

IN BRIEF

Pacific County's unemployment rate highest in all of Pacific Northwest

LONG BEACH, Wash. — For the second consecutive month, workers in Pacific County are unemployed not just at a higher rate than every other county in Washington state, but in all of the Pacific Northwest.

The newest monthly unemployment figures, released by the Washington State Employment Security Department on Tuesday, pegs the county's January unemployment rate at 10.3%. The preliminary estimate is up slightly from the revised 10.1% unemployment rate in December, up from a pandemic low of 8.1% in October and up from last January's 7.2% rate.

Unemployment data from Oregon and Idaho indicate that not only does Pacific County have the worst unemployment rate in the state, but that it has the worst unemployment rate for any county in the region. In Washington, neighboring Grays Harbor County saw its unemployment rate stay steady at 9.5%, and Wahkiakum County's unemployment rate decreased from 7.4% to 6.3% — lower than what it was last January.

While the unemployment rate stayed mostly static from the previous month, the county's critical leisure and hospitality industry again faced steep losses. Non-farm employment dropped from roughly 5,500 jobs in December to 5,310 jobs in January, a loss of about 190 jobs overall. More than 75% of jobs lost in the county came in the tourism-reliant industry, which shed 150 jobs.

Year-over-year, employment in the hospitality industry is down 22.5% from last January. Manufacturers have also been hit hard over the past year, with employment down a staggering 37.4%. Government jobs, the largest group of workers in the county, are down 7.8%.

Pacific County unveiling latest vaccine appointment system

SOUTH BEND, Wash. — With COVID-19 vaccines slated to become more widely available in the coming days and weeks, the Pacific County Health and Human Services Department is gearing up to unveil a new system for scheduling vaccine appointments that it hopes will lighten the load on the department's staff.

The new system comes via the software program PrepMod, according to Katie Lindstrom, the county's health director. The program, once someone is eligible to be vaccinated and there is enough local supply, will email the individual a unique link that allows the person to schedule their own appointment.

The system used up until this point has consisted of county employees spending hours on the phone, manually calling people on a waitlist thousands of names long.

"It should be a game-changer for us. Up until now, I would say for each daylong vaccine clinic it's probably two days worth of multiple people working to schedule and do paperwork for (the clinic)," Lindstrom said.

— *Chinook Observer*

'Wildfire Wednesdays' on tap through June

The Oregon State University Extension Fire Program has launched "Wildfire Wednesdays," a lunch-and-learn webinar series.

The statewide campaign is intended to help Oregonians prepare for wildfires through greater awareness and actions.

The webinars will be at noon on alternating Wednesdays in March through June.

For more information, links to recorded webinars or to register, visit beav.es/FAFP. People can also email amanda.brenner@oregonstate.edu or call 503-655-8631.

— *The Astorian*

DEATHS

March 15, 2021

JAY, Craig Scott, 59, of Roseburg, formerly of Astoria, died in Portland. A service announcement is pending.

MacDONALD, Stacey Elizabeth, 47, of Astoria, died in Astoria. Caldwell's Luce-Layton Mortuary of Astoria is in charge of the arrangements.

ON THE RECORD

Luring

• Jesus Daniel Walter Sass, 23, was arraigned Tuesday on three counts of luring a minor, online sexual corruption of a child in the first degree and online sexual corruption of a child in the second degree.

DUII

• Ricky Lee Saari, 63, of Astoria, was arrested Tuesday on Jerome Avenue and 16th Street in Astoria for driving

under the influence of intoxicants.

• Jose Antonio Madrigal, 37, of Sunnyside, Washington, was arrested Tuesday on S. Franklin Street and Avenue A in Seaside for DUII.

• Crystal M. Hansen, 36, of Longview, Washington, was arrested Saturday on U.S. Highway 30 near Tongue Point in Astoria for DUII and reckless driving.

PUBLIC MEETINGS

THURSDAY

Seaside Transportation Advisory Commission, 6 p.m., City Hall, 989 Broadway.

Study shows low housing inventory in Gearhart

Affordable housing remains a top need

By R.J. MARX
The Astorian

GEARHART — The city has significantly less housing capacity than previously identified, Matt Hastie, of Angelo Planning, told a joint workshop of the City Council and Planning Commission.

"We did find a pretty significant difference in the residential capacity, from 700, in the updated analysis, to almost 381 units," Hastie said at the meeting last week.

The results show a need for 234 new housing units by 2038.

"We found, on paper at least, there is enough land to satisfy that 20-year demand," he said. "What that means, the city doesn't have the information or the basis to justify an urban growth boundary expansion."

Nevertheless, the city could update the comprehensive plan, zoning ordinances and other policies to ensure that affordable housing demand is met, Hastie said.

After a Clatsop County housing study delivered by Angelo Planning and Johnson Economics in 2019, Gearhart hired consultants to do a fine-grain analysis, City Planner Carole Connell said.

The building and land analysis, approved a year ago and delivered at a cost of about \$12,000, used statewide guidelines to identify buildable lands, along with Portland State University population projections, as a

ABOUT 60% OF HOUSING UNITS ARE CLASSIFIED AS VACANT AND THE MAJORITY OF THEM ARE OWNED AND USED AS SECOND OR VACATION HOMES. MORE TYPICAL VACANCY RATES FOR COMMUNITIES IN OREGON ARE CLOSER TO 5%.

basis of future estimates.

Cities are required to maintain a 20-year supply of land to accommodate projected growth for housing and other needs. If the city finds that it does not have enough land to meet its long-term needs, it potentially would need to expand its urban growth boundary.

"We took all of that information that we prepared for this project, plus all the information in the previous document, and that's what we're presenting at the meeting," Hastie said. "The city asked us to take a closer look at the buildable lands inventory and come up with an estimate what your supply of land for residential development looks like to get a better understanding of what properties are constrained and how does that affect capacity."

The discrepancy in numbers between the 2019 county study and this year's study comes from a closer look at specific properties being developed, areas constrained by the tsunami inundation zone, dune zone and conservation easements.

The city has some provisions in code that require

use of an adjacent lot by the same owner to be reserved for septic use, rather than for a second house, Hastie added. "We had not factored that into the earlier analysis but did factor it into the updated analysis," he said.

About 60% of housing units are classified as vacant and the majority of them are owned and used as second or vacation homes. More typical vacancy rates for communities in Oregon are closer to 5%.

According to the study, there is a need for more rental supply for lower and moderately priced rental units. Almost 90% of the city's 1,840 housing units are described as single-family detached. Rentals make up about 16% of those units.

The greatest need for rental units is found at the lowest and middle price points, the study found. To improve supply, land could be rezoned for that purpose, or the land could be an outright use in the medium-density zone, Hastie said.

The city could promote accessory dwelling units, encourage cottage cluster housing and streamline off-street parking requirements

to increase the availability of on-street parking in different neighborhoods.

The city's zoning code needs an update to show that the housing is allowed, on what size lots and what density. "We've provided some of those amendments," Hastie said.

The report identifies comprehensive plan policies that could be changed or updated to determine if they are best practices for cities.

"One would be to expand the range of housing types that you need to be consistent with what the earlier housing study said," Hastie said. "Two, would be to have a more explicit policy to talk about support for development for housing available for low and moderate incomes."

While larger cities are required to update the study every six years, Hastie recommended Gearhart review the study every five years, as a matter of course, as well as Portland State University's population updates.

"Portland State University is regularly updating their projections," he said. "They do annual population estimates for cities, and when the census comes out, they go back and recalibrate all their estimates to be consistent with the estimates."

"If you think the trends were identified previously or off base, I'd encourage you to participate in that process," Hastie said. "You ought to take a look at that and see how that supply looks like."

"It is pretty wonky stuff, even for planners like myself," he added.



R.J. Marx/The Astorian

Spay and Neuter Thrift Store volunteers Patti Rouse, Jan Benfield and Annie Berge.

Big gift lifts Spay and Neuter Thrift Store

By R.J. MARX
The Astorian

SEASIDE — Two donations totaling \$9,000 to the Spay and Neuter Thrift Store will offset a year of losses because of the coronavirus pandemic.

"This covers much of our COVID losses and also helps us install a much-needed water heater," Patti Rouse, the store's president, said. "We are so thankful for those who are remembering us in their estates, and with their donations."

More than 800 dogs and cats benefited from the thrift store's contributions in 2020. The shop provides owners \$50 vouchers for a surgery bill for cats and \$70 for dogs, to be redeemed for services at any veterinarian in Clatsop County. There is no limit to the number of animals per owner that may receive vouchers.

Last year, the pandemic all but shut down the shop, with limited revenue as a result

'THIS COVERS MUCH OF OUR COVID LOSSES AND ALSO HELPS US INSTALL A MUCH-NEEDED WATER HEATER. WE ARE SO THANKFUL FOR THOSE WHO ARE REMEMBERING US IN THEIR ESTATES, AND WITH THEIR DONATIONS.'

Patti Rouse | president of the Spay and Neuter Thrift Store

and a drop in donations.

In November, the shop gave out \$3,150 in coupons. Despite good sales, it saw a loss of almost \$500. In December, the shop distributed almost \$5,000, but the loss after expenses was \$2,374. In January the shop gave out \$1,870 in coupons, with a loss of \$120.

"Our landlords forgave half the rent for two months, which was an amazing help," Rouse said. "Then we reopened, but with less than

half of our previous hours. Most volunteers were not wanting exposure to customers. The few who were comfortable asked we have two-hour shifts since masks are required."

Meanwhile, the need to spay and neuter pets continued, as well as cash donations to the South County Food Bank and the Clatsop County animal shelter.

"We give \$300 a month to the food bank for pet food," Rouse said. "We give \$500 a

month to the Clatsop County shelter to help them pay for spaying and neutering."

The shop also gives \$300 a month to the River Song Foundation, a group based in the county that spays and neuters feral cats, among other animal assistance programs.

"We are only open six hours a week, and we're giving out over \$5,000 a month in coupons to spay and neuter your pets," Rouse said. "To make that money up is huge."

Volunteers process donations, clean, sort and haul things to Goodwill. Some volunteer just one day a week, Rouse said. "Our shifts are about three hours," she said. "We are always looking for volunteers."

So far this year, 185 animals have been spayed or neutered, Rouse said. The shop is open Monday, Tuesday and Thursday from noon to 2 p.m., and will open Fridays from noon to 2 p.m. starting March 26.

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