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## Oregon will drop indoor mask mandate

### Hospitalizations have sharply declined

By GARY WARNER  
*Oregon Capital Bureau*

Oregon will drop an indoor mask mandate in public places on March 19 and end the two-year COVID-19 state of emergency on April 1, Gov. Kate Brown announced Thursday.

Brown said the moves were possible because of a steep decline in new virus cases and hospitalizations from the latest wave caused by the highly contagious omicron variant.

“We can now protect ourselves, our friends and our families without invoking the extraordinary emergency authorities that were necessary at the beginning of the pandemic,” Brown said in a statement.

Hospitalizations of people with COVID-19 are on pace to drop under 400 per day, the bench mark Brown set to lift an indoor mask mandate that was revived over the summer during a previous surge of infections across the state.

Earlier this month, Brown had said the indoor mask mandate would be lifted by March 31, but could come earlier if hospitalizations dropped below the threshold.

COVID-19 hospitalizations were at 528 on Thursday, having fallen by more than half since late January.

Brown will also lift the state of emergency she put in place in March 2020 after the first virus cases were reported in Oregon.

Brown tweeted “the pandemic is not over” and followed up with a full statement released from her office.

“COVID-19 is still present in Oregon, and we must remain vigilant,” the governor said. “We must continue to get vaccinated and boosted, wear masks when necessary, and stay home when sick. That is the only way we can achieve our shared goals of saving lives and keeping our schools, businesses and communities open.”

In a videotaped message released Thursday, Colt Gill, the director of the state Department of Education, said schools would be included in the move to lift the indoor mask mandate based on

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Lydia Ely/The Astorian

The Merwyn Apartments opened last year next to City Hall.

## For the Merwyn Apartments, a challenging first year

### Lower-income housing next to City Hall

By NICOLE BALES  
*The Astorian*

The Merwyn has had a challenging first year offering lower-income apartments next to City Hall, but city and nonprofit leaders remain encouraged that the housing is serving an important need in the community.

Innovative Housing Inc., a Portland nonprofit, renovated the historic hotel building on Duane Street and opened to tenants last spring. The project created 40 affordable and workforce housing units in a housing market that has become increasingly out of reach for many.

Most of the units are studio apartments that serve lower-income workers and people who were previously homeless or in unstable living conditions. Four units are priced at market rate. Behavioral issues, tenant turnover

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and management difficulties have contributed to concerns about adding more lower-income housing downtown. Innovative Housing and city leaders are optimistic, however, that the early challenges are normal growing pains that are expected to resolve over time.

The Merwyn is being used as an example by both advocates and critics of a workforce housing project proposed across the street at Heritage Square.

City Councilor Joan Herman, who represents the downtown ward, said it is important to keep perspective. The old hotel building was long seen as a blight just steps away from City Hall.

“We’ve got 40 housing units that weren’t there before, as well as a beautifully restored building,” Herman said. “The company is committed to providing good management, and I think they’ve shown that since the beginning, even though there was a rocky start.”

“I think, really, that’s a huge accomplishment and a huge gift for the community.”

“We do have an affordable housing crisis in the Pacific Northwest, especially in towns like Astoria that have a lot of business in tourism,” said Julie Garver, the housing development director for Innovative Housing. “It’s great to be able to add to the housing stock and add in an income range that isn’t well

“An affordable housing crisis” Innovative Housing purchased the vacant and neglected building, also known as the Waldorf Hotel, from a demolition contractor. The nonprofit was able to restore the space and many historic characteristics. The final touch was completed earlier this year, with the re-creation of the canopy that covered the front entrance.

“We do have an affordable housing crisis in the Pacific Northwest, especially in towns like Astoria that have a lot of business in tourism,” said Julie Garver, the housing development director for Innovative Housing. “It’s great to be able to add to the housing stock and add in an income range that isn’t well

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## A decadelong saga after Astoria shooting ends with a plea deal

### Savinskiy convicted of attempted murder

By ERICK BENGEL  
*The Astorian*

A decade ago, Yevgeniy Pavlovich Savinskiy threatened two police officers at an Astoria motel, led law enforcement on a high-speed pursuit, and tried while in jail to arrange for adversaries in his criminal case to be killed or crippled.

The case, which saw multiple appeals and a lengthy sentence reversed as Oregon law changed, arrived at a resolution on Thursday.

Savinskiy, 47, was convicted on two counts of attempted first-degree murder, attempt to elude police, two counts of conspiracy to commit first-degree murder and one count of conspiracy to commit first-degree assault.

He was sentenced by Judge Henry Kantor to more than 11 years in prison. With credit for time served, Savinskiy will be

out in less than two years.

As part of a plea deal that includes no contact with the victims, Savinskiy, formerly of Washougal, Washington, agreed to renounce his U.S. citizenship and return to his home country of Ukraine. If he violates his probation, such as by trying to reenter the U.S. illegally, he will serve more than 10 years in prison.

On Feb. 12, 2012, Astoria police officers Joe Symonds, Christopher McNeary and a third officer were called to the Lamplighter Motel — now the Atomic Motel — on Marine Drive to detain a guest that police suspected of illegally possessing a silencer and using false identification. Symonds approached the door, while McNeary and the other officer went around the back.

When Savinskiy answered, his suspicious behavior — opening the door a few inches, putting weight on it to keep the officers out, seeming to stall — alarmed Symonds, according to District Attorney Ron Brown, who recounted the events at the sentencing.

Symonds saw Savinskiy’s eyes dilate. “He thought something was going to happen,”



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Crime scene investigators took down notes and photographed the parking lot area of the Lamplighter Motel after gunfire broke out between Astoria police and a guest in 2012.

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Brown said, “and it did.”

Savinskiy withdrew into the room and raised a handgun as Symonds pushed the door open. Symonds and McNeary opened fire. Savinskiy, who was shot through the left wrist and in his right shoulder, managed to exit the room, climb into his rented van with the gun, speed over the New Youngs Bay Bridge, turn into the Premarq Center, then drive over concrete barriers to get back onto U.S. Highway 101 southbound.

The midday car chase continued through Warrenton, Gear-

hart and Seaside. In the Cannon Beach area, Savinskiy reversed course to get on to U.S. Highway 26, where the van was spike-stripped. He drove another few miles on the rims, Brown said, before he spun onto the roadside.

“We’re lucky somebody wasn’t killed just by virtue of that chase,” Brown said.

Even as officers surrounded him, Savinskiy was seen going for his gun before he surrendered.

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## Sturgell pleads no contest to sex crimes

### Hammond fisherman placed on probation

By ERICK BENGEL  
*The Astorian*

Dennis Lee Sturgell Sr., the Hammond fisherman whose convictions for sex abuse crimes were vacated last year, will not have a new trial.

On Thursday, Sturgell, 69, pleaded no contest in Clatsop County Circuit Court to first-degree attempted sodomy and first-degree attempted unlawful sexual penetration.

In August 2015, Sturgell met a young woman at a Warrenton bar and, plying her with drinks and cocaine, had sex with her at his Naselle, Washington, property and later in an Astoria hotel. At his trial, the state argued, and the jury found, that the woman was too intoxicated to consent.

Sturgell also pleaded no contest to bribing a witness. Through an intermediary, he tried to give the victim’s father \$5,000 if the victim agreed to drop the case. Sturgell also threatened to undermine the woman’s reputation.

Sturgell’s new sentence is five years of probation. He will have to register as a sex offender, submit to drug and alcohol treatment and have no contact with the victim or her family. The victim will get \$15,000 out of Sturgell’s posted bail.

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