



Lydia Ely/The Astorian

Business owners and residents have complained about the homeless downtown.

City set to host discussion on issues related to homelessness

Community forum comes amid growing public frustration

By NICOLE BALES
The Astorian

City and business leaders will host a community forum Wednesday night on homelessness and livability to share information and hear from the public.

The panel discussion at the Liberty Theatre will include representatives from the city, the Astoria-Warrenton Area Chamber of Commerce, Clatsop Community Action, Clatsop Behavioral Healthcare and LiFEBoat Services. Representatives from Clatsop Economic Development Resources, the Astoria Downtown Historic District Association and the Astoria Warming Center will assist in organizing questions from the public.

There has been growing public frustration over bad behavior and quality of life concerns that stem from an increasingly visible homeless population. In the coming weeks, city councilors will consider adopting ordinances to give police more tools to respond to some of the issues.

“What we found in working through this, is that there’s some folks that maybe don’t know what the city is working on, what the City Council is focusing on to address this,” City Manager Brett Estes said. “And then some of the challenges that we’ve got, in terms of working through some of the issues with case law and state law.

“The city is looking at this as a way to be able to have first of all, a forum for folks to be able to speak to the City Council directly about some of the issues, but also for us to be able to get some information out to the community.”

COMMUNITY FORUM

A community forum on homelessness and livability issues will be held at 6:30 p.m. on Wednesday at the Liberty Theatre.

THERE HAS BEEN GROWING PUBLIC FRUSTRATION OVER BAD BEHAVIOR AND QUALITY OF LIFE CONCERNS THAT STEM FROM AN INCREASINGLY VISIBLE HOMELESS POPULATION. IN THE COMING WEEKS, CITY COUNCILORS WILL CONSIDER ADOPTING ORDINANCES TO GIVE POLICE MORE TOOLS TO RESPOND TO SOME OF THE ISSUES.

Mayor Bruce Jones and representatives from the various organizations will share some initial thoughts and information. Police Chief Geoff Spalding will give a presentation about what the

city has been working on to address bad behavior and quality of life concerns.

People will be able to write their questions and comments on cards, which will be collected, vetted and read to the panel. Alison Hart, a consultant and former executive director of the Oregon State Chamber of Commerce, will guide the discussion.

All the comments will be documented and shared with the City Council and posted on the city’s website.

Jessamyn Grace West, the executive director of the downtown association and a former city councilor, said she hopes the meeting “will bring clarity to dispel a lot of the misinformation around this complex topic, as well as reaffirm our commitment to working on solutions with all entities involved.”

Kevin Leahy, the executive director of Clatsop Economic Development Resources, expects the meeting will be the first of many that focus on concerns from the business community. He hopes future forums will allow business leaders and owners to address other issues, such as housing and city codes, and collectively share feedback with city and county leaders throughout the North Coast.

“We feel that the business voice is not heard consistently, like let’s say, at City Council meetings or county commissioner meetings,” Leahy said. “We see the next steps after this from the business community ... is really looking at other opportunities for them to be collectively collaborating and getting the feedback back to council.”

David Reid, the executive

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Merkley appears at town hall

Salmon, Russia part of the discussion

By ERICK BENGEL
The Astorian

Depleted salmon stocks, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, the health of the environment and of American democracy were top of mind for Clatsop County residents who attended U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley’s virtual town hall on Saturday afternoon.

The event came as the Oregon Democrat’s party faces uncertain prospects in the midterm elections in November.

Democrats could lose majorities in Congress, as inflation continues and polls indicate most voters disapprove of President Joe Biden’s performance.

Merkley highlighted the local impact of Democratic leadership, including the \$7.8 million the county received from the American Rescue Plan Act. The money will fund grants for small businesses, affordable housing, mental health services, rural health care, internet access and emergency preparedness, among other items. Cities within the county received several million dollars, as well.

Merkley also touted an omnibus spending package that includes \$1 million for a waterline project in Hammond. The upgrade is designed to prevent low water pressure when industrial demand is high.



U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley wants to reform the filibuster.

Salmon

Concerns about decreasing salmon levels arose repeatedly in the one-hour town hall — Merkley’s 20th of the year and 488th as U.S. senator. The senator holds the events annually in each of the state’s 36 counties.

Several speakers pushed for Merkley to get involved in the multistate effort to remove dams from the Snake River — the tributary that runs from Wyoming through Idaho and meets the Columbia River in southeast Washington state — to help restore the salmon population.

Bob Rees, a fishing guide from Hammond, said, “We’re hopeful that we can find a way for the Senate offices to kind of integrate into this conversation and find a solution that works for rural communities.”

Judith Huck, of Astoria, echoed Rees’ comments on the importance of salmon to the community and the need to remove the dams. “There’s just a fraction of the number of salmon in the Columbia River than there used to be,” she said, “and we do need you to be working towards improving that situation.”

Merkley said the process is “no small deal because of all the roles those dams play.”

For the past decade, he has worked to remove four dams from the Klamath River, and even with strong arguments in favor — “very little electricity generation, no flood control role, no irrigation role” — it will be about two years more before anything is taken out, even with the dams’ owner wanting them gone, he said.

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Former execs live restaurant dream in Gearhart

Couple take on Pacific Way Cafe

By R.J. MARX
The Astorian

GEARHART — Alan Arora was a CEO for a software company before becoming a consultant specializing in business development. Jennifer Arora, a senior vice president for Sony Pictures in media and marketing, was on the studio lot every day.

When Sony restructured, the couple saw an opportunity to re-imagine their future.



“I was portable,” Alan Arora said. “It was pretty easy for me to leave L.A., so we made the move to Oregon.”

They both worked from their home in Lake Oswego. When the pandemic hit, they began to evaluate what life would be like coming out of COVID-19.

They are the proud new owners of the Pacific Way Cafe and Marketplace.

“We both fancied ourselves foodies,” he said. “I used to joke in the middle of my corporate career — I guess it was a joke — wouldn’t it be

nice if I could just have a chalkboard bistro out on the highway somewhere, that I wrote on a chalkboard what I had that day? And if you liked it, you came on in. If you want a bottle of wine, there’s a rack, pick it out. That was sort of my dream, but I couldn’t really see how to connect the dots.”

They began their search for the right fit on the Oregon Coast. When the Sweet Shop became available, they zeroed in on Gearhart. When that sold, Arora reached out to Lisa and John Allen at Pacific Way.

“We thought, it’s got a really nice character,” Arora said. “I called John up one day and said, ‘Hey, I’d love to come by and introduce myself. I’m not a Realtor, but really like the vibe of your place.’”

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R.J. Marx/The Astorian

Alan Arora stands in front of the Pacific Way Cafe.

