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CORONAVIRUS



Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

Astoria will stop collecting taxes for the Astor West Urban Renewal District.

Astoria spreads urban renewal wealth

Tax collections end for west side district

By EDWARD STRATTON
The Astorian

Local governments can budget for an additional \$803,000 in funding after Astoria opted to stop collecting taxes for the Astor West Urban Renewal District.

The property tax money will instead flow back to local governments, including around \$407,000 that Astoria plans to spend on several full-time positions to help with planning, emergency preparedness and community policing.

The City Council, in its role as the Astoria Development Commission, created the Astor West Urban Renewal District in 2002 to fund improvement projects from the Astoria Bridge to Smith Point. The fund has collected a maximum indebtedness — the amount that can be spent on projects — of \$9.1 million. It is projected to have \$5.3 million left for future projects.

Without the urban renewal collections, the State School Fund is in line for another \$246,000 in funding next fiscal year, Clatsop County another \$76,000 and Clatsop Community College more than \$39,000.

City Manager Brett Estes recommended not increasing the maximum indebtedness and instead using the money to hire several new positions to help turn the City Council's two-year policy goals into action.



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Astoria plans to add an emergency preparedness and fire marshal position in the Astoria Fire Department.

A new urban planner would help with code amendments amid a deluge of development activity. A new joint fire marshal and emergency manager would help enact a more proactive approach to fire safety and disaster preparedness. And a part-time police position would help with a community policing presence to address quality-of-life issues.

Mayor Bruce Jones called the situation a "win-win," with \$5.3 million left over in the urban renewal fund to help improve Uniontown. He

singled out the help for community development with City Planner Barbara Fryer out on leave but working part time.

"We know how far behind staff is on work in that department because of the lack of manpower," Jones said. "And we've all identified resilience — and specifically resilience for disaster preparedness in earthquakes (from) the Cascadia Subduction Zone — as a huge gap."

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Astoria schools opt out of state testing

A burden during the pandemic

By KATIE FRANKOWICZ
The Astorian

Students in the Astoria School District will not have to participate in state testing this year.

The federal government recently approved a request from Oregon to waive statewide assessment requirements because of the impacts of the coronavirus pandemic and the limited opportunities many students have had for on-site learning. However, limited testing at each grade level, starting at third grade, will be required.

If parents in the school district still want their children to take the state's Smarter Balanced assessment, they can opt in and the district will provide students with an opportunity to take the test.

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Vaccine eligibility expands

New virus cases are climbing

By NICOLE BALES
The Astorian

Clatsop County is vaccinating the remaining priority groups against the coronavirus as eligibility opens to all adults in Oregon on Monday.

As virus cases continue to climb throughout the state, more counties are also expected to move into higher risk levels.

Dr. Dean Sidelinger, the state's epidemiologist, said Friday that while Oregon is approaching a milestone of offering vaccines to everyone 16 and older, the state is also confronting emerging and more contagious variants of the virus.

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Miss Oregon to return to Seaside

A hybrid event planned for June

By R.J. MARX
The Astorian

SEASIDE — Miss Oregon will be back in June.

The Scholarship program, canceled last year because of the coronavirus pandemic, will return to the

Seaside Civic and Convention Center from June 16 through June 19.

Director Beth McShane said it will be a hybrid event, with both a live audience and a livestream. In-person activities will be conducted under the Oregon Health Authority's guidance for indoor entertainment.

Hosting the pageant will signify the beginning of a slow return to pre-pandemic normalcy, Russ Vandenberg, the general manager of the convention center, said.

"I couldn't be more delighted to see the return of this organization and others as they make their way

back to Seaside," he said.

In 2020, the directors of the Miss Oregon and Miss Oregon Outstanding Teen competitions canceled the events over virus concerns.

"As you can imagine, 2020 found us at a loss," McShane said. "Contracts canceled. Loss of events. Loss of fundraisers. Loss of revenue. Our commitment to providing scholarships for women throughout Oregon remains steadfast, and we plan to offer over \$300,000 in scholarships for young women across Oregon."

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Miss North Coast Caitlin Hillman, left, and Miss Clatsop County Haylie Moon ride on a vintage fire engine last year.



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