

# School: ‘We haven’t made any definite decisions’

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In meetings Tuesday night to answer parents questions about next school year, Superintendent Craig Hoppes thanked parents for their patience and flexibility during a difficult year.

“We were learning as everybody was — on the go,” he said.

Astoria was particularly cautious when it came to moving away from online classrooms, or distance learning. While some other school districts on the North Coast shifted operations regularly based on changing state and local coronavirus case metrics, Astoria opted to begin online and stay online for much of the fall and winter.

District leaders felt this approach made the most sense for public safety and ease of operations. They wanted to avoid a situation where they opened classroom doors only to have to abruptly close them again.

Now, Hoppes is hopeful that any changes to their plan will only be progressive,



Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

**Astor Elementary School students cheer as seniors make their way past the school in June.**

changes that allow the district to open up even more.

Still, many students have had a fractured school year. Online classes worked for some, but not for many. District leaders and teachers have expressed their concern about who was left behind and even the lack of engagement among students who hadn’t struggled with school before.

Like other school districts, Astoria is providing an edu-

cational enrichment program for students across grade levels this summer. Previously, these kinds of offerings would be more academic, geared for students who needed additional tutoring or help catching up in certain subjects.

There will still be an educational component this summer, but the focus is on fun and engaging activities,

said Eva Hague, the school districts’s summer school

coordinator.

The free camps, made possible by a grant through the Oregon Department of Education, run from July 4 through Aug. 12, with transportation and meals provided. The sessions include a range of options: theater, crafts, band and orchestra camps, afternoon sports activities, a close read of the “Star Wars” movies and more.

The school district is not looking to gather any infor-

mation or data; there won’t be any testing.

“Really it’s a social-emotional focus, of making this a healthy, inviting place to be,” Hague said.

In Seaside, Superintendent Susan Penrod said the school district is also looking ahead to a full-time schedule for students in the fall.

“We are planning to bring back kids five days a week,” she said. “We completely reworked what teaching and learning have looked like. Together, we’ve been able to bring our students back on-site this spring, which was no easy feat. So we’re excited to have them back full time this fall.”

Masks will still be required for students and drivers on buses. The school district plans to develop protocols for entry and screening of students into buildings, as well as cleaning and disinfecting. All students are required to wear appropriate face coverings indoors.

Students, staff and other adults will not be required to wear face coverings outdoors

for physical education, recess and other activities.

Fully vaccinated staff will be required to wear masks indoors only when students are in school.

The school district surveyed families after school resumed on-site instruction to see if they wanted to stay in a virtual program or a full-time in-person classroom.

“They want it to be in the building,” Penrod said. “Very, very few parents shared that they would want to stay in the same online option, not enough for us to be able to offer something from our teachers.”

After a school year of stops and starts, Penrod made it clear that protocols remain fluid.

“These are conversations that the leadership team is still having, and we haven’t made any definite decisions,” she told the school board. “We know that over the summer, things are going to change. But we want to let you know that this is the plan.”

*R.J. Marx contributed to this report.*

## Housing: ‘We’re in the game long term’

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“So our question to stakeholders and partners was, ‘What can the county do to move the needle on housing?’” he said. “And knowing that we have limited resources and, frankly, we have limited expertise in housing development.”

There were five suggestions, and fundamentally, Bohn said, there was a desire for the county to act as an advocate and a convener.

Bohn laid out the suggestions to county commissioners.

One of the most vital resources the county can bring to the table is land, Bohn said. He shared options that are available for potential affordable housing development in Astoria and Warrenton.

Beyond that, he said, the county will work with cities and review codes, zoning requirements and other regulations that impact affordable housing development.

“And then it’s to play this continual role as we move forward to have long-standing reciprocal relationships with these nonprofit housing providers so that we can have a steady stream of projects within the county,” Bohn said. “Because this isn’t a one-time challenge. This is an ongoing, sustainable challenge of building additional units overtime.”

“We’re also fortunate that some of our nonprofit partners, like CBH (Clatsop Behavioral Healthcare), are also going to be getting into the housing business, which is great. And their focus is really on permanent supportive housing, which fits a very important niche. But it’s going to take all of us to do our small part to make a difference that the community needs.”

As far as who will facilitate the work on behalf of the county, Bohn said there are several different options, including funding a position at the Northwest Oregon Housing Authority that focuses specifically on housing development in Clatsop County. The housing authority provides critical housing assistance to low-income residents in Clatsop, Columbia and Tillamook counties.

“Whether that is ultimately an idea that has legs is not fully developed yet, but that’s one of the options,” Bohn said. “The other option is that we hire a county staff to facilitate these kinds of partnerships or a consultant. So there’s a number of options and we’re still working through that.”

### Commissioner support

County commissioners were supportive of the framework.

Commissioner Lianne Thompson said she would like the board to have a role in the process and serve on an advisory committee for the work.

Bohn said that while he does envision an advisory committee for ongoing collaboration, he wants to get the ball rolling.

“And again, we just need to put the shovel in the ground from my perspective and just start this process, because there is muscle memory that is important to these affordable housing projects,” he said. “And we just don’t have that muscle memory right now because we haven’t done it together. And so I think staff is just eager to get the process started.”

Commissioner Pamela Wev said she liked the idea of the county being an ambitious convener.

“I’ve been real disappointed after we did the housing study, which remember was half-funded — 50 grand from the county and 10 (grand) from each of the cities — and I have seen very little results coming from that, including from our standpoint,” she said.

Thompson was also happy to see movement. “County manager, assistant county manager, thank you for this work,” she said. “It’s inspiring. It’s hopeful. We are getting in the game. As Commissioner Wev points out, we had a housing study. The board that existed then was unwilling to have a commission be involved with that. So it really kind of cut the legs off. Now you’re putting the wheels back on the bus. So we’re going to get on the road.”

“Now where we go and how much horsepower we have — if I can continue the metaphor — we’ll see. But we’re in the game. We’re in the game long term. We’re in the game to build capacity locally, regionally, across the state. We’re well begun.”

## Risk: One of 22 counties that will be at lower risk through June 24

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Clatsop County have received at least one dose of vaccine, according to the Oregon Health Authority.

Margo Lalich, the county’s interim public health director, said the county is working on vaccinating more people though smaller, more targeted pop-up vaccination clinics. She expects the county will reach 65%.

“At this point in time Clatsop County would be very hard pressed to get to 70% at any point soon,” Lalich said during a county Board of Commissioners work session on Tuesday.

Clatsop County is one of 22 counties that will be at lower risk through June 24. Five counties will be at moderate risk and nine will be at high risk.

Counties with a population of 30,000 or more are evaluated for risk based on virus cases per 100,000 over two weeks and the test positivity rate for the same period.

Counties at lower risk have a case rate under 50 per 100,000 people, and may have a test positivity of 5% or less.

As of Saturday, Clatsop County had 40 cases per 100,000 over a two-week period. Test positivity was 3.2%.

## Agency: ‘A step forward for Seaside’

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offers in-person services and groups for people with mental health issues and for those in recovery from substance abuse.

Baker said she looked at the buildings in Seaside on a Friday and made an offer the following Monday because properties were being purchased so quickly.

The former 2nd Chance Bargains will be used for outpatient services now being conducted for about 250 patients a year at the agency’s Seaside clinic. They will close the agency’s S. Holladay Drive location, which the organization rents.

The former Seaside Antiques and Collectibles, a neighbor to City Hall, will become a five-bed shelter.

“When I say shelter, what I mean is not what most people mean,” Baker said. “People will live there, God willing, for three to four months until we can find them something more permanent.”

The two-story facility will have three single bedrooms and one double bedroom.

Common areas will include a group meeting and social room, dining area and kitchen. An Americans with Disabilities Act-accessible bathroom and bedroom will be located on the first floor.

The three units underneath the building will eventually be permanent supported housing.

The shelter will be staffed 24

hours a day, she said.

People will have intensive support services to help them maintain employment and actively engage in sober support if they are in recovery.

The initial cost of renovation was \$400,000, but has increased with the cost of materials and the price of lumber, Baker said. “We now expect to pay close to \$500,000 to renovate the three apartments, the green house and the clinic,” she said.

Baker said she hopes additional funding from the state Legislature will allow the agency to hire at least two more staff, embedding one person in the Seaside Police Department and one in the Astoria Police Department, where the bulk of crisis calls come in.

“We have one mental health counselor who’s on at any given time and a manager during business hours,” Baker said. “With a county the size of Clatsop, it’s really hard to be available to respond to all the different calls that we have.”

Agency funding increases, including potential federal and state dollars, could add staffing and provide quicker and more flexible responses.

“I, for one, call this a step forward for Seaside,” Mayor Jay Barber said. “It will really benefit the people that you’re serving. Keep us posted as things go along. Our neighbors will be interested to know how it develops, and how we can help you and support you.”

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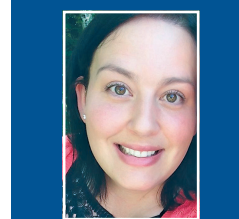
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