

Power outage shut down elevator at Owens-Adair

Some worry about access to groceries and medications

By NICOLE BALES
The Astorian



The elevator is down at the Owens-Adair Apartments.

The elevator at Owens-Adair, an affordable housing complex for seniors and people with disabilities, has been down since a power outage Tuesday afternoon, leaving some residents unable to come and go from their apartments.

The power outage affected more than 7,400 customers in the Astoria area for more than an hour and caused disruptions for businesses and local government. The cause was traced to damage at the substation south of Youngs Bay.

In a letter to residents of Owens-Adair, the Northwest

was not sure if it was something they would have in stock.

“We are also working with our insurance company, as there may be coverages that can help us cover costs if we need to temporarily relocate people, if the repair timeline becomes protracted,” Evans said in an email on Thursday.

Jane Wilson, who lives on the second floor of Owens-Adair, told The Astorian that she has had a difficult time getting up and down the stairs, but that some of her neighbors cannot use the stairs at all.

One of her friends is blind and has a hard time walking downstairs. She needs help walking her dog until the elevator is repaired.

“It’s really cumbersome for all of us,” Wilson said.

“We can’t get our mail. A lot of people can’t get out to even go to the grocery store

and can’t put our groceries back upstairs because we can’t get upstairs.”

Other residents were exasperated and claimed the elevator has broken down several times over the past few years.

Some worry residents will be unable to get their medications or make it to medical appointments.

In April, the housing authority, which provides critical housing assistance to low-income residents in Clatsop, Columbia and Tillamook counties, unveiled a plan to double the size of the apartment complex and update the existing building.

A new, four-story, 50-unit apartment project called the Owens-Adair Annex would mirror the building and likely serve low-income seniors and people with disabilities earning 30% to 50% of the area median income.

Astoria Column: Mural is 525 feet long

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six years. The extensive history is something he continues to learn about every day.

He values chatting with visitors, making connections and hearing different inter-

pretations and observations of the detailed 525-foot-long mural that wraps around the Column, which illustrates the development of the region.

The Column also holds significance to Brown, who

grew up in Seaside and has many memories from visiting. She plans to submit a story of her own.

On one of her first dates with her now-husband up at Coxcomb Hill, she recalls slipping and falling on the

Column floor during a rainy day.

“It’s something we laugh about to this day,” she said.

Brown and Pynes hope others are also interested in sharing stories to help fill the pages of 100 years.

Ordinance: Decision was 3 to 1 to advance

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late 2019.

In April, the county extended a moratorium on new vacation rentals. The freeze is set to expire in late August, but could end sooner if the county settles the matter before then. A second reading on the ordinance will be held on June 22.

Nuanced conversations

Viviane Simon-Brown, a Cove Beach resident, told commissioners on Wednesday that, despite the lengthy public process, the county “has missed every opportunity to achieve lasting, viable, collaborative results our communities could live with.”

She said the county spent too much time focusing on the minutia of operating standards and avoided deeper discussions about the impact of vacation rentals on natural resources and the character of neighborhoods.

“Did we ever have the opportunity for nuanced conversations about what is a community? No. The public process forced us into, ‘You’re either for or against short-term rentals.’ There is no way to discuss the huge differences between neighbors renting and investment companies.

“Yes, you chose the process. Yes, you chose the structure. You determined the outcome,” she continued. “However, it’s not over. That’s a promise.”

Nancy Chase, who has owned a vacation rental in Cove Beach for decades, long before the advent of Airbnb and other online platforms, supported the ordinance, saying it clarifies the status of vacation rentals in residential zones, including those that have historically had part-time getaway homes.

“My view as an owner of a residence is that, if I have the right to rent my house for 30 days, why is it then illegal, or could be illegal, if I rent it for 29 days as a short-term rental?” she said. “I think it’s a residential property right.”

Commissioner Pamela Wev voted against holding a first reading. Echoing desires expressed by some residents and planning commissioners, she said she wanted the board to consider limiting the number of vacation rentals in certain areas.

“Almost everyone agrees that there should be some kind of a cap in order to maintain the livability and the residential integrity of the zones,” she said.

Wev recently indicated she favored a Planning Commission recommendation — one no longer before the board — that would have allowed vacation rentals in commercial and multifamily residential zones, along with Arch Cape, but prohibit them in other residential zones.

That recommendation would have phased out vacation rentals in Cove Beach and other neighborhoods as

permits expire. It would also eventually have eliminated about half a million dollars in lodging taxes, according to the county’s Department of Assessment and Taxation.

Property rights

Wev said on Wednesday she wanted to withdraw the ordinance. She has called it a “one-size-fits-all” approach.

“It’s not even a compromise,” she told her fellow commissioners. “I think it’s just not the direction that we should be going in when we talk about zoning in rural places in Clatsop County.”

Commissioner Courtney Bangs does not view the vacation rental ordinance as bringing about sweeping changes, but as preserving the status quo, since scores of vacation rentals already populate the landscape.

“I want to support the people that live within my district and who have reached out to me out of fear that we would somehow remove their livelihood from them in this process,” said Bangs, who represents the eastern portion of the county.

She and Commissioner Lianne Thompson expressed concerns about violating owners’ property rights. They both raised the specter of litigation if the county banned vacation rentals.

Noting the relative wealth of some people who oppose vacation rentals in their neighborhoods, Thompson said, “I’ve heard a lot

Outbreaks: ‘The virus keeps mutating’

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The Astorian reached out to the third facility but could not immediately confirm the outbreak.

Due to a surge in virus cases, the health department has urged people to wear masks at indoor gatherings, especially where immunocompromised people and other vulnerable populations are present.

The county has also advised people who have not yet been vaccinated and boosted against the virus to do so.

After the county saw a spring lull in COVID-19 infections — less than 20 per week, the county said — case counts have spiked. Scores of new infections appeared in the county in the first week of June, according to Oregon Health Authority figures.

“It’s concerning to me when we’re having outbreaks again in our long-term

care facilities because those residents are dependent on us to protect their health and well-being,” Margo Lulich, the county’s interim public health director, said.

An outbreak at Clatsop Care Memory Community last year involved 37 cases and five deaths.

The health authority released a report on Thursday tracking May’s “breakthrough” virus cases, where people who have been vaccinated nevertheless get infected.

Of 44,363 cases statewide, more than 47% were among unvaccinated people, while about 52% were among the vaccinated, according to the health authority. About 62% of the breakthrough cases were among people who had received a booster, the health authority said.

“If you look at the overall data of severity of illness and hospitalizations, those who are boosted experience less severe illness,” Lulich said.

The health authority reported that hospitalization occurred in less than 3% of breakthrough cases and less than 1% have died. “The median age of vaccinated people who died is 80,” the health authority wrote.

The county’s booster rate has lagged behind the vaccination rate, which now stands at about 74%. A county survey among more than 400 self-selected respondents found a hesitancy to get boosted. This was especially true for the second booster shot, which has been approved for age groups and individuals most at risk.

Lulich said she is not trying to sound an alarm but to remind people the pandemic is not over. “The virus keeps mutating,” she said.

As of Wednesday, the county had seen 5,057 virus cases and 50 deaths since the pandemic began, according to the health authority’s tally.

Bird flu: All of the protocols could change again, and quickly

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that are particularly susceptible to the disease.

That means, in most cases, no gulls, no barn owls, no eagles — exactly the kinds of birds the wildlife center sees often.

The risk to people is low, but for birds, avian influenza is often fatal and there is no vaccine or treatment, said Katie Haman, a Washington state wildlife veterinarian.

Bringing an infected bird into a clinic or a home could spread the disease to new areas and increase its reach, Haman said.

The Washington State Department of Health and the state Department of Fish and Wildlife this week cautioned people against touching sick or dead wild birds.

The virus is extremely contagious among some domesticated bird species like chickens, pheasants and turkeys and is often spread through interactions with wild birds.

Some experts expect cases to drop off in the summer as migrating wild birds move on, though there is a chance cases could spike again in the fall with cooler temperatures.

But it isn’t even clear what the situation is right now since few wild birds are being tested. Nor do experts know which bird species have been most affected. After all, noted Cheryl Strong, a biologist for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, it is easier to find a large sick bird like a bald eagle than a very small sick bird like a snowy plover.

For now, Strong and others have received guidance to avoid handling birds out in the field. The Oregon

Biodiversity Information Center out of Portland State University is avoiding capturing and banding adult birds during the outbreak.

At the wildlife center, Saranpaa is already thinking about the weeks ahead. Pelicans usually start showing up at the center’s clinic in June and late July. There are baby seabirds that also make appearances in the early summer.

Saranpaa said he wants to find ways to continue to serve the community and help wildlife despite the challenges posed by the bird flu. He hopes to be able to do field assessments as people encounter birds in need of help.

With these assessments, volunteers could perform euthanasias on site if a bird is exhibiting symptoms of avian influenza without the risk of bringing the disease back to the wildlife clinic. If a bird isn’t exhibiting symptoms, there’s the possibility they could be brought back to the clinic and put into a five-day quarantine.

The wildlife center still needs to run this idea past the state, but the center has not had a positive case yet and Saranpaa is confident going forward.

Still, he cautions, all of the protocols could change again, and quickly.

For now, clinic staff are telling people who encounter sick or injured waterfowl like ducks or geese to call the nearest state fish and wildlife office. For other types of birds, people should call the wildlife center’s clinic before trying to capture the bird and bring it in.

This story is part of a collaboration between The Astorian and Coast Community Radio.

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