

Column: ‘The Astoria Column is our logo’

Continued from Page A1

But due to the close quarters inside the Column, Pynes said they withheld announcing the reopening widely in hopes of avoiding a “stampede” of visitors all at once. They plan to make an official announcement on Thursday.

Pynes said the sales of parking passes atop Coxcomb Hill, which cost \$5 for a calendar year, dropped significantly last year due to the closure of the Column. Some visitors complained they had to pay to park but could not climb up to the viewing deck of the 125-foot high landmark.

“It was inconvenient and a little bit of an irritant having the monument closed,” Van Dusen said.

But as most coronavirus restrictions in Oregon are



Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

The Astoria Column has reopened to visitors.

lifted, Pynes and Van Dusen are thrilled visitors can return to witness a “360-degree view.”

“It’s great to see the kids at the top throwing off airplanes again,” Pynes said. “You can hear the adults, too ... It feels great to be getting back to normal.”

The “airplanes” are the

balsa wood gliders sold for a dollar each in the gift shop next to the Column. Thousands of gliders are sold each year.

Shawn and Lorrie Taylor were two of the many people who made the trip up Coxcomb Hill since the Column’s reopening. The couple moved to Astoria last

year, but hadn’t been inside and atop the monument in over two decades. When they heard about the reopening, they came back to get a view from the top. This time, Shawn Taylor brought a glider to throw off the viewing deck.

“The view is just stunning,” Taylor said while glancing out at the peaks in the distance.

Pynes and Van Dusen pointed to the history and significance the Column brings to Astoria, and are grateful that it is reopened to the hundreds of thousands of visitors it draws every year.

“The Astoria Column is our logo,” Van Dusen said. “It is a wonderful piece of art, along with a nice monument and a beautiful story. We just hope everyone can enjoy it.”

Land use: Some take issue with the approach

Continued from Page A1

Commissioners have said the steps are necessary to clarify roles and responsibilities. But planning commissioners and some people involved with the advisory committees have argued that while the public process can be messy, it is fundamental to Oregon’s land use planning goals.

“In our capacity as members of the governing body, it’s our job to appoint various groups to fulfill our mission of caring for the people of the place,” Commissioner Lianne Thompson said during a work session in June. “Those appointed positions are necessarily more limited in scope and authority.”

“What I saw was that we as a governing body had not been clear enough in the role definitions with which we empowered you to work for us and the people of Clatsop County. So that’s why we did the pause. That’s why we said we have to clarify roles and responsibilities.”

‘Aspirational’

The concerns raised were mainly over policies proposed in the Northeast and Southwest Coastal advisory committees. The county referred to some of the proposals as “aspirational” and said the committees need to stay within the boundaries of the law.

Commissioner Courtney Bangs and some in the timber industry also questioned items in the draft of a planning goal that addresses for

estlands. Public comments about the goal described the suggested policies as an overreach and called the proposed regulations of industrial timberlands illegal.

Commissioners agreed on a new framework with a target completion date of July 2022. Gail Henrikson, the county’s community development director, said parameters will be provided to guide the process.

The citizen advisory committees will take six months to focus solely on updating their respective community plans. The Planning Commission and county-wide advisory committee will complete the review of the goals together rather than separately.

In early May, Henrikson canceled Planning Commission meetings scheduled for May, June and July. In an email to planning commissioners, she said no applications had been submitted to the county that would require a hearing before August.

Henrikson said that, in the meantime, county staff would prepare new training material for planning commissioners and review the Planning Commission bylaws. A joint meeting between the Board of Commissioners and the Planning Commission is planned for July.

The significant changes to the bylaws would include removing variance review from the Planning Commission’s scope of authority, establishing term limits and allowing the removal of a planning commissioner for two or more unexcused

absences. Other changes include outlining responsibilities for the chair, vice chair and staff and guidance for conduct and appearance of bias.

“I was pleased to see such common-sense rules and responsibilities basically outlined by staff at the request of the Board of Commissioners,” Bangs said during a work session in June. “You addressed attendance and decorum and respect and following Oregon state rules and laws in conjunction with the goals of the county governing body.”

“So basically you’ve outlined similar expectations of a traditional job, in my personal opinion. Work as a team for a common goal, and that goal is economic success, health and well-being of our county.”

Bangs said she was saddened by a few emails she saw in response to the draft, calling the feedback “open malice.”

Because discussions about Planning Commission bylaws and the comprehensive plan have taken place during work sessions — which typically do not provide time for public comment — feedback to commissioners has largely taken place outside of meetings.

‘Very concerned’

Some planning commissioners and citizen advisory committee members told The Astorian that while they are not necessarily at odds with all the changes made by the county, they take issue with the approach.

Projects: ‘I didn’t get everything I asked for’

Continued from Page A1

The money allocated to the library renovation will go toward needed upgrades, including to the reading room so it will comply with Americans with Disabilities Act guidelines.

The Columbia River Maritime Museum will receive a \$304,378 grant from state lottery bond proceeds for preservation of the Lightship Columbia.

Clatsop Community College will get \$8.1 million in general obligation bond money for a maritime sciences hall.

Chris Breitmeyer, the college president, said he is pleased the building was approved for funding again. “That was an appropriation that was awarded a couple years ago but we had to extend the deadline because of the pandemic,” he said.

The college would have needed to raise \$8 million by this year in order to get these matching funds from state lottery bonds. But the coronavirus pandemic came with uncertainty, and would-be donors were not ready to contribute. The deadline was extended and now the college has more time to come up with the matching amount.

Cannon Beach will receive \$360,000 in fed-

eral virus relief money for earthquake and tsunami resilience.

In Arch Cape, the water district will get \$2 million in infrastructure grant money for the Arch Cape forest project.

Phil Chick, the manager for the water district, said he’s very grateful for the money.

The funds will help the water district move forward with the purchase of 1,521 acres of commercial timberland surrounding the Arch Cape watershed. The district is hoping this will help conserve the forest and protect the source of the area’s drinking water.

“We are going to have an appraisal of the property here, and are working on getting that completed this summer,” Chick said. He added the forest management plan for the property is expected to be completed toward the end of summer.

State Rep. Suzanne Weber said it was a challenging session but she and her colleagues were able to do a lot of good for the region.

“I was very pleased,” the Tillamook Republican said. “You ask for all these things and think, ‘I don’t have a chance at all of this. I’m a freshman legislator. I’m

most likely not going to get anything for my area.”

Weber didn’t get everything she asked for, including funding for a project in Seaside.

“But, overall, I think we did very well receiving state funding through the lottery and bonds and ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) money for this area,” she said.

Sen. Betsy Johnson, the co-chair of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means, has an important role in state spending decisions.

The Scappoose Democrat said she didn’t get everything she asked for either, including money for the Port of Astoria, but she worked with Weber and Rep. Brad Witt, D-Clatskanie, to make sure they could request projects from different parts of the region.

“With regrets, I didn’t get everything I asked for but I think we got a hell of a good start,” Johnson said. “Counties and municipalities can’t afford to do these big projects so that’s why having federal help through the ARPA money is so beneficial because now they’re able to go in and effectuate entire projects.”

The senator said she plans to keep pushing for the requested projects that didn’t receive funding.

Fund: ‘It is a blessing to have this in Astoria’

Continued from Page A1

reaches patients from the Long Beach Peninsula in Washington state to Tillamook and everywhere in between.

“My main hope is for the community to understand how important it is and we want it to keep going so we can support cancer patients through their journeys,” said Kujala, who also serves as the chairman of the Clatsop County Board of Commissioners.

Mari Montesano, an oncology social worker at the cancer center, assesses the patients and families to determine what resources they need while going through treatment.

“I try to exhaust all other resources and funds before going to Arm-in-Arm, but it has helped patients get through treatment or have that support during treatment to spend time with family at the end of their lives or to have running water and electricity,” Montesano said.

Montesano said one of the cases that stays in her mind happened a couple of years ago.

“We had a family and a parent was sick and had to be in Portland to get special treatment and the Arm-in-Arm Fund helped pay for the kids and the other parent to stay in Portland to be there,” she said, adding that the sick parent ended up dying there. “There are no other resources for that,

so this fund allowed them to be there.”

Other patients who weren’t able to work during their treatment have used the fund to help pay their water and power bills, or pay down debts so they could have a fresh start financially.

“It is a blessing to have this in Astoria,” Kujala said of the cancer center. “You’ll hear time and time again how grateful (patients) are to do this treatment in Astoria.”

Armington added it’s important to have the cancer center in Astoria so patients don’t need to drive two hours each way to Portland to receive 15 minutes of radiation. Instead, they can get treatment close to home in a location that in itself is healing.

“Astoria is so beautiful, and you can be in a place where you can look out the window and see the river ... and get world-class cancer care right there,” he said.

Outside the cancer center is a healing garden with a plaque on the wall dedicated to Mary Armington for starting the fund.

“She’s grateful for what she has and wants to share it with other people,” Bill Armington said.

He added the fund has been in place for about three years, but he doesn’t think there’s much awareness of it locally. He encourages people to give what they can or set up recurring donations.

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