

Breweries: ‘Anyone who had growth last year, by the end of the year, it’s amazing’

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It came down to a quick shift of focus from draft sales to packaged beer.

“As a state, the craft beer industry was hit pretty hard last year. It was fully dependent on how quickly a brewery could pivot,” said Christina LaRue, the executive director of the Oregon Brewers Guild.

Selling beer on draft takes less packaging, and is less time-intensive to produce, which Kroening said impacted Buoy Beer’s production.

“That’s where all craft brewers had a rough time both from the on-premise stuff closing down at their own locations to draft beer. So while we had an increase in volume, it all shifted into cans and we didn’t sell very much draft,” Kroening said. “Volume was there, but not the same revenue or profitability.”

Both Fort George and Buoy Beer sold more beer, but made less money because canned sales bring less revenue. But increasing volume was still a good direction, LaRue said.

“I wouldn’t say that it was huge growth,” she said. “But anyone who had growth last year, by the end of the year, it’s amazing. Because so many did not.”

Fort George saw 9% growth in barrels sold, according to founder Chris Nemlowill.

“We were one of the first breweries in Oregon to put beer in cans, and really lean into it. And so we’ve been canning for quite a while. We were just set up in a way that we were able to pivot towards putting everything in cans,” he said.

Before the pandemic, Fort George’s sales were around half in cans and half in draft. He said they were lucky to have recently expanded into the Astoria Warehousing property on the riverfront, where they had the storage space to shift almost entirely to canned sales.

“We definitely did take a hit, though, because our revenue was way down in 2020 versus 2019, because when we sell cans of beer to grocery stores it’s just a lot less revenue than selling beer on draft,” Nemlowill said. “And really, we like to have our beer served and in bars and restaurants.”

Nemlowill said that with restaurants, including the downtown Astoria taproom, back open, Fort George is returning to pre-pandemic sales numbers. He added that it’s nice to see customers in-person again.

“That’s really exciting for me, because that’s really the reason that I got into this industry,” he said. “To create a community gathering space.”

School bond: Safety, security concerns will be addressed

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Measure 4-212 will also address a number of maintenance issues related to aging infrastructure, including deteriorating roofs, exterior surfaces and plumbing. Electrical, heating and ventilation systems will see improvements.

Safety and security concerns will be addressed with the addition of new fire sprinklers, locking mechanisms and communication devices.

Levied at an average tax rate of \$2.20 per \$1,000 of assessed property value, the bond rate is 3 cents less than the average for the Knappa School District’s previous bond. The new bond will mature in 25 years.

The school district will receive a \$4 million state grant to push the outlay to \$18 million.

“I’m just happy for the kids and the teachers and other district employees who will benefit from it — and the community at large,” said Brian Montgomery, the chairman of

Yes Knappa, a group that formed to support the bond measure.

“I was cautiously optimistic I would say, but not surprised, because our community always seems to turn out in support of things like this whenever needed ... It’s kind of par for the course for this group of folks. They always step up to the plate when needed.

“You don’t want to get blindsided,” he said. “We worked up until the last few days on making sure that people got out to vote. I was pretty optimistic about it based on the feedback from calling people and talking to people.”

Over the past several years, voters have supported other bond measures for school improvements on the North Coast. Seaside approved a \$99.7 million bond in 2016 to move schools out of the tsunami inundation zone. A \$70 million bond in Astoria and a \$38.5 million bond in Warrenton approved in 2018 funded upgrades to schools.



Lydia Ely/The Astorian

Flowers and weeds have grown into the sides of the pit at Heritage Square.

Heritage Square: Zoning allows broad range of uses

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Only this year did city councilors decide they wanted workforce housing on the property, driven by concerns about a lack of affordable and lower-cost, workforce housing in the region.

The request for expressions of interest states the city’s preference is to sell

the land to a chosen developer, but city leaders are prepared to entertain other scenarios, including options like a long-term lease or a joint venture to ensure the desired development happens. The city is also considering a number of amendments to its development code to further pave the way for any proposed project.

The zoning at Heritage Square allows for a broad range of uses, but housing is considered a conditional use. Some changes the city might consider would be to allow housing outright and ease requirements on how a building’s ground floor is used. The city is also ready to assist with coordinating with the Oregon Department

of Environmental Quality. The site is considered a brownfield and has contamination issues.

“Note however,” the document cautions, “that the city’s willingness to entertain any such code modifications will be based on its determination that the modifications are necessary to achieve a quality project.”

Food tax: Would not take effect until next summer

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The tax would not take effect until next summer.

On Wednesday morning, Mayor Sam Steidel was cautious about calling the ballot measure one way or another, but said it did appear the measure will pass.

“We have some time to be sure that all the process and goals are understood and it functions smoothly before the season hits,” he said in a statement. “We have a community guidance, slim though it is. My focus is to see it works for the benefit of everyone in the community: resident, business and visitor.”

From the beginning, the food tax prompted fierce debate in the community. Signs sprouted up around town urging “no” votes. The Oregon Restaurant and Lodging Association also weighed in on the question, saying the tax would hurt businesses. The organization has opposed other food and beverage tax measures across the state.

On Tuesday, a similar proposal in Newport to raise funds for public safety, the library, parks, city facilities and other services failed 68% to 32%.

In Cannon Beach, Reckmann does not expect the final tally to be the end of the matter. If the vote remains this close, he anticipates the results could be challenged.

Given the uncertainty

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Sam Steidel | mayor of Cannon Beach

over the tax’s success, Reckmann has already considered the possibility of going to voters with a levy proposal in May. The fire district board meets Monday and Reckmann said the levy will be discussed as an option if the food tax fails.

Calls for service rose steeply last year, with the majority coming from visitors. In meetings with city councilors this year, Reckmann warned city leaders of tough decisions ahead if the fire district could not find other, stable sources of funding.

The city and fire district billed the food tax as a way to get tourists to pay their share for city and emergency services while avoiding an increase to residents’ property taxes. A city consultant estimated much of the food tax revenue would be generated through visitor spending.

The City Council debated

passing the tax as an ordinance, but decided in a 3-2 vote in July to send the matter to voters.

Many opponents of the food tax said they supported the fire district and other emergency services but worried about the timing of the measure, coming on the heels of social and economic disruption caused by the coronavirus pandemic. They also expressed distrust over how the city would use its portion of the revenue.

In the weeks ahead of the election — and after years of debate — the City Council voted to construct a new City Hall and police station where the existing facility sits. It was, in part, an effort to give voters a clear sense of what they might be voting for with the food tax.

“We will enter into the next phase of the City Hall project soon and that needs community involvement,” Steidel said. “I ask residents

to be aware and understand this will be an intense open discussion over the coming year.”

Lolly Champion, a resident, has solicited feedback on the food tax and advocated against it through a series of emails to others in the community. She wrote about the distrust she and others felt with the city.

“I hope this ballot goes down and we can start again,” she wrote, “with a levy for the fire district and levy by the city for a City Hall.”

Proponents said the food tax would benefit everyone with minimal impact to businesses and the community. They pointed to the overburdened fire district and the failing, unsafe City Hall building. The new tax was a simple solution to bring in necessary revenue, but not put all the financial weight on residents, they argued.

Deb Atiyeh, a staunch advocate for the tax, felt confident it would pass in the last few weeks before the election.

Some people she spoke with — the locals, she said — hadn’t been aware of the measure before she told them about it. In general, they were enthusiastic about the tax and the revenue it could generate, she said.

“Everyone knows the needs of things that have been kicked down the road so long,” she told The Astorian in October.

PFIZER VACCINE CLINIC FOR KIDS

The Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine received authorization from the FDA for children ages 5-11. CMH is offering a vaccine clinic for all children (CMH patients or not) in this age group.

DATE: Saturday, Nov. 13
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