burke Hales, a professor of oceanography at Oregon State and chief scientist for PacWave. The industry has struggled to get off the ground. One reason is because wave energy devices need to be tested at scale in the ocean. Putting these large pieces of infrastructure into the water requires a comprehensive regulatory process and a lot of money. A first-of-its-kind wave energy project proposed off the coast at Reedsport actually fizzled in 2014 due to high startup costs. The PacWave facility would provide a designated spot in the ocean about 7 miles off the coast at Newport to test wave energy technologies, eliminating many of those costs.

— Oregon Public Broadcasting

Lawmakers take aim at loophole in state gun law

SALEM — So many people are buying guns in Oregon these days that the state police are often unable to complete background checks in time, allowing the sales to proceed if the deadline isn't met. A handful of Democratic lawmakers have now put forward a bill in the Legislature that would close this loophole. It's often called the Charleston loophole because Dylann Roof was able to buy a gun that way, and then murder nine Black people at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina, in 2015.

"You have the power to prevent a similar act of violence here in Oregon," Sharon Risher, whose mother and two cousins were killed in the church, said in virtual testimony Thursday before the state House Judiciary Committee.

In Oregon, it's up to the state police to do a background check. And they are warning that they are overwhelmed.

In 2019, the Oregon State Police completed 276,912 background checks, said Maj. Tom Worthy. In 2020, that total rose by 51% to 418,061. "We saw exponential growth that we've never seen before," Worthy told a committee of the Legislature on Thursday. "I can tell you that the unit is not staffed for that volume, and it would be impossible for us to stay current based on our current employees that we have."

— Associated Press

DEATHS

Feb. 17, 2021

COZART, Melinda L., 61, of Astoria, died in Astoria. Ocean View Funeral & Cremation Service of Astoria is in charge of the

arrangements.

McMULLIN, Gregory Kay, 71, of Astoria, died in Portland. Caldwell's Luce-Layton Mortuary of Astoria is in charge of the arrangements.

PUBLIC MEETINGS

MONDAY

Jewell School Board, 6 p.m., Jewell School Library, 83874 state Highway 103.

Seaside City Council, 7 p.m., (electronic meeting).

TUESDAY

Clatsop Care Health District Board, 5 p.m., (electronic meeting).

Sunset Empire Park and Recreation District Board, 5:15 p.m., (electronic meeting).

Astoria Planning Commission, 5:30 p.m., City Hall, 1095 Duane St.

Warrenton City Commission, 6 p.m., City Hall, 225 S. Main Ave.

'Zoom bomb' rattles Seaside School District

Meeting disrupted by slurs, profanity

By R.J. MARX
The Astorian

SEASIDE — During a livestreamed Seaside School District board meeting this month, listeners were hearing from board chairman Mark Truax and Superintendent Susan Penrod when 7 1/2 minutes in the screen was hijacked.

"At this time the meeting was interrupted by unknown parties, using racial slurs and profanity, as well as violent images," the school district wrote in board meeting minutes. "Muting all participants did not stop the audio or video. All participants were put back into the waiting room while staff discussed how to proceed. After reviewing participants and setting all to be muted, the meeting was resumed."

The resumption came with an immediate apology from the superintendent. "I'd like to apologize to everybody for what happened," Penrod said. "Those words and video were very offensive. We do not tolerate that and I'm very sorry that happened."

According to school district policy, when a staff member learns of a potential bias incident, they will prioritize the safety and well-being of everyone impacted and promptly report the incident to the building or program administrator.

"Our district investigates any incident that involves hate or racist language," Penrod said before Tuesday's board meeting. "In addition, we adopted the policy named 'All Students Belong' in December, which requires us to report the results of our investigation to our staff and families."

District policy mandates

responding staff "recognize the experience of all persons impacted, acknowledge the impact, commit to taking immediate action, and prevent further harm against those persons impacted from taking place."

The administrator will determine responsibility within 10 days of receiving the complaint. Responses aim to protect those impacted and provide "accountability and transformation for people who cause harm."

If any party is not satisfied with the outcome, they may appeal the district's decision.

Penrod called the incident "very frustrating."

The investigation conducted by the district office and technology coordinator Don Mespelt determined the incident could have been caused by one or many different people using software to conceal their identities. Similar incidents have

happened in school districts across the U.S. and at other public meetings.

"We're trying to work with Zoom to uncover the identities of the individuals," Penrod said. "The school district is dedicated to providing equitable, safe, learning environments as well as inclusive, welcoming meetings, whether virtually or in person."

For now, Zoom and Mespelt recommend following Zoom security recommendations and best practices to prevent further intrusions. The school district may choose to disable the chat function during public meetings.

"We're reworking the policy, the meeting format, and a lot of it has to do with public comment," Truax said. "We haven't decided what will be in place at the March meeting. It will probably be if you have a question, email it in beforehand."



Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

An apartment complex is planned for the empty lot next to Safeway.

Housing: 'Think about Tongue Point'

Continued from Page A1

Astoria, at around 9,700 people with several large apartment complexes in the works, is also nudging up against state requirements for cities of at least 10,000 to add more middle housing — everything between single-family homes and mid- or high-rise apartment buildings.

A majority of councilors and commissioners appear supportive of strategies in the housing study to set minimum zone densities, to the point of prohibiting single-family homes in higher-density R-3 zones, which City Manager Brett Estes said comprises most of the city's vacant buildable land.

"Think about Tongue Point," he said of the large swath of undeveloped federal and private land. "That whole area is zoned R-3, multifamily."

Under city codes, a subdivision of single-family homes could be built in Tongue Point, Estes said. City staff recommended requiring at least duplex-level density in remaining high-density zones.

Planning commissioners, including Daryl Moore and Cindy Price, cautioned against creating too much of an incentive to tear down older but nonhistoric homes. The only protection from most old homes being torn down is historic designation.

"Astoria has a South Slope that is not at all designated historic, as far as I know," Price said. "But that place has beautiful views as well, and is a lot of R-2 that could be subject to the sorts of economic incentives for demolition and bigger buildings."

Height and mass

Commissioners and councilors also appear receptive to increasing the allowed height and mass of buildings in higher-density zones, depending on compatibility with sur-

'THE WORST THING THAT CAN HAPPEN IS TO HAVE THE PLANNING COMMISSION SPEND A YEAR DEVELOPING CODE AMENDMENTS AT OUR DIRECTION, AND THEN AS SOON AS THERE'S SOME COMMUNITY OPPOSITION TO THOSE CODE AMENDMENTS, WE ALL SAY, 'OH NO, NEVER MIND. WE WEREN'T REALLY SERIOUS ABOUT IT.''

Astoria Mayor Bruce Jones

rounding homes. The discussion brought up the former Central School site, two blocks of medium-zoned vacant land along Irving Avenue where multiple housing proposals have fallen to neighbor opposition.

Moore, who has served on the Planning Commission for six years, said building heights have always been the biggest point of resistance, but something he wants to address.

"I think the higher buildings don't block views any more than the lower buildings, except in extreme circumstances," he said.

The City Council has established a goal of building mixed-use, affordable- and market-rate housing project at Heritage Square. Commissioners and councilors appear receptive to adding more high-density housing in such commercial zones.

They were also in favor of lowering off-street parking requirements, noting that Astoria's historic homes often don't meet the requirement and utilize street parking.

"A lot of those homes were built without cars in mind," City Councilor Tom Hilton said. "If we're going to increase housing, we need to streamline some of the

tions quite commonly."

Urban growth boundary

To address a deficit of single-family homes, Estes queued up a discussion for later by the City Council on whether to expand the city's urban growth boundary east. Astoria's city limits stretch east to Tongue Point, far beyond the urban boundaries.

"If we are talking about urban growth boundary swaps or amendments to address our state-noted deficiency, that will be to the south and the west of Coxcomb Hill, in what is many times seen as our urban forest," Estes said.

The process would take several years and likely be expensive enough to require grants, Estes said.

Mayor Bruce Jones opted to hold off on discussing city expansion until a future meeting.

The City Council brought up recommendations to increase density several years ago, but pulled back after community opposition. Jones said councilors need to anticipate community opposition and stick up for good ideas coming from city staff and the Planning Commission.

"The worst thing that can happen is to have the Planning Commission spend a year developing code amendments at our direction, and then as soon as there's some community opposition to those code amendments, we all say, 'Oh no, never mind. We weren't really serious about it,'" the mayor said.

the Astorian

Established July 1, 1873
(USPS 035-000)

Published Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday by EO Media Group, 949 Exchange St., PO Box 210, Astoria, OR 97103 Telephone 503-325-3211, 800-781-3211 or Fax 503-325-6573. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Astorian, PO Box 210, Astoria, OR 97103-0210

DailyAstorian.com
MEMBER OF THE ASSOCIATED PRESS
MEMBER CERTIFIED AUDIT OF CIRCULATIONS, INC.

Circulation phone number:
800-781-3214
Periodicals postage paid at Astoria, OR

ADVERTISING OWNERSHIP
All advertising copy and illustrations prepared by The Astorian become the property of The Astorian and may not be reproduced for any use without explicit prior approval.

COPYRIGHT ©
Entire contents © Copyright,
2021 by The Astorian.

Printed on
recycled paper

Subscription rates
Effective January 12, 2021

MAIL

EZpay (per month).....\$10.75
13 weeks in advance.....\$37.00
26 weeks in advance.....\$71.00
52 weeks in advance.....\$135.00

DIGITAL

EZpay (per month).....\$8.25

WANTED

Alder and Maple Saw Logs & Standing Timber

Northwest Hardwoods • Longview, WA

Contact: John Anderson • 360-269-2500

VOLUNTEER
PICK OF THE WEEK

Peaches

Senior female
Red Tabby

Increase joy in homebound pleasures. In season or out, this sweet treat will always soothe life's little cares.

Sponsored by
Bayshore
Animal Hospital

CLATSOP COUNTY ANIMAL SHELTER
1315 SE 19th St., Warrenton • 861- PETS
www.dogscats.org 🐾 Noon to 4pm, Tues-Sat