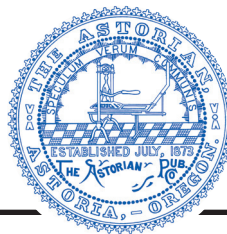


OPINION



the Astorian

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GUEST COLUMN

Oregon gains new state agency

You probably didn't notice what happened in state government overnight between June 30 and July 1.

Gov. Kate Brown gained a state agency under her direct control. Emergency management went from a long-time office housed within the state Military Department to becoming the independent Department of Emergency Management.



DICK HUGHES

"It really elevates emergency management as a core function of government," Andrew Phelps, the department's director, told me. "Our

mission didn't change. Our job of preparing for, mitigating against, responding to and recovering from disasters really stayed the same."

The evolution from Office of Emergency Management to a department will affect Oregonians. But mostly it will occur behind the scenes, including strengthening training, expanding staffing and modernizing the role of emergency management.

"Emergencies and disasters, they're not natural. We sometimes hear them called natural disasters, but that's not accurate. Emergencies and disasters are the results of hazards that impact or intersect with where we build and how we build. ...

"Wildfires become disasters when they burn into that wildland-urban interface and we haven't done enough to reduce the risk. We haven't done enough to create defensible space or build with more fire-resistant materials," Phelps said.

"My hope is having us as a Cabinet-level department — a department that's at a peer level with other state agencies — it allows us to be more intentional on that risk-reduction aspect of our work as emergency managers and influence those conversations about how we build and where we build. What investments we as a state choose to make or choose not to make. Those all play such a huge role in whether or not a hazard is



The state has a new Department of Emergency Management.

'HISTORICALLY, OUR MORE MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES, UNDERSERVED COMMUNITIES, FARE MUCH WORSE AFTER A DISASTER. AND THOSE DIVIDES THAT EXIST ON A BLUE-SKY DAY IN OUR COMMUNITY ARE FURTHER EXACERBATED WHEN WE HAVE AN EMERGENCY OR DISASTER.'

Andrew Phelps | Department of Emergency Management's director

simply a hazard or a hazard that leads to a disaster."

Emergency management has been a complicated, and often convoluted, system in Oregon. It involves cities, counties, tribes, nonprofits, businesses, state agencies and the federal government. Tensions and difficulties, which vexed local officials and legislators alike, were reflected in state audit reports and the state's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Sometimes good people, wanting to do the right thing, end up doing the wrong thing, because structures get in the way and there are overlapping authorities and people don't actually know who is in charge," state Rep. Paul Evans, D-Mon-

mouth, said at a legislative hearing in February 2021 on House Bill 2927.

"And quite frankly, agencies trying to continue (their) main mission, sometimes find themselves actually not either being successful at the day-to-day stuff and not being successful at supporting the emergency mission."

Evans, who chaired the House emergency management committee, was the driving force behind the bipartisan HB 2927. It shifted the Office of Emergency Management to a department this year and the Office of the State Fire Marshal to a department next year from under Oregon State Police, as well as making other changes to clarify roles. The product of discussions since 2017, the

78-page bill passed the House with unanimous support and the Senate with four "no" votes.

Oregon is a lovely state. But virtually every square inch has a complex hazard profile, which could include potential for fires, windstorms, excessive heat, ice or snowstorms, landslides, volcanic eruptions, dam collapses, earthquakes, tsunamis, chemical spills, pipeline ruptures or other events.

It's a misconception that emergency management runs disaster response. Who's in charge will vary but is guided by emergency plans. If the governor declares an emergency, it is Phelps' job to marshal state resources and ensure that agencies provide the needed assistance. He also is the point person for federal disaster response.

Much of emergency management's work is with communities and agencies in building collaboration and getting ahead of potential emergencies.

"We think of ourselves in emergency management at the state level as kind of the conductors of the orchestra. We don't play all the instruments," Phelps said. "But we make sure that everyone has their instruments, that they know how to play them. That they've got the same piece of music. That they're stopping and starting at the same time, playing at the same volume and tempo and in the same concert hall."

That should mean Oregon communities, whether Portland or Pendleton, Astoria or Ashland, are treated more equitably in emergency preparation and management.

"We know that here in Oregon and really across the nation, disasters don't impact everyone the same. Different communities have different capacity to withstand shock and stresses of a bad day," Phelps said.

"Historically, our more marginalized communities, underserved communities, fare much worse after a disaster. And those divides that exist on a blue-sky day in our community are further exacerbated when we have an emergency or disaster."

Dick Hughes has been covering the Oregon political scene since 1976.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Long overdue

First, I want to thank Laurie Caplan for her letter to the editor (July 5). It opened my eyes! For some reason, I understood that the community spaces described by Mayor Bruce Jones and others would be in addition to our much-needed remodeled library.

Second, is the bond on the November ballot to remodel the Astoria Library, or is it to create a community center, with limited access to books? This needs to be made clear.

I, too, am a browser. I browse for books in a library, or used book store. I've done this since I was a child, studying the books to choose just the right one(s).

I visited the Astoria Library last week. There were no other patrons at the desk, so I spoke with the staff about the proposed remodel, and my concerns. One of the women walked me over to the plans and answered my questions.

I was so pleasantly surprised! Not only will I be able to freely browse the stacks, but there will be more natural light, a ramp and elevator to meet the Americans with Disabilities Act standards and more children's space, in addition to expanded community areas.

Our Astoria Library is long overdue for a remodel. Go to the library, look at the plans, talk with the staff, and then decide how you will cast your vote in November.

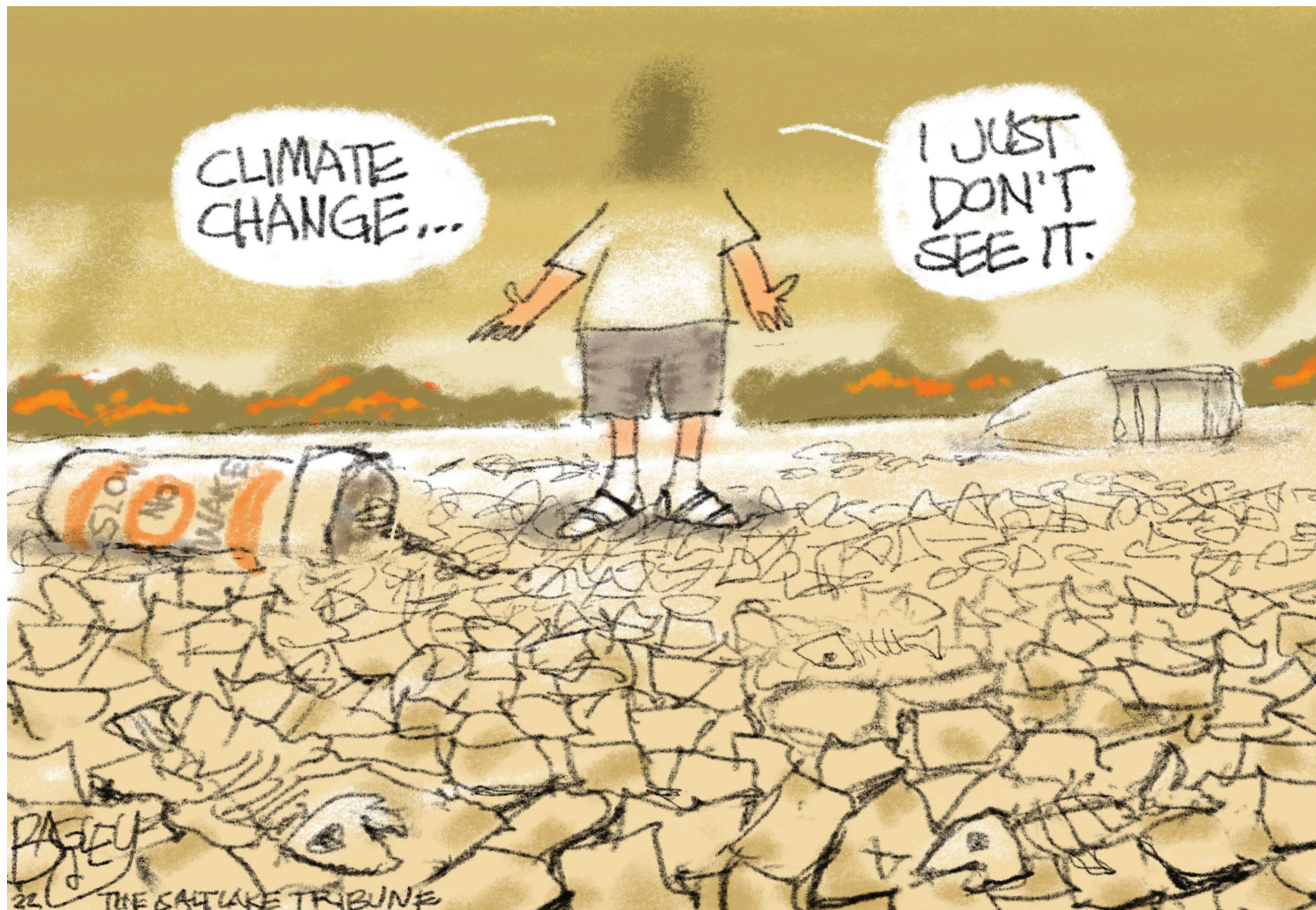
MARCIA FENSKE
Astoria

Trick you

My wife and I raised four kids and a dog in unincorporated Astoria. Today, we want to turn our future retirement home into a short-term rental while we finish our careers.

When we lived in Astoria, our backyard served as a target range for guns, a grazing area for many loud roosters, a campground for overnight birthday parties, it held Fourth of July parties with fireworks, along with many more activities.

Our landscaping was maintained on a "when I had time" schedule. We stored a boat in the driveway, a broken down car (twice), and we rode four-wheelers. In all that time, our neighbors never called the cops on us; our property simply allows for that kind of activity.



LETTERS WELCOME

Letters should be exclusive to The Astorian. Letters should be fewer than 250 words and must include the writer's name, address and phone number. You will be contacted to confirm authorship. All letters are subject to editing for space, grammar and factual accuracy. Only two letters per writer are allowed each month. Letters written in response

to other letter writers should address the issue at hand and should refer to the headline and date the letter was published. Discourse should be civil. Send via email to editor@dailyastorian.com, online at bit.ly/astorianletters, in person at 949 Exchange St. in Astoria or mail to Letters to the Editor, P.O. Box 210, Astoria, OR., 97103.

Contrast that to today. The property is professionally landscaped and maintained every two weeks. It has zero broken down cars in the driveway, no boats, roosters, dogs, kids, etc. Everything that was considered "good enough" has been upgraded to perfection for potential guests.

In short, there are never going to be

guests who can outdo my family with noise, cars, activity, water usage, etc., plus my house looks better than ever. Turning my house into a short-term rental has actually greatly increased the comfort of my neighbors.

Don't let the not-in-my-back-yard people (NIMBYs) trick you. They want their

private beaches, in their rich neighborhoods, to remain exclusive to all. If the NIMBYs succeeded, you handed them the keys to our beaches. Beaches are for the public, not the rich!

CHRIS DeLONG
Snohomish, Washington

Sums it all up

Kudos to Charles Dice, Jeff Davis and Clare Hasler-Lewis for fighting vacation rentals in residential county zoning. Seaside has destroyed residential zoning with them, leaving us with only motel zones.

"Neighborhoods are for families, not vacation rental businesses," to quote Dice, which sums it all up. I wish our city had had these ethics when they instead chose to decimate our living areas.

SANDY REA
Seaside