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Business leaders press city for creative solutions on wastewater

Growth of breweries strains system

By NICOLE BALES
The Astorian

As Astoria finalizes its industrial pretreatment program, business leaders are calling for more creative solutions to increase capacity of the city's wastewater treatment facility.

The City Council adopted an ordinance this week formalizing the program, which requires all breweries, cideries and distilleries to have industrial discharge permits that set the limits on the sewage the businesses can release into the city's treatment lagoons.

In the coming weeks, the council will review separate resolutions that will establish waste allocations and detail a new rate structure that will classify different users based on concentration of wastewater.

The city began working with the two largest breweries — Fort George Brewery and Buoy Beer Co. — about two years ago to develop the program.

As the businesses, and others in the fermentation sector, have grown over the past decade, so has the strain on the city's system.

The concentration of suspended solids from the hops, barley and yeast used in the brewing process has been discharged directly into the treatment lagoons for years, impacting capacity and taxing the city's ability to pump out treated wastewater into the Columbia River clean enough for federal standards.

With the boom of craft beer across the county, the problem is not unique to Astoria. Other cities and breweries have also been forced to implement industrial pretreatment programs and figure out other ways to address the impact on municipal treatment systems.

Over the past two years, in addition to implementing an industrial pretreatment program, the city has planned and received funding for a \$5 million project to expand capacity of the treatment lagoons. Fort George and Buoy Beer jointly hired a brewery wastewater consultant, which led to developing a side-streaming system, which removes the heaviest effluent before the wastewater is discharged into the city's system.

Compete for capacity

With all the changes, Astoria expects the treatment lagoons to last until 2045. But some business leaders and brewery owners feel the new regulations, costs and limits could stifle growth or make it too expensive for new ventures to enter the market. There are also concerns that businesses will be left to compete for capacity.

"In your deliberations, we respectfully ask you to consider a couple of things," Ayreann Colombo, the executive director of Columbia

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Lydia Ely/The Astorian

Monica Gibbs prepares lunch plates while working at Filling Empty Bellies.

LiFEBoat Services looks to help the homeless find jobs

Transitional employment can be a bridge to the workforce

By NICOLE BALES
The Astorian

Monica Gibbs had been out of work for a while. She wanted to find a job, but she was not sure she could manage reentering the workforce.

Gibbs was homeless for much of her life, including after she moved to Astoria with her daughter in 2011. Her post-traumatic stress disorder makes it difficult for her to be consistent, which makes it hard for her to find a good fit and an employer willing to be patient.

"You mentally know yourself, and you're like, 'OK, I can go work this job until maybe two weeks when I get a paycheck, but after that I don't know if I'm going to be able to go back,'" she said. "McDonald's don't want you to walk in and tell them that. You're wasting their time. There has to be places that are equipped to give people a chance."

Gibbs said her life changed after

'THERE ARE SO MANY DIFFERENT TYPES OF MENTAL ILLNESS AND JUST BECAUSE YOU HAVE MENTAL ILLNESS DOESN'T MEAN THAT YOU CAN'T BE A PRODUCTIVE MEMBER OF SOCIETY ... YOU MIGHT JUST NEED A LITTLE BIT OF EXTRA HELP.'

Osarch Orak | director of Filling Empty Bellies

she became a member of Beacon Clubhouse, a members-only center that provides mental health support and other services.

Beacon Clubhouse and Filling Empty Bellies, a nonprofit that serves meals to anyone in need and connects homeless people with services, are under the umbrella of LiFEBoat Services, which opened on Commercial Street downtown last August.

Gibbs was the first person to complete Beacon Clubhouse's transitional employment program, which helps connect members to jobs and provides support during the first 90 days, whether it be assisting with transportation, job training or provid-

ing clothes and shoes. After 90 days, members may be hired on permanently or use the experience to find another job.

Gibbs was hired by Filling Empty Bellies to help in the kitchen for 90 days, and she said the work was a good fit and gave her something to focus on. Afterward, she took on a permanent position in the organization.

"With the transitional employment, I got a shot," said Gibbs, who has since also found housing. "I wasn't trying to prove to them I could do the job. I'm working hard to prove to myself that I could do it. And I did it."

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Popular downtown coffee shop to change hands

Cross stepping away from The Rusty Cup

By ABBEY McDONALD
The Astorian

From behind the counter at The Rusty Cup, Brian Medford greeted customers and their dogs by name and juggled coffee orders. He's still working on knowing what a regular will want as soon as they walk through the door.

When Medford takes over the beloved cafe on Commercial Street downtown, he will be inheriting much more than the business itself.

Kristy Cross, owner of the cafe and voted best barista by Coast Weekend's readers 10 years in a row, said she couldn't have sold the business to anyone with more enthusiasm.

Medford, originally from the Appalachians in North Carolina, learned baking professionally in Seattle. He moved to Astoria in 2019, where he owns Idlewild Biscuits and Bakes and works at Peter Pan Market & Deli.

"I had a pastry background, and I had wanted to have a spot here in town. Then the pandemic occurred, and this was always a place where I would come



Lydia Ely/The Astorian

Kristy Cross and Brian Medford stand in the doorway of The Rusty Cup.

and get my coffee," Medford said. "So I just thought, maybe I should just ask her what she's thinking about with the shop and see if she's interested in maybe doing something together."

The two began meeting earlier this year to discuss his interest in the business. Cross realized she'd found the person with the right energy to own and operate The Rusty Cup.

"We just started talking and it was very natural, and I could tell that he was going to have that same care for it that I have. I just felt good about it," Cross

said.

For the next month, Medford is working at the cafe three days a week to learn from Cross and get to know the business more before taking over at the end of June.

"I feel a little daunted about it. I mean, it's such a hub for folks and they love it here and they love Kristy. It's the coffee, it's the food. It's such a sense of fun here, and everybody's welcome," he said. "Kristy knows everyone,

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Commissioners move closer to consensus on vacation rentals

Vote would make rentals a recognized use

By ERICK BENGEL
The Astorian

Clatsop County commissioners have signaled they are ready to approve a change to the county's development code that would make vacation rentals a recognized use in unincorporated areas.

Commissioner Mark Kujala, Commissioner John Toyooka, Commissioner Courtney Bangs and Commissioner Lianne Thompson indicated they favor a county staff recommendation, crafted on board direction, to allow vacation rentals in all commercial and residential zones, where more than 170 already operate.

The four commissioners said at a Wednesday work session that they were pre-

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pared to vote on the issue after county staff presented an in-house report that did not find a direct causal link between the growth of the local vacation rental industry and the rise in home prices. Homes throughout the county are appreciating in value, likely driven by high demand facing a constricted supply, the report said.

The report also found that the vacation rental industry is not eating into affordable housing. Most homes used as rentals of 30 or fewer days fall outside a price range considered affordable.

A 2019 study that looked at the local housing crisis

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