

County reports three new virus cases

The Astorian

Clatsop County on Wednesday reported three new coronavirus cases. The cases include a man and a

woman in their 60s living in the northern part of the county and a woman in her 20s living in the southern part of the county.

All three were recovering at

home. The county has recorded 783 cases since the start of the pandemic. According to the county, 18 were hospitalized and six have died.

Vacation rentals: Regulated by two county ordinances

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Gail Henrikson, the county's community development director, said the meetings were an opportunity to explain how the code compliance process works and how they prioritize and address complaints.

"It was also a chance for us to hear all of the concerns that we were getting on a piecemeal basis, but just to (create) a communitywide dialogue so everybody was hearing the same thing at the same time," she said. "And then by hearing that, it also gave staff a chance to begin to identify areas in the ordinance where we needed to make revisions to help us better implement and enforce it."

During the community meetings, residents explained how short-term rentals have impacted their quality of life. Many of the complaints deal with noise, parking and overcrowding. Other complaints are out of the county's control.

Vacation rental owners have described their efforts to be good neighbors and encourage their guests to do the same.

"And they also have concerns about possible changes to the ordinance that may impact how they do business or even possibly eliminate the possibility of them doing business," Henrikson said.

There are two county ordi-



Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

Vacation rentals in Arch Cape are required to book minimum seven-night stays.

nances that regulate vacation rentals. One is specific to Arch Cape, while the other covers the remaining unincorporated parts of the county.

Both are similar, but have a couple of key differences regarding parking and length-of-stay requirements.

The Arch Cape ordinance requires a minimum seven-night stay, and only one reservation is allowed during a seven-day period. Street parking is not allowed. There is no limit or minimum stay requirement for other unincorporated areas, and street parking is allowed.

Commissioners directed staff to set parameters and a scope of work for an ad hoc committee to help combine and reconcile the two ordinances.

"Those would be the two big areas where we would need to have a committee to look at it and determine how best to reconcile," Henrikson said. "Whether it's taking one of the ordinance provisions and recommending that to be adopted or just creating some sort of compromise between the two ordinances."

The board's guidance on other questions could be drafted as amendments. Some of those questions include whether there should be a "three-strikes rule" — requiring staff to revoke a vacation rental permit after three complaints — and penalties for people who knowingly submit false complaints.

Some policy items were provided as a starting point for future discussions, includ-

ing questions about capping short-term rentals, prohibiting them in certain parts of the county and how the lodging tax is utilized.

Henrikson said those items will not be included in the revisions to the ordinances at this time.

"It was so clear to me how much everybody who wrote cared about this issue," said Commissioner Lianne Thompson, who represents South County. "Every single person has this passionate devotion to community well-being. There is not a consensus on what that community well-being looks like, how it's defined, none of it. There's no agreement."

"My concern about establishing a committee would be it would have to have a purview where it looked at what was state law, what were the sidebars. I've seen some things with citizen advisory committees that have caused me great concern."

"There have been a number of proposals that have been in clear violation of state law and have been termed 'aspirational.' Well, I don't have an aspiration to break the state law, and I think it doesn't help the situation when anybody thinks that their will or their whim or their idea or their passion, however we want to characterize it, can have the force of state law or county ordinance."

Crisis response: 'We have urban problems ... rural funding'

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Clatsop Behavioral Healthcare, the county's mental health provider, has a mobile crisis team available to advise law enforcement, help diffuse situations, connect people to treatment and avoid unnecessary hospitalization or arrest.

Baker said the mobile crisis team is only one piece in creating an effective system of care.

"We're very proud of it, but we're also aware of the limitations that the state currently only funds us to the level to have one person working across the county at any given time," Baker told county commissioners at a work session.

"There's a lot of discussion statewide around it is better to do co-response, which means having behavioral health experts or clinicians go out with law enforcement, or the CAHOOTS model, which is a diversion from law enforcement altogether, requiring 911 to carefully screen and send the CAHOOTS van out. I think there is a case that can be made for either. In this particular county, given the fact that we have multiple 911 centers, co-response might be easier."

"But having mobile response in and of itself is not going to help address all the behavioral health needs that we're seeing," she said. "We also have to have a place for

folks to go. And that looks a lot like a crisis stabilization center.

"I know there had been discussion about the North Coast Crisis Respite Center being that crisis stabilization center. And what we have found over the years operating it is that it's really hard to put people who are in psychiatric crisis into a treatment environment where people are living there full time at the same time. It's sort of like what would happen to your household if you brought somebody in who was really struggling and you're trying to maintain the stability of everybody else."

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Amy Baker | executive director of Clatsop Behavioral Healthcare

Baker thinks the rapid access center planned for the agency's Bond Street site in Astoria can serve more of that function and be a place for police to drop people off when they are in crisis. The opening of the center is dependent on when the agency can hire staff, which Baker said has been a challenge, in part due to housing.

"That crisis stabilization center, I think certainly is a need," said Mark Kujala,

the chairman of the Board of Commissioners, who represents Warrenton, where the crisis respite center is located. "And many of us, I think naively so, thought that the respite center was going to address that and become the bridge between the hospital and jail. And I know that it hasn't done that — and never probably was intended to be that — but it certainly is a glaring need within the community."

Baker said she would love the rapid access center to be open 24/7, "but we don't have the funding or the staffing capacity for that."

She said some of the biggest barriers to providing care continue to be a lack of funding and affordable and transitional housing.

"I think one of Clatsop's unique challenges is that we're like a rural county, except that we have urban problems — in part due to our proximity to Portland — except that we have rural funding," she said. "So it's kind of a double whammy there."

Baker and Phillips also

addressed the state's high threshold for civil commitment, which, in many cases, ties the hands of law enforcement, mental health providers and hospitals from being able to properly assist people in crisis because they cannot force people to accept help.

"The Oregon Court of Appeals certainly values liberty much above an individual's well-being, unless the threat to well-being is imminent and very serious," Phillips said. "And the primary concern has always been preserving someone's liberty and avoiding stigma. But I think most people would agree that someone who is suffering a serious mental illness is probably not wholly at liberty or free from stigma. The consequence, certainly, of having a very limited civil commitment process is that it then diverts people to the criminal justice system, which certainly has greater stigma and potentially greater loss of liberty."

The sheriff said he would like to see the mobile crisis team expanded but acknowledged the limits of outreach.

"We can reach out, and certainly repetition is sometimes helpful — being consistent in reaching out to people. But sometimes we can't legally compel someone to engage in services or to get treatment," Phillips said. "And the hospitals have the same thresholds to work within, so it's difficult."

Port: 'We're trying to run a lean facility here'

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more than \$4,700 a month by 2026. The original term lasts 20 years, with four five-year renewal options.

"There's a lot of components moving along with this," McGrath said. "Helligso Construction is working on getting the site prepped and should be able to start work once the city of Warrenton gives the approval."

Scoular hopes to open the plant in the spring. By then, the Port will install a pressurized sewer system to cut down on tidal infiltration at the airport swamping Warrenton's wastewater treatment plant.

"I think it's very exciting to see the Port move forward on this," said Dirk Rohne, the president of the Port Commission.

The lease comes as Scoular is moving through the approval process to join the Clatsop Enterprise Zone, which offers five years of property tax breaks on new investments.

The company's application, along with another from the owners of Buoy Beer Co., has been approved by the Astoria City Council but still needs the signoff from the Port, Warrenton and Clatsop County.

As part of the enterprise zone, Scoular would save an estimated \$641,000 on property taxes over five years in exchange for building the plant and creating new, higher-paying jobs.

Tom Wortmann, director of corporate development and strategy at Scoular, said the new positions would include a plant manager, quality manager, finance manager and other skilled operators.

"We're trying to run a lean facility here, so a skilled operator is someone that knows how to run the equipment, and if it breaks, knows how to fix the equipment," he said at a recent primer on enterprise zones. "I think you'll see a very skilled workforce we're looking to employ here."

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Hotel: City has until end of May to issue new decision on permits

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one-year extension of permits in June. He argued the coronavirus pandemic had made financing for new hotels almost impossible, making his project eligible for more time because of an economic hardship.

The city maintained that Hollander had 18 months before the pandemic to start construction. City staff noted that two other projects — the Bowline Hotel under construction near Buoy Beer Co. and a Hilton Home2 Suites being planned near

the New Youngs Bay Bridge — proved a viable market for new hotel construction during the pandemic. Staff also cited its discretion to consider new, more restrictive building rules inspired by a public backlash to the height and size of Hollander's project.

The City Council upheld staff's findings. Hollander, who argued that his project was not the same as the other hotels, appealed to the state Land Use Board of Appeals, which sided with the developer.

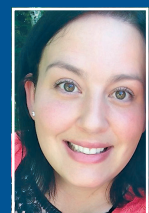
"At a minimum, the City

Council was required to explain why it chose not to rely on petitioner's evidence of poor market conditions and instead chose to rely on evidence of other hotels that petitioner explained are not similarly situated and may or may not have received financing," the appeals board said.

The appeals board also ruled that the city could use new, more restrictive building rules as an argument against a hotel approved prior to their adoption. If he can't win the appeal, Hollander faces significantly shrinking the hotel to preserve views of the river.

City Attorney Blair Henningsgaard said Monday the reopened record would allow city staff to submit more evidence regarding the progress of the Bowline and Hilton projects from when Hollander's hotel was approved and when he sought an extension of permits.

City Manager Brett Estes said the earliest the City Council could hold a new hearing on Hollander's project would be the second meeting in April. The city has until the end of May to issue a new decision on Hollander's permits.



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