



Alexis Weisend/The Astorian

Copeland Commons, a nonprofit, wants to develop affordable housing at a former hotel building on Marine Drive.

City to consider system development charges

Fees could help finance infrastructure

By NICOLE BALES
The Astorian

The Astoria City Council is expected to approve a contract with a consultant in the coming weeks to craft and implement a system development charge program.

A system development charge is a one-time fee assessed on new development and some types of redevelopment that is typically collected when applying for a building permit.

The fee is intended to get developers to pay their fair share for costs associated with expanding public infrastructure needed to accommodate growth. It is also intended to prevent the burden from falling on existing development and utility ratepayers.

Nathan Crater, a city engineer, told the City Council during a work session Friday that fees could be used to support capital improvement projects related to infrastructure.

See Charges, Page A6

Nonprofit looks to close funding gap for affordable housing project downtown

Copeland Commons could seek urban renewal money

By NICOLE BALES
The Astorian

An Astoria nonprofit hoping to create affordable housing downtown is looking to the city to help close a funding gap.

Congregants at First Presbyterian Church purchased a former hotel building on Marine Drive in 2019 with a plan to renovate and provide housing.

The church group, now a nonprofit called Copeland Commons, has been discussing a partnership with Innovative Housing Inc., the Portland nonprofit that renovated the former Waldorf Hotel next to City Hall into the Merwyn Apartments.

Andy Davis, a board member of Copeland Commons, told the City Council during a work session Friday that he expects a development agreement with the nonprofit will be signed in the coming weeks.

He said the group intends to apply for low-income housing tax credits to help complete the project.

Funding gap

Davis said that while the details and costs are still estimates, the group appears to have a funding gap of about \$1.5 million. He said partners like the Columbia Pacific Coordinated Care Organization are willing to help, but that the group needs to secure investments from additional sources before breaking ground.

“There’s some urgency on our part to get help with that,” Davis said, noting that the group has been sitting on the property for some time and wants to apply for state funding in the spring.

He said Bill Van Nostran, the pastor of First Presbyterian who spearheaded the effort to buy the property, has announced plans to retire at the end of the year.

“I’d like to see us move ahead in definitive ways before that happens,” Davis said.

TOGETHER, THE TWO BUILDINGS COULD PROVIDE MORE THAN 60 UNITS TARGETED FOR PEOPLE WHO EARN BETWEEN 30% AND 80% OF THE AREA MEDIAN INCOME, DAVIS SAID. MOST WOULD LIKELY BE STUDIO APARTMENTS AND THE OTHERS WOULD BE A MIX OF ONE AND TWO-BEDROOM UNITS.

Davis said the building, which used to serve as a boarding house, is blighted and would essentially need to be gutted and rebuilt. He said Copeland Commons also owns the empty lot to the east, where they plan to build a second, attached building.

Together, the two buildings could provide more than 60 units targeted for people who earn between 30% and 80% of the area median income, Davis said. Most would likely be studio apartments and the others would be a mix of one and two-bedroom units.

“One of the reasons (Innovative Housing) is interested in the project is because the Merwyn is a small enough footprint and housing development that it’s hard for them to support management and maintenance staff on a full-time basis,” Davis said. “And they’re expecting that if they are controlling two buildings in the downtown, the Copeland and the Merwyn, that they would be able to have full-time staff for those positions and it would make managing both of them much easier.”

Interim City Manager Paul Benoit said the property is located within the city’s Astor East Urban

See Housing, Page A6

Black History Bus Tour to explore North Coast

The popular program resumes after pause

By ALEXIS WEISEND
The Astorian

The Oregon Black Pioneers’ Black History Bus Tour will explore the North Coast in September, stopping at sites of African American historical significance.

The tour, which will leave from the Charles Jordan Community Center in Portland on the morning of Sept. 18 and return that evening, winds from Portland to Seaside and includes a series of guest speakers and films on African American history in Oregon.

Zachary Stocks, the executive director of the Oregon Black Pioneers and an education technician at Lewis and Clark National Historical Park, said he is proud the tour will resume for the first time in six years. New

See Tour, Page A6

Finding health — and joy — through time with dogs

Holen has trained border collies

By ERICK BENGEL
The Astorian

When Pam Holen was in her 50s and still living in Alaska, she developed rheumatoid arthritis, an autoimmune disorder that damages joints, bones, tissue, even eyes and organs.

Holen’s specialist told her she’d likely be in a wheelchair in her 60s. “And that made me mad,” she recalled.

Holen sought a form of exercise



that would keep her condition from worsening.

At a state fair, she watched two older ladies running their puffy miniature poodles through an agility event, a course where dogs leap over obstacles, weave around poles, climb A-frames and perform other feats of speed and grace. “And I went, ‘I can do that,’” she said.

Holen went on to train border collies.

Now in her 70s, the Astoria resident has competed in almost every sport — including agility, flyball,

sheepherding and scent work — that border collies excel in. Some of her dogs earned top scores in Alaska, she said.

Everything involved in owning dogs, from multiple daily walks to throwing a ball, served as physical therapy. “You don’t permit yourself to give up to the pain in your body,” she said.

Her rheumatoid arthritis went into remission.

In Alaska, Holen ran medical offices, worked as a paralegal and served as the court-appointed special advocacy program in Wasilla. After she retired, she ran a bed-and-breakfast.

A master gardener, Holen founded the Flavel House Garden



Erick Bengel/The Astorian

See Holen, Page A6

Pam Holen, of Astoria, with her 13-year-old border collie, Maisie.

