



Astorian

150TH YEAR, NO. 12

DailyAstorian.com // THURSDAY, JULY 28, 2022

\$1.50

City advances code changes for housing

Amendments are tied to state law

By NICOLE BALES
The Astorian

The Astoria Planning Commission approved development code amendments Tuesday night designed to remove barriers for new housing construction.

The amendments, which are expected to go before the City Council in September, are in response to recent changes in state law intended to increase housing affordability and availability across Oregon.

Astoria became recognized as a medium-sized city when its population tipped over 10,000, which means it must comply with new rules that include allowing duplexes on residential lots that allow single-family homes. The city must also expand opportunities for lot divisions for middle housing, which enables units in duplexes and triplexes to be sold individually.

To avoid the state code automatically taking effect, the changes must be

adopted by the end of the year.

Since most of the city's buildable land has been developed, the city said the changes would encourage infill. The amendments also incorporate recommendations made in Clatsop County's 2019 housing study.

During a public hearing on the amendments, Megan Leatherman, the city's community development director, reviewed adjustments made since the last Planning Commission meeting in June.

"The state legislation is definitely more specific in what we have to do, and we made those changes in the draft that I presented at the last meeting," she said. "And so where we have a little bit of wiggle room and room for discussion and input from the community and the commissioners is with some of the county housing study components."

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Lydia Ely/The Astorian

A 2020 survey of Jewell School District families found that less than 40% of people in the area had reliable internet.

Expanding access to broadband in Jewell proves to be difficult

A project between the county and the school district faces challenges

By ERICK BENDEL
The Astorian

A project to bring broadband to the Jewell area is undergoing a reboot.

Last year, Clatsop County and the Jewell School District signed an intergovernmental agreement to deliver improved internet access to areas where service, if it exists at all, tends to be spotty and sluggish. A 2020 survey of school district families found that less than 40% of people in the Jewell area had reliable internet.

The task of upgrading internet service in this remote corner of the county has proven more difficult than the proposal initially suggested.

Meanwhile, the school district — the project's community anchor — has faced upheavals in leadership.

Steve Phillips, the former superintendent who originally presented the broadband idea to the county Board of Commissioners in September, was placed on administrative leave pending an independent investigation. In May, Phillips became the new superintendent at Newberg Public Schools.

Brian Gardner — who served

'IT'S A COMPLICATED ISSUE. THERE'S NOT AN EASY ANSWER (TO) HOW TO GET INTERNET TO VERY RURAL AND SECLUDED PLACES, YOU KNOW? THAT'S WHY IT HASN'T BEEN DONE.'

Brian Gardner | former acting superintendent who is serving as a consultant on the broadband project

as acting superintendent earlier this year before Cory Pederson was hired along with a new principal — continues to work as a consultant on the broadband project.

Gardner said he has put a stop to spending any additional money on it.

"It's not a boondoggle," he

said, "and I'm trying to make sure that it doesn't become one."

An early phase of the project called for a \$500,000 contribution from the county and \$250,000 from the school district.

A little over \$140,000 has gone into the project so far, Gardner said. That amount has paid for a trunk line — a dedicated fiber-optic cable — connected to Jewell School, a tower — called "tower zero" — atop a school building, and a roughly \$80,000 deposit with American Tower Corp. to build towers to serve the wider region. If the project doesn't pan out, about \$50,000 of that \$80,000 is recoverable, since there is a \$30,000 restocking fee on materials already purchased.

In total, roughly \$90,000 has been spent, Gardner said.

The intergovernmental agreement stipulates that the county pays for two-thirds, the school district the other third. If the project were to end at this point, the county would be out roughly \$60,000, the school district about \$30,000, Gardner said.

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Eviction worries intensify as protections end

Many struggle with high cost of rent

By ALEXIS WEISEND
The Astorian

SEASIDE — Patricia Cook, who manages a Dollar General, has been living in her car since she was evicted in June.

Paying her rent wasn't a problem until her mother moved out and she began to struggle without the extra income. Then, she said, her rent was raised.

Cook is looking for a new place to stay at a time when rents are high, housing options are scarce and applying for rental assistance no longer keeps her safe from eviction.

"There's so many people in this town that are working, but there's no housing that they can go to

because they can't afford it," she said.

During the coronavirus pandemic, a series of moratoriums on evictions and foreclosures in Oregon helped prevent evictions from surging.

Oregon extended protections for tenants who applied for rental assistance by the end of June. If tenants receive an eviction notice for nonpayment of rent and show their landlord they applied for rental assistance before the deadline, they cannot be evicted while their application is pending.

The safe harbor protection expires at the end of September.

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WARRENTON

City to put transfer of preschool building on ballot

Community Action Team would take over

By ETHAN MYERS
The Astorian

WARRENTON — Voters will decide in November whether the city can transfer a preschool building that has become a financial burden.

Head Start, a federally funded preschool program, operates at several locations across Clatsop County, including one on S.W.

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Joshua Bessex/The Astorian

Warrenton is looking to transfer a Head Start building to Community Action Team.

Crockett chooses not to run for City Council

An open seat in downtown's Ward 3

By NICOLE BALES
The Astorian

Jennifer Crockett, the executive director of the Liberty Theatre, will not run for the Astoria City Council in the November election.

Crockett, who was the first person to announce her candidacy for the downtown Ward 3 seat, said her choice was prompted by family matters.

City Councilor Joan Herman, who holds the seat, has chosen not to seek a second, four-year term.

"I recognize the importance of local individuals stepping up and taking part in local government, and what an awesome opportunity that would be," Crockett said in a statement. "Unfortunately, my situation has changed and that is no longer an option for me at this time."



"But, I look forward to continuing to participate in my community as an advocate for the arts and economic development as the executive director of the Liberty Theatre."

In an interview with The Astorian earlier this year, Crockett said she wanted to be part of the discussion in deciding how the city

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