



Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

Astoria police receive many calls about behavior at a park at Ninth and Astor streets.

## Homelessness: ‘We know we could do more’

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Downtown business owners and homeless people have clashed after people slept or drank in doorways or left behind litter and human waste. Meanwhile, there are few places for the homeless to go.

Their presence on the Astoria Riverwalk and in other city parks has been a source of frustration to some in the community and feeds the perception that certain areas are less safe than they used to be — a perception also noted in survey responses but not backed up by police calls and reports, Spalding said.

The purpose of the survey was not to single out or attack any particular group, the police chief explained. “We understand many of the people experiencing homelessness are good people. ... Our goal really is, through enforcement, to get people into services,” he said.

The state Legislature concluded this summer with several new laws that further complicate when and how police can intervene with quality of life issues and crimes often associated with people who are homeless.

Police are asked to deal with issues that they probably shouldn’t, Spalding said. When people don’t

### **FOLLOWING THE SURVEY RESULTS, THE DEPARTMENT PLANS TO STEP UP COMMUNITY POLICE WORK TO MAINTAIN A MORE PROACTIVE PRESENCE.**

know who to call, they call the police.

Following the survey results, the department plans to step up community police work to maintain a more proactive presence.

The City Council authorized the hiring of a community outreach officer this year, a position Spalding hopes will go a long way to building community relations. The position includes some basic police training, but will be more focused on outreach and education. Around a dozen people have applied.

Besides homelessness, survey respondents included concerns about drugs and mental health issues, as well as a desire for more police patrols on

foot or bicycle.

A total of 369 people responded to the survey. The survey did not collect detailed demographic information, but did record where people live. The majority of respondents live in Astoria, while others own businesses or work in the city or live in unincorporated areas.

A majority of respondents said they felt Astoria police were responsive, respectful and treated people fairly, but questions about the department’s community relations showed areas for improvement. Some people felt the department could do more to work with residents to solve local problems and make it easier for people to provide input.

“We know we could do more,” Spalding said.

But the police chief and city councilors said they were pleased with the survey results. There were few surprises and officers have told Spalding they feel supported and trusted by the community. In response to a question asking for people’s overall opinion of the police department, 25% of respondents checked “Outstanding” while 42% checked “Good.”

“In the current environment we’re policing in, I consider that a high score for us,” Spalding said.

## Gimre’s Shoes: ‘No regrets at all’

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Throughout much of the coronavirus pandemic, Gimre employed only two part-time workers, meaning he was often left to run the store on his own. He admits that burnout from the past year and a half played a role in his decision to retire.

“Anyone who was in retail through the whole COVID situation has gone through some sense of fatigue in one manner or another,” he said. “I certainly felt it.”

Gimre credits Paycheck Protection Program loans for his store’s ability to survive. Since then, Gimre said sales have rebounded and July was one of the better months on record.

“It makes you feel good that there is demand out there for a store like ours and brick and mortar still has a chance in today’s world,” he said.

When Pete and Jon Gimre’s father passed along the business, he told them to, “Treat people when they come into your store like a guest in your home.” That philosophy won over many within the community, as evident by the large number of people who showered Gimre with congratulations and well wishes on his retirement announcement on Facebook.

“I have no regrets at all,” he said. “I have made more friends from just meeting people in the store. The store has allowed me to give back into the community like



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Gimre’s Shoes is a signature business on the North Coast.

*‘IT MAKES YOU FEEL GOOD THAT THERE IS DEMAND OUT THERE FOR A STORE LIKE OURS AND BRICK AND MORTAR STILL HAS A CHANCE IN TODAY’S WORLD.’*

Pete Gimre

I never would have imagined when I was 24 years old in multiple ways.”

Gimre is grateful for the community that continues to embrace the store, a community he does not plan on leaving anytime soon.

Instead, he will continue to enjoy the hiking, kayaking and outdoor activities that the region offers.

When Gimre thinks back to what downtown Astoria was like when he was in high school, he remembers a number of shoe stores.

While a few have remained open, most have come and gone, Gimre said.

“Gimre’s has always found a way to survive and I think it’s because of hard work and dedication,” he said. “We have been extremely fortunate to have the most loyal employees — long-term employees — I could ever dream of over the course of time.

“That is a testament that we are doing something right.”

Gimre does not envision that changing under his brother’s leadership.

“I wanted to keep that legacy going and keep it in the family if at all possible,” he said.

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