

## IN BRIEF

## Man dies after jumping off Astoria Bridge

An Astoria man died after jumping off the Astoria Bridge on Wednesday afternoon.

James Robert Neikes, 29, was still alive when emergency responders arrived, police say. He had landed on the grass east of Suomi Hall.

Neikes was taken to Columbia Memorial Hospital in Astoria for treatment, then flown to a Portland-area hospital, where he died.

## Seaside contractor fined for violating job safety standards

SEASIDE — Synergy Construction Group, a contractor based in Seaside, was fined more than \$15,000 by the state for job safety violations on a residential roofing project last year.

The Oregon Occupational Health and Safety Administration said an inspection found two employees working on a roof with no protection against potential falls. The inspection was conducted after a complaint about the lack of fall protection.

According to Aaron Corwin, an Oregon OSHA spokesman, this is the fourth time Synergy Construction Group has violated the fall standard since February 2020, each of which resulted in fines.

Sabel Wilder, a company representative, said in an appeal that the violations were the actions of a subcontractor.

“The reason I did not participate in an opening or closing conference was because I told the inspector that I believed he had the wrong company,” he said. “I asked for any evidence that put our employees at the scene of the alleged violation, he said he could not produce any evidence, and was told someone said it was our company.”

“Yes, we were the general contractor for this project, the project was subcontracted to another licensed company. If there were any violations, my advice for the inspector was to produce pictures or something that could substantiate his claims. He could not. For this reason I want a hearing.”

## Seaside enlists consultant for city manager search

SEASIDE — The city wants to fill its lead staff role by June 30, when City Manager Mark Winstanley steps down.

The city manager, who started with Seaside as finance director in September 1985, was named city manager in November 2001.

After announcing the opening internally, Seaside received one internal candidate for the position in December.

To expand that search, the City Council has voted to expand the recruitment and search to the hiring of consultants Jensen Strategies.

“I’m recommending that we retain Jensen and his team,” Mayor Jay Barber said at Monday’s meeting. “They are very competent. They’ve done searches in Warrenton. They’ve done searches in Cannon Beach. They are just winding up one in one of the suburbs east of Portland, one of the suburbs. Based on the references that I’ve checked, they are very competent and will do an excellent search.”

— *The Astorian*

## Peninsula man held on child rape charges

LONG BEACH, Wash. — The Long Beach Police Department arrested U.S. Coast Guardsman Jordan R. Wekenborg-Garcia, 31, of Long Beach, on Wednesday for three counts of first-degree rape of a child.

The arrest was a result of an investigation conducted by police, Washington State Child Protective Services and the U.S. Coast Guard after a victim told a fellow student at school she was having sex with an adult.

During the investigation, authorities say Wekenborg-Garcia admitted to investigators that he had been involved in sexual activity with the 10-year-old at least six to seven times.

According to court documents, the activity is believed to have been as far back as when the child was 4 years old and happened as recently as Dec. 26.

— *Chinook Observer*

## ON THE RECORD

### Burglary

• Dylan Rigg Knight, 32, of Seaside, was arraigned on Wednesday on charges of burglary in the first degree, theft in

the second degree, criminal mischief in the third degree and criminal trespass in the second degree. The crimes are alleged to have occurred in April.

## PUBLIC MEETINGS

### TUESDAY

**Port of Astoria Commission**, 4 p.m., workshop session, (electronic meeting).

**Warrenton City Commission and Planning Commission**, 5:30 p.m., joint meeting, City Hall, 225 S. Main Ave.

**Seaside Planning Commission**, 6 p.m., work session, City Hall, 989 Broadway.

**Seaside School District Board**, 6 p.m., (electronic meeting).

**Astoria City Council**, 7 p.m., City Hall, 1095 Duane St.

# Housing incentives unlikely this year

Legislature will likely wait until 2023

By **JIM REDDEN**  
*Oregon Capital Bureau*

Oregon elected officials and community leaders agree the state has a housing shortage that is fueling homelessness and an affordable housing crisis. But the Legislature will not consider a comprehensive proposal to significantly increase housing production until 2023 at the soonest.

That was one takeaway from the 2022 Housing Economic Summit held online Thursday. State Rep. Julie Fahey, the chairwoman of the House Interim Committee on Housing, told attendees that lawmakers will not have enough time to consider such a proposal during the session that begins on Feb. 1 because it is limited to just 35 days.

“2023 is a year away and a year is not that long of a time,” said Fahey, a Democrat who represents Eugene and Junction City.

Fahey spoke at the end of the conference and her comments likely disappointed some of the participants. During a series of panel discussions, numerous speakers said the statewide housing shortage is driving up prices, increasing the number of those living on the streets and preventing many people of color from purchasing even a starter home to begin building wealth.

The discussions also revealed tensions between policymakers and homebuilders that the Legislature could address. They included questions of whether the state’s existing land use planning laws are limiting the availability of buildable land, how much government infrastructure charges are increasing housing costs and whether well-intended policies to increase energy efficiency and fight climate change are pushing prices too high.

“For every \$1,000 of



Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

**A new apartment project is planned near Safeway in Astoria.**

additional cost, 1,578 Oregonians are priced out of the market,” said Geoff Harris, the customer experience director for Hayden Homes, which builds workforce and middle-income housing, including cottage clusters and small multifamily projects.

Fahey admitted that the Legislature needs to discuss such issues while preparing a comprehensive proposal to increase housing production. But she said it will take a focused effort involving all parties, who must be willing to compromise.

State Sen. Dick Anderson, the vice chairman of the Senate Interim Committee on Housing and Development, agreed.

“From what I see, it will take a great deal of energy and focus and time,” said Anderson, a Republican who represents the central coast.

Both Fahey and Anderson said the 2022 Legislature could take up smaller bills to address the housing shortage, however. Fahey said she expects a substantial affordable housing funding package to be considered. Anderson said his committee will introduce a bill to better enforce a previous legislative requirement

that governments prepare an analysis of how new housing policies will affect home prices.

In the meantime, Fahey said she believes elected officials should change the discussion about where housing should be built.

“The root cause of our housing crisis is the lack of supply. We need to build more housing, and sometimes that means build more housing next to you,” Fahey said.

The summit revealed that local officials across the state are very aware of the housing shortage and are working on local proposals to increase production. Gresham Mayor Travis Stovall moderated a panel that included Gresham City Planner Eric Schmidt and Medford Planning Director Matt Brinkley. They listed initiatives each city has undertaken over the past year, including a housing developer summit with 60 participants in Gresham and the adoption of a master plan with 37 strategies in Medford.

Both cities have also completed a housing capacity analysis required by the 2020 Legislature that determined they have enough buildable land within the

state-required urban growth boundaries for the next 20 years. Harris questioned whether that is actually true in any city, however, saying that much of the land considered buildable by governments has problems — from bad soil to steep terrains — that limit how much housing can actually be built on it.

Other problems cited by panelists include slow permitting approval processes that add weeks and even months to the start of construction. Even the slightest delay is especially problematic now because inflation is increasing construction costs, while COVID-19 is making it difficult for developers to find as many workers as they need.

The summit was sponsored by the Oregon Bankers Association, Oregon REALTORS®, and the Oregon Home Builders Association. It featured nationally recognized speakers, as well as local experts in the areas of housing, regulation and economics, and a variety of issues that will impact housing in Oregon in 2022 and beyond.

*The Oregon Capital Bureau is a collaboration between EO Media Group and Pamplin Media Group.*

## State fines Port of Morrow \$1.3M over nitrate violations

By **GEORGE PLAVERN**  
*Capital Press*

BOARDMAN — Oregon environmental regulators have fined the Port of Morrow \$1.3 million for repeatedly overapplying agricultural wastewater on nearby farms in an area that already has elevated levels of nitrates in the groundwater.

The state Department of Environmental Quality announced the fine on Tuesday.

Under a state water quality permit, the port collects nitrogen-rich wastewater from food processors, storage facilities and data centers at its Boardman industrial park, which it then reuses to irrigate neighboring farm fields growing potatoes, onions and other high-value crops.

But according to the agency, the port violated its permit more than 1,000



EO Media Group

**The Oregon Department of Environmental Quality alleges the Port of Morrow has applied excessive amounts of nitrate-containing water to area farmland.**

times from 2018 to 2021, exceeding the limit on how much nitrogen can be safely applied to farmland and resulting in 165 tons of excess nitrogen in the fields.

Leah Feldon, the Department of Environmental Quality’s deputy director, said these are “serious violations of water quality regulations that are in place to

protect public health and the environment.”

The Port of Morrow is Oregon’s second-largest port, behind only the Port of Portland. It is in the Umatilla Basin of northeast Oregon, where in 1990 the state declared a Groundwater Management Area due to high levels of groundwater nitrates exceeding 7 milli-

grams per liter.

In a statement, Ryan Neal, the port’s general manager, said it takes the violations seriously and will work in collaboration with the state toward finding a long-term solution that benefits local farmers, port industries and the region as a whole.

“The Port of Morrow has been working collaboratively with DEQ on the content of this action,” Neal said. “We look forward to jointly developing a resolution.”

High levels of nitrates in drinking water are linked with serious health concerns, particularly for babies and pregnant women. Groundwater is used as a primary source of drinking water across the basin, which spans northern Umatilla and Morrow counties — including the cities of Hermiston, Boardman, Irrigon, Stanfield and Echo.

## Offices close for Martin Luther King Jr. Day

*The Astorian*

In observance of Martin Luther King Jr. Day on

Monday, all federal, state, county and city offices and services, including Astoria, Warrenton, Gearhart, Sea-

side and Cannon Beach city halls, are closed. All U.S. post offices are closed, and there is no mail delivery.

Astoria, Jewell, Knappa, Warrenton/Hammond and Seaside (including Cannon Beach and Gearhart) school district schools, and Clatsop Community College, are closed.

The Astoria Library, Seaside Library and Warrenton Library are closed.

The Port of Astoria offices and services are closed.

Garbage collection through Recology Western Oregon and the city of Warrenton garbage collection are not affected by the holiday. Recology Western Oregon’s transfer station is open.

The Sunset Pool in Seaside is open. The Astoria Aquatic Center is open.

The Clatsop County Heritage Museum is closed. The Oregon Film Museum is open from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., the Flavel House Museum is open from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., and the Carriage House is open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. The Uppertown Firefighters’ Museum is closed for the winter.

The Sprouts Learning Center is open from 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Fort Clatsop is open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. The Columbia River Maritime Museum is open from 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Sunset Empire Transportation (“The Bus”) is running.

## the Astorian

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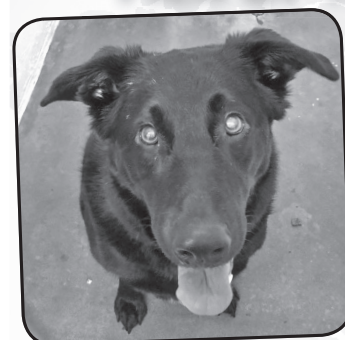
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## VOLUNTEER PICK OF THE WEEK



### Milo

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