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Astoria plans to close child care facility

Sprouts Learning Center will shut down at the end of June

By NICOLE BALES
The Astorian

After reaching a critical staffing shortage and operating at an unsustainable loss, Astoria will close Sprouts Learning Center, the city's day care program, at the end of June.

The center is one of the larger child care facilities in Clatsop County, making the closure a significant loss as child care options remain scarce.

The city's Parks and Recreation Department has been operating the program with a skeleton crew for several months, and staffing reached a critical point late last year. The city said the day care at the Astoria Recreation Center loses about \$17,000 a month.

During a work session on Wednesday afternoon, city councilors unanimously supported transitioning out of providing the service by the end of the fiscal year on June 30. The closure will impact 21 families.

"I've always felt that adequate child care is one of the most important community health components out there," Mayor Bruce Jones said. "And it's one of the most important components of a thriving local economy. And as we've seen, it's also one of the most difficult services to provide without significant subsidies of some sort. It's still very disappointing that our federal government has never made this a top national priority."

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New virus cases at care home

Outbreak disclosed in the state's weekly report

By ERICK BENGEL
The Astorian

The Oregon Health Authority has reported nine coronavirus cases at Clatsop Care Memory Community, a care home in Warrenton.

The outbreak, first reported on Jan. 28, was disclosed on Wednesday in the health authority's weekly report.

The care home, part of the Clatsop Care Health District, has no active virus cases, Hannah Olson, the facility's administrator, said on Thursday.

Olson said the outbreak peaked at 10 virus cases and was entirely among staff. She said no one was hospitalized as a result.

"Everyone's doing well, and everyone is healthy, and it was pretty mild," Olson said. "It was much better than this last time."

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Lydia Ely/The Astorian

Astoria is looking at ways to address issues related to homelessness.

City looks at menu of options to address quality of life concerns

Police regularly receive complaints tied to homelessness

By NICOLE BALES
The Astorian

Astoria is weighing different options to address quality of life concerns that stem from an increasingly visible homeless population.

Police regularly receive complaints related to homelessness — people sleeping in doorways, tents and vehicles to trash, abandoned property and public urination and defecation.

The visibility has led to a perception that some places in the community are unsafe, Police Chief Geoff Spalding said.

At a City Council work session on Wednesday, the police chief presented a menu of options designed to curb some of the behavior.

"These are very complex issues — we're operating in a lot of gray area," Spalding told city councilors. "And we're also dealing with some very complex individuals as well. So this is not an easy

topic, and we want to navigate this very carefully.

"This is a problem that impacts everybody in our county — all of our social services providers, of course, law enforcement. So this is something that we intend to work on together with all of our partners. We don't feel that we can solve this alone."

Priorities

The City Council prioritized a few options, including updating the city's camping ordinance and creating an expulsion zone ordinance, which would temporarily expel repeat offenders from specific areas for periods of time.

Because of recent court rulings and state legislation, the city has limited options for enforcing camping on public property, Spalding said.

If there are shelter spaces available for people to sleep, police can enforce illegal camping. But if

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Geoff Spalding | Astoria police chief

Jones will not seek reelection as mayor

Herman, Rocka to also step away from City Council

By NICOLE BALES
The Astorian

Astoria Mayor Bruce Jones will not seek another term in November.

Jones, the deputy director of the Columbia River Maritime Museum in Astoria and a former commander of U.S. Coast Guard Sector Columbia River, was elected to represent the east side's Ward 4 on the City Council in 2016 and ran a successful campaign for mayor in 2018.

"It's a great privilege to serve our



Joan Herman Bruce Jones Roger Rocka

unique, vibrant community as mayor, especially through the ongoing pandemic and other challenges we've faced," he said in a statement. "Astorians are passionate about their town but far from homogenous in their views or their backgrounds. I appreciate the great diversity of opinion on important issues we've wrestled with, knowing that all have Astoria's best interests at heart.

"My fellow councilors' dedication, bipartisanship and civility makes serving with them a joy. Whether we

decide an issue 5 to 0 or 3 to 2, once the vote is taken we move on to the next issue with no hard feelings."

Jones called his choice not to run for a second, four-year term a tough decision.

After six years on the City Council, the mayor said it is time to focus on family and his work at the museum.

"Until then, however, we have a full plate of pressing issues and much yet to do," he said. "The council will not be slowing down."

Jones stepped into the role of mayor at a time of turnover on the City Council. The city was grappling with many of the same issues it is now, including how to provide more affordable and workforce housing, how to

Fitzpatrick to run for mayor

Business owner active on planning issues

By NICOLE BALES
The Astorian

Sean Fitzpatrick, who owns apartment complexes and serves on the Astoria Planning Commission, intends to run for mayor in the November election.

Fitzpatrick, who owns Wecoma Partners and the Illahee Apartments, is the first person to announce his campaign for the city's top post.

Mayor Bruce Jones has chosen not to seek a second, four-year term.

Before Fitzpatrick began to buy property and work in Astoria nearly 20 years ago, he said he knew he wanted to make the city his home. He started visiting family in the area when he was a child. He eventually moved to the city with his wife permanently in 2010.



Sean Fitzpatrick



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