

Cannon Beach will go to voters on food tax

By **KATIE FRANKOWICZ**
The Astorian

CANNON BEACH — It looked like the City Council was about to pass a controversial local tax on prepared food — until suddenly it didn't.

City councilors had voted 3-2 last week in favor of drafting an ordinance to enact a 5% tax rather than putting the question to voters in the November election.

But at a special meeting last Wednesday night, City Councilor Brandon Ogilvie, who had voted in favor of pursuing the ordinance at a previous meeting, changed his mind. Now, the city will race the clock to get a tax proposal ready for the November ballot.

The switch suits a number of restaurant, coffee shop and bakery owners and service industry workers who urged city councilors to put the matter to a public vote, or

at least hit pause on passing the ordinance.

City leaders estimate the local tax would raise about \$1.7 million per year. The city planned to split the revenue with the Cannon Beach Rural Fire Protection District to help with operational costs. The city's cut would go toward funding a new City Hall and police station — to replace the aging facility with one that can function as a center for emergency operations.

Other Oregon cities have passed or have considered passing similar taxes to pay for infrastructure.

'There's time'

At a meeting last week, the City Council heard overwhelmingly from people in favor of the tax, who agreed with some city leaders that it was the best way to spread out the costs of infrastructure needs and emergency services fairly between visitors and residents.

The tax was small, they said, and most visitors, coming from places with statewide sales taxes, would be unlikely to notice.

But the food service industry rallied ahead of last Wednesday's special meeting and there were only a few present who spoke in favor of the tax.

Those against it listed a number of concerns. They said their businesses already exist on slim margins and the coronavirus pandemic took a heavy toll. Now, they are struggling to regain their footing and find workers. Some businesses were forced to restrict their hours or their capacity because they can't secure enough employees. They worried that the tax would affect how people tipped staff.

With supply chain disruptions and workforce issues across a variety of industries, it has also been difficult to stock the products needed to create the goods they sell,

added Deanna Hammond, the co-owner of Cannon Beach Bakery.

The pandemic is far from over and who knows how long these other effects will last, she told the City Council. She questioned why the tax needed to be passed now. "There's time," she said, "but this isn't the time."

Others worried about how the tax would impact North Coast residents' ability and interest in dining out in Cannon Beach. The businesses rely on locals during the off-season, but a tax could drive those customers elsewhere.

Some business owners asked the City Council to look into other ways to raise the money. They suggested paid parking or an increase to the local lodging tax.

'My vote is no'

City Manager Bruce St. Denis said that city leaders have looked at several options since the prepared food tax was first discussed two years

ago. The tax emerged as the best option in terms of the amount raised and the flexibility the city would have in how it used the money, he and City Councilor Mike Benefield said.

Mayor Sam Steidel supported the tax but wanted it to go to voters, as did City Councilor Robin Risley. They said it was a huge decision with the potential for major impacts on businesses.

City Councilor Nancy McCarthy, however, was adamant that the decision should be made by the City Council. She believed it was the council's job to ensure there was adequate funding for city projects and the health and safety needs of residents, visitors and city employees.

The prepared food tax is an extremely important decision, she said Wednesday. "And it's our decision that we have to make," she said.

Ogilvie was initially reluctant to put the matter to vot-

ers, as well, and he believed enacting the tax was the right decision.

He also referenced a large organization that he expected would put its weight behind trying to defeat any local food tax proposal on the November ballot. The Oregon Restaurant and Lodging Association released a statement following the City Council's last meeting saying the proposed tax was "unconscionable" at this time.

Given the association's likely involvement, "that, to me, does not feel like a vote of the community," Ogilvie said.

But when it came time to vote, Ogilvie paused for a long moment.

"I'm going to change my vote," he said finally. He apologized to the people who had supported him in his earlier stance.

But, Ogilvie said, "I'm going to insist that this does go for a vote and that's all I have to say. My vote is 'no.'"

Most new county virus cases involve the unvaccinated

By **GRIFFIN REILLY**
The Astorian

Most new coronavirus cases in Clatsop County involve people who are unvaccinated against COVID-19, a pattern found across Oregon and the United States.

Of the last 11 reported virus cases in the county as of last Friday, nine were unvaccinated, according to the Public Health Department.

The pattern is playing out on the North Coast as most government restrictions to contain the virus have been lifted and locals and visitors are engaged in summer activities.

Mass vaccination events in the county have ended and the pace of vaccinations has slowed over the past several weeks.

"It's going to be a very slow, uphill climb for our county," said Margo Lalich, the county's interim public health director. "And I don't know if we'll get there."

Clatsop County set a goal of having 70% of the popu-

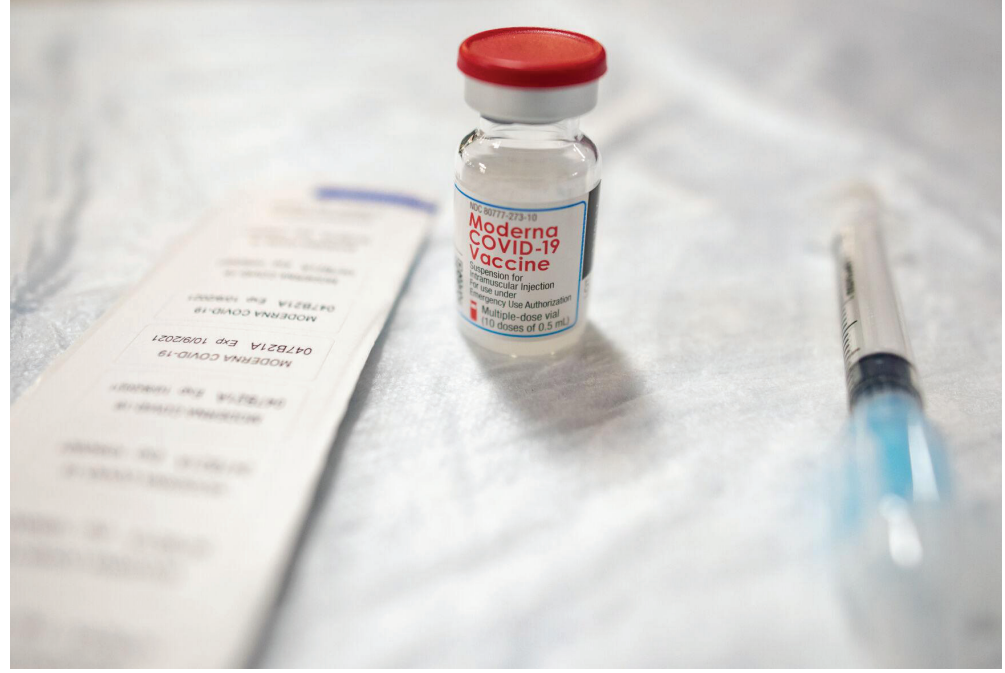
lation — 27,533 people — vaccinated to try to achieve herd immunity against the virus. As of last week, 55.2% — 21,772 people — had been fully vaccinated.

The county announced that last Friday's weekly update from the vaccine task force would be the last. Instead, the county said it would share vaccine updates and related information on the county's website and on social media.

Last week the Oregon Health Authority, which tracks county vaccination rates among people 18 and over, lists Clatsop County as having 65.5% with at least one dose of vaccine and 60.8% as fully vaccinated. The rates place Clatsop County in the top third of Oregon counties for vaccinations.

As of Wednesday, the county has recorded 1,113 virus cases, 25 hospitalizations and 10 deaths since the pandemic began.

Despite a surge of virus cases in late June, which prompted the state to put the county under caution, and about 40 new virus cases



Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

More than 55% of Clatsop County residents have been fully vaccinated against the coronavirus.

over the past three weeks, the urgency to take precautions has appeared to wane since the state lifted restrictions at the end of June.

The county has transitioned to a more targeted approach to close in on the vaccination goal. New outreach will identify smaller communities across the

county that may be experiencing accessibility barriers, Lalich said.

"These events are open to the community, but we are also meeting people where they live in case there could potentially be transportation barriers or with individual work schedule," she said.

Lalich said her team has

observed that many people were reluctant to get vaccinated because they wanted to see how others would respond to a vaccine. Others changed their view after someone in their personal circle tested positive for the virus.

She hopes people recognize that many of the health

precautions the county has asked people to take are not necessarily unique to COVID-19.

"I just want to reiterate that many of the things we have in place for COVID are things we have had in place for years during flu season," Lalich said. "You stay home if you're sick, proper hand-washing, don't go to work if you're sick. That is not new information, it's just that people are paying more attention because we have a novel virus circulating in our community and around the globe."

The Public Health Department expects virus cases to rise as more things return to normal. Officials believe the risk of exposure from new cases is as good a reason as any to get vaccinated.

"Even though Oregon has opened up, many restrictions are still in place," Lalich said. "Being vaccinated, we know, can prevent infection most of the time. If someone does get infected, the risk of illness or hospitalization goes down when someone is fully vaccinated."

NEWS NOTES

Rare to Coast, opah found at Sunset Beach

A large fish, rare to the Oregon Coast, was found on Sunset Beach last Wednesday morning. The 3.5-foot, 100-pound opah was reported to the Seaside Aquarium at 8 a.m.

After seeing photographs of the unusual fish they quickly responded and recovered the fish. It created quite the stir at the Aquarium where folks were encouraged to come take a look at this beautiful and odd-looking fish.

The fish will be frozen until the school year starts. Partnering with the Columbia River Maritime Museum's educational director, Nate Sandel, a school group will dissect this large fish.

While rare this far north it is not unheard of. According to The Oregonian, a 97-pound opah was caught 37 miles off of the Columbia River Mouth in 2009.

Opahs can grow to over 6 feet and weigh over 600 pounds. They inhabit the open ocean in tropical and temperate waters where they feed on krill and squid.



Tiffany Boothe/Seaside Aquarium

A 100-pound opah was found on Sunset Beach last Wednesday morning.

a turning point in the civic and cultural history of the state, reads a proclamation delivered at last Monday's City Council meeting, celebrating the 1.5-mile sea wall and promenade. The Prom plays "a vital role in the tourism industry that generates millions of dollars for the local and state economy."

Mayor Jay Barber and council members unanimously supported the proclamation.

On Aug. 7, the city will celebrate the centennial with a parade at 10 a.m. and a public ceremony on the Turnaround at 1 p.m. State Sen. Betsy Johnson is the keynote speaker.

The proclamation was part of a year-long celebration of the Prom Centennial, the Sunset Empire Park and Recreation District is hosting a chalk art contest on the Seaside Promenade on July 30. On Saturday, July 31, artists will create art on the Seaside Promenade near the Turnaround starting at 9 a.m., with judging and an awards ceremony with

prizes that afternoon.

"It's so important for us to remember our history and here's a great quote that really underscores that the past shapes our future," Barber said at the council meeting's close. "Whether we realize it or not, remembering well, is as important as doing well."

With more than \$31K in donations, playground close to fruition

A Gearhart girl's dream looks closer to reality as the city prepares to bring a playground to Pacific Way.

When the former Gearhart Elementary School was shut down, the playground equipment was transferred to the new Pacific Ridge Elementary School. Ten-

year-old Berkley Sturgell launched a Quarter Mile

Challenge to raise funds for the city's Play Equipment Fund. The goal was to collect enough quarters to stretch the length of one-quarter mile. According to Sturgell's estimate, that was about 17,160 quarters, or roughly \$4,290.

Sturgell's efforts brought three times that, more than \$12,000. With outside donations large and small, a total of \$31,000 has been raised so far. Mayor Paulina Cockrum said at last Wednesday's City Council meeting.

That brings the playground closer to fruition.

"We have selected a

likely vendor and have a couple designs that I have to review," Cockrum said.

Costs have not been determined.

Upon ordering, equipment delivery is expected in about eight weeks.

"Because of the loss of the school system we want to get this done sooner rather than later," City Administrator Chad Sweet said at the meeting.

After looking at designs and costs, the city will see what the funding gap might be. Construction should begin "as soon as possible," he said.

Council proclamation honors city 'turning point'

"A turning point in the civic and cultural history of the state of Oregon," is how a proclamation celebrating the 100th year of the Seaside Prom.

The promenade marked

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