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# Astorian

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## Emergency dispatch looks to future

Temporary merger ends but consolidation still possible

By NICOLE BALES  
The Astorian

Emergency dispatchers returned to Astoria last week after temporarily merging with Seaside over the past several months.

The move to Seaside was prompted by staffing shortages at Astoria's 911 dispatch center, which reached a critical point last fall. The merger, ideally, should have been a flip of the switch, but instead it exposed deficiencies in technology and interoperability that left many emergency responders on the North Coast frustrated.

The challenges also revived talks about whether Astoria and Seaside should combine emergency dispatch centers into a single countywide 911 dispatch center, a conversation that has occurred off-and-on for more than 20 years.

Jeremy Hipes, Astoria's emergency communications manager, said staffing is improving, and he is encouraged by the applicants and people in training. The cities are also continuing to coordinate on upgrades to improve interoperability.

Seaside has agreed to temporarily assign a dispatcher to Astoria until a new hire is fully trained. Astoria is still working toward hiring and training five additional staffers to meet the dispatch center's minimum for full operations.

"The hope is that we'll be in a much better place by the end of summer," Hipes said. "We're just going to have to make it through summer and then we should be able to handle our pressures a little better without necessarily having to have assistance from our surrounding agencies."

He said that as the police department continues to address the staffing challenges, answering emergency calls will be the priority. That means people calling the nonemergency line may have to wait a little longer than usual until someone picks up.

Eric Halverson, Astoria's interim police chief, said the department is also continuing to look at different technologies that could be applied to reduce some of the pressure on dispatchers.

"Ultimately, the goal is to continue to add staffing and that's what we're focused on, but we're still looking at other options," Halverson said. "We have to be conscious of the need for employees to have time off and those kinds of things. Right now, we've put together a schedule where we're able to do that and so we're definitely in a better place than we were six months ago, but we have room to grow, too."

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## County report finds vacation rentals do not drive up housing costs

### Commissioners weigh new restrictions

By ERICK BENGEL  
The Astorian

A new report by Clatsop County staff found no correlation between the recent growth of the vacation rental industry and the rise in housing prices.

Prepared by the county manager's office, the Community Development Department, Assessment and Taxation, Geographic Information Systems and county counsel, the short-term rental data report will be presented to the county Board of Commissioners at a work session on Wednesday.

County commissioners are weighing where in the county's unincorporated areas to recognize short-term rentals as an allowable use. More than 170 rentals already operate on county land, most clustering near the oceanfront. Except for Arch Cape, where vacation rentals have been allowed since 2003, the development code does not mention them.

Clatsop County is not alone in confronting rentals of 30 or fewer days. Oregon's coastal communities have seen an explosion of vacation rentals that bring in tourist money yet can undermine quiet neighborhoods.

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Photos by Lydia Ely/The Astorian

ABOVE: A house displays a sign advertising vacation rentals in Arch Cape. BELOW: Vacation rentals are popular in Cove Beach.

*'COMMUNITIES SUCH AS CANNON BEACH, WHICH HAS SEVERELY CURTAILED SHORT-TERM RENTALS, SAW THE LARGEST REAL MARKET VALUE INCREASE BETWEEN 2018 AND 2021 FOR PROPERTIES HOLDING AN STR PERMIT. THIS IS LIKELY DUE TO THE VALUE PLACED ON WHAT IS PERCEIVED AS A LIMITED AND SCARCE OWNERSHIP OPPORTUNITY, THUS COMMANDING A HIGHER PRICE.'*



### ELECTION DAY

Ballots that are mailed must be postmarked by May 17. Ballots can be turned in at drop boxes by 8 p.m. Follow the results at DailyAstorian.com



## Outreach guides seniors to services

Bjaranson helps the elderly reach their goals

By ETHAN MYERS  
The Astorian

WARRENTON — When Suzanne Bjaranson meets with someone — typically a senior, or sometimes a caregiver or family member — she starts with one question: "What is it you want to accomplish?"

Bjaranson, the community program supervisor at NorthWest Senior and Disability Services, then takes steps to help them achieve their goals, whether it be to move into an assisted living facility, enhance in-home care or

seek other options.

Now in her seventh year at the organization, Bjaranson oversees an extensive number of programs and courses that the group — which serves Clatsop, Tillamook, Polk, Marion and Yamhill counties — has to offer.

"Whether you've got resources or not, we can help break down what your options are and where to turn to, because it can be overwhelming," Bjaranson said.



Outside of counseling on options and resources, other programs, funded through the Older Americans Act and Medicaid, include caregiver support, fall prevention, Medicare counseling, mentoring for seniors suffering from anxiety or depression and several more.

Led by Bjaranson, the Clatsop County branch also offers a number of health education classes, such as overviews on chronic conditions, diabetes prevention and exercise.

But perhaps the organization's most impactful work, Bjaranson said, is through the home delivery meal program.

"There is such a need for it," she said. "Transportation can be

very tricky in this county for a lot of seniors, so having that program available is really huge."

NorthWest Senior and Disability Services also has three meal sites in the county — in Warrenton, Seaside and Svensen — where seniors can get together to eat and interact. With the arrival of the coronavirus pandemic, the sites have evolved into curbside pickup.

"The congregate is so valuable for people to connect and be with one another, and that stopped," Bjaranson said. "We can see that there is a need for that again. People are wanting to gather and be with their friends again."

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Suzanne Bjaranson is the community program supervisor at NorthWest Senior and Disability Services.

