

Cleanup: City staffing challenges have made issue even more difficult

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which includes 875 acres that covers downtown and along S. Main Avenue to just south of Warrenton High School.

City staff is accepting applications on a first-come, first-served basis for the remainder of the fiscal year that ends in June with funds from the commercial program, Engbretson said. Come July, the residential program should be in full swing.

The topic, which was discussed at a City Commission meeting in early January, drew several interested residents.

Improving nuisance properties has been a priority for the city in the past, Balensifer said, but significant ground was lost during the coronavirus pandemic.

City staffing challenges have made the issue even more difficult.



Lydia Ely/The Astorian
Felix Tapales stands in front of a section of the structure that collapsed at his property.

The nuisance abatement process typically goes through the community development director, a posi-

tion that is vacant. City leaders felt it was time to take a new approach.

“The idea is, ‘Hey, here’s a car-

rot. I’ll come alongside you and help you get there and if that’s not the case, then we can go the nuisance route,’” Balensifer said.

The mayor said he sees much of the early funds going to properties the city views as priorities. Tapales’ property would likely be addressed first, he said, but there are several other structures along S. Main Avenue that need significant work.

“Some of these properties are beyond the scope of what we have budgeted to fix,” Balensifer said. “So it’d be better to work with people to leverage dollars to accomplish the goal of urban renewal to clean it up.”

Tapales has lost track of how many dumpsters have been filled and emptied from the trash and junk within his property. He estimates he has put over \$10,000 into the effort, if not more.

“When I’m here, I focus on cleaning,” said Tapales, who works as a merchant marine. “... But it looks like we haven’t even started.”

The aging and unstable structure has already collapsed in several spots. Much of Tapales’ attention has been on emptying out the numerous paint and home supply chemicals that filled the shelves. Because of the chemicals, the structure cannot be burned or bulldozed until they are emptied.

Knowing the extensive time and money likely ahead of him, Tapales is hopeful the residential grant program will lend a helping hand.

“There’s a lot of potential with the location – it’s a pretty nice, central location,” Balensifer said. “But right now, it’s a massive eyesore and no one is happy with it.”

Hipes: Calls the dispatcher took 20 years ago still give him nightmares

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“Unfortunately, a lot of people don’t know dispatchers exist,” Hipes said. “Still today, people think we’re cops or we’re firefighters, and we’re not. We’re our own people. We do our own part of this business.”

When someone calls 911, they reach a dispatcher, who becomes the first person assessing the situation. “It’s your job to collect that information and paint a picture for those responders of what they’re walking into,” Hipes said.

Is someone having a heart attack? Is there a fight underway? If a car crash occurs, is someone trapped? Will the fire department need to bring special equipment to pry the person out of a vehicle?

Dispatchers also answer the nonemergency lines, which people call for matters that are trau-

matic all the same. Perhaps the caller’s house or car got broken into. Power outages often generate nonemergency calls.

“You gotta be prepared to be that caring, calm voice, no matter what phone line you pick up,” Hipes said.

‘A great example’

The son of a sergeant in the Milwaukie Police Department, Hipes grew up wanting to work in law enforcement. His father, he said, was “a great example.”

Hipes learned that some officers do traffic stops and write tickets because they have to, and others will look past the initial encounter — the broken headlight, the occasion for arrest — and try to figure out what will actually help the person.

His father was from the latter school. “He saw that there’s black

and white and gray,” Hipes said.

As a teenager, Hipes became a police cadet. He put on a uniform, went on ride-alongs, learned how to talk on the radio and write reports. He wanted to be a cop like his dad. But cops, he quickly learned, see and smell things that Hipes didn’t necessarily want to.

At 20, he started dispatching for the city of Milwaukie. Back then, in 2000, dispatchers worked with a corded phone and wrote down call details by hand on cards.

Hipes remembers stamping the cards to record the time, stamping it again when an officer arrived on scene, and again when the officer finished. At the end of the day, Hipes would take the cards, wrap a rubber band around them, write the date on the stack and put it in a box.

With the rise of digital technology, many older dispatchers chose to retire. But Hipes, who came of

age with AOL chat rooms, knew how to adapt.

Calls that Hipes took 20 years ago still give him nightmares.

“I’ve heard officers scream ‘Shot fired’ over the radio and not heard anybody talk back to me for three minutes, not knowing if that was an officer who was shot, if they’re alive or dead,” he said. Those were among the longest three minutes of his life. It was a suicide by cop.

One time a man committed suicide while talking with Hipes. The caller, he said, “literally told me that ‘I just called you because I wanted you to hurt like I do.’ And then he killed himself on the phone with a gun. Made me listen to it, just because he wanted somebody else to hurt.” Hipes didn’t have enough time to help him; the man wouldn’t give his name or address. “He just wanted somebody to be on

the phone to hear him do it.”

‘Nowadays, you’re part of the team’

The dispatch profession also touches the other side of life.

Hipes has helped deliver babies over the phone, coaching parents-to-be who couldn’t make it to a hospital on time. He has helped callers perform CPR and revive their loved ones.

Last year, the Oregon Legislature passed a law declaring emergency dispatchers as first responders, like police officers and firefighters, and made them eligible for state retirement benefits in the same way.

This recognition meant the world to dispatchers, Hipes said. When his career began, dispatchers were considered secretaries and secondary workers, and often treated as such. “Nowadays, you’re part of the team,” he said.

Squid: There are limits to what the data collected through NOAA’s surveys can say

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collects every year from designated spots off the West Coast. The surveys are independent from fisheries and do not target squid, but squid kept showing up.

While researchers saw major increases in the squid population in the north, they did not see the same level of increase in California, the squid’s more traditional home. Market squid is a cornerstone of California’s commercial fishing industry, both in value and in pounds landed.

For Oregon fishery managers, the new study is a useful sort of ground-truthing, confirming what they had started to see in commercial fishing landings in 2016.

In 2020, commercial fishermen off Oregon landed just over 10 mil-

lion pounds of market squid — more than what was caught in state waters between 1980 and 2016. The fishery had been almost nonexistent in Oregon. Suddenly, fishermen saw dollar signs.

To Hunsicker, the new research provides “a clear example of how changing climate and ocean conditions are impacting marine resources and fishing communities.”

There are limits to what the data collected through NOAA’s surveys can say about the squid, cautioned Brandon Chasco, lead author of the new study on squid and a quantitative ecologist with NOAA.

“The area we are looking at is just a sample of the squid distribution and it’s not even where the bulk of the squid population is,” he noted.

They are only sampling one or

two times a year, as well.

“We’re capturing one part of their life history,” Chasco said.

Much of the fishing of market squid occurs in state waters and states manage that activity, but NOAA does have a broader role to play in ecosystem management.

Market squid are an important part of the marine food web — numerous types of animals eat them. Since the squid feed off smaller organisms, they are an important way for energy to move up through the food chain.

“Just knowing that a forage species that is important to the ecosystem appears to be responding to these large, environmental drivers — that’s important to planning,” Chasco said.

Oregon fishery managers imple-

mented new regulations last year to address the growing local fishery, including weekend closures to try to space out fishing activity on squid spawning grounds.

They will be addressing other concerns and possible future action at an Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission in February. There are still some critical information gaps when it comes to market squid and questions about what a dedicated commercial fishery in Oregon could mean for the animals overall.

But with colder waters now off the Oregon Coast, it isn’t clear what will happen next for the emerging fishery this year. There is no set season for squid, but landings seem to occur more often in the warmer months. No squid have been landed in Oregon so far this year, according

to the state.

Greg Krutzikowsky, with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, noted that the West Coast is back in a La Nina year, referring to the oceanic and atmospheric phenomenon that is part of a broader climate pattern and brings cooler conditions.

“It will be interesting to see if there’s as much of the resource available for landings off of our coast,” Krutzikowsky said. “But things change and things move around and sometimes we’re surprised by how things go.”

He thinks fishermen will still try for market squid. How much they’ll end up catching is anyone’s guess.

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