

Jewell School District hires acting superintendent

Gardner retired from Central Linn

By **ETHAN MYERS**
The Astorian



The Jewell School District has named an acting superintendent.

JEWELL — The Jewell School District has hired an acting replacement for Superintendent Steve Phillips, who was placed on administrative leave last month pending an investigation.

Following an executive session on Monday night, the school board voted unanimously to make Brian Gardner, a former superintendent at Central Linn School District in Linn County, the acting superintendent for the rural school district. The appointment was effective immediately.

“We’re very excited,” Mike Stahly, the school board’s chairman, told The Astorian. “He is starting in the morning — he is actually starting right now. I hope everybody has a chance to stop in and meet him.”

Gardner served as super-

intendent in Linn County for a decade before retiring from the position last year. He also has past experience as a principal and teacher.

He will fill in through the end of June, or until an earlier date is given by the school board with 30 days advance notice, according to

his contract.

The appointment of Gardner comes as Jewell has faced leadership uncertainty and turnover in recent years.

“My interest in Jewell is because I think that my basic background and skills can come in and hopefully calm the waters a little bit, and do

some things to help the district set up for long term and permanent success,” Gardner said to the school board and attendees of the meeting on Monday. “My basic feeling is you do that by focusing on the kids and focusing on the staff. The rest of it is noise.”

“So I see it as — my job is to try to get that focus back to where it needs to be ... Hopefully, I can help with that. I am looking forward to it.”

With only a few months remaining in the school year, Gardner said he plans to meet individually with school board members and administrators to get himself up to speed.

The acting superintendent’s duties will feature a combination of remote and in-person work. Gardner, who is based in Nevada, plans to make weekly commutes to the school district, spending a few days at a time in Jewell.

In his contract, Gardner will be paid based on days worked, with his weekly earnings prorated at \$800 per day. With the exception of spring break, his contract requires a weekly in-person presence.

After the conclusion of the school board meeting on Monday, Gardner held a discussion with parents and attendees, addressing concerns and answering ques-

tions. Topics touched on his availability, communication and the lack of stability in the superintendent role.

Parents expressed frustration with the inability to find a long-term solution at superintendent. Phillips was appointed superintendent in 2019.

“Right now, we are on this every three, four-year cycle of superintendents getting turned around,” a parent, who also works at Jewell School, said. “... It’s like a hamster in a wheel, you keep on running, you keep on working hard, but you are going nowhere.”

Gardner said he could potentially discuss the issue with the school board. He indicated that he would not pursue a permanent role.

Phillips was put on paid administrative leave during a Feb. 15 special session, which followed an executive session. An independent investigation was initiated shortly after.

The school board has not disclosed the reason for the investigation.

Clatsop County looks to strengthen emergency management

By **ERICK BENGEL**
The Astorian



Lydia Ely/The Astorian

Rain and high tides caused flooding in Seaside in January.

Clatsop County is looking to strengthen emergency management.

The work of responding to natural hazards and disasters — from fires and floods to a megaquake and tsunami — would belong to a new county department instead of the emergency management office.

Along with the restructure, the county will recruit a full-time department director, who will report to the county manager. Tiffany Brown, the county’s emergency manager and director of the Emergency Operations Center, will report to the new director.

The position will be funded by money reallocated from an emergency management coordinator role, which has been vacant since last year.

At a recent county Board of Commissioners meeting,

County Manager Don Bohn said he hopes to have someone in place within three to four months.

“There’s no doubt that the risk towards Clatsop County regarding earthquakes, tsunamis and windstorms, and

any other form of natural disaster, is high,” he said, “and I think that it’s important as we move forward that the emergency management function be elevated to a department level.”

Commissioners will hold

a second reading on an ordinance to remove from the county manager’s assigned duties the direction of the emergency management office.

The move has been considered for more than a

decade. In 2010, emergency management — a statutorily required agency — was shifted from the sheriff’s office to the county manager’s office.

In 2015, the county manager at the time considered converting emergency management into a director-led department, but ended up absorbing the duties himself.

This is the first time a full-time director will lead the county’s emergency functions.

“It’s exciting for me,

and should be for the whole community, that the county manager, and the board in turn, has decided to make this investment,” Brown said.

The state, meanwhile, is doing something similar. By law, the state Office of Emergency Management, long under the umbrella of the Oregon Military Department, is slated to become the Department of Emergency Management, and report directly to the governor.

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Circuit Court dismisses election challenge on Cannon Beach food tax

By **NICOLE BALES**
The Astorian

An appeal for a new election on a controversial food tax has failed.

The 5% tax, which applies to prepared food sold at restaurants and similar businesses, was narrowly approved by voters in November and survived a recount in December. The money raised will support emergency services and city infrastructure.

Opponents of the tax questioned the integrity of the election and expressed concerns about ballot drop boxes and how ballots were counted.

In an election contest filed

in Circuit Court in December against the Clatsop County Elections Division and County Clerk Tracie Krevanko, Megan Miller and Josh Tuckman, the owners of Castaways Global Cuisine & Wine Bar, alleged violations of election law and fraud.

The legal challenge alleged a ballot drop box at City Hall was improperly and prematurely opened and that ballots from a drop box in Seaside were improperly rejected. Some votes, the court filings said, were not properly counted or counted at all.

The court dismissed the case in February.

Miller and Tuckman, who were among the many restaurant owners who

opposed the ballot measure ahead of the election, could not be reached for comment.

The county declined to comment. Measure 4-210 was approved in a 380-374 vote. The city expects to begin collecting the tax in July.

City Manager Bruce St. Denis has defended the opening of the drop box in front of City Hall. He said people had shoved several ballots into the side of the box and city staff wanted to make sure the ballots were protected from the rain. He and Karen LaBonte, the city’s public works director, unlocked the box and put the ballots inside.

County elections staff have said St. Denis and

LaBonte did not violate any rules.

Meanwhile, the drop box in Seaside was not considered an official drop-off location.

Krevanko picked up two ballots in the Seaside drop box after the election, but they were considered too late to count and never opened.

The tax is estimated to generate \$1.7 million annually, which will be split between the city and Cannon Beach Rural Fire Protection District.

The city will use its portion to help fund a new City Hall and police station, while the fire district plans to use its share for operations as calls for emergency service continue to rise.

New legal twist in fight over oceanfront home

By **NICOLE BALES**
The Astorian

The city and a couple seeking to build a controversial beach house overlooking Haystack Rock are now being sued by a neighboring property owner.

Stanley and Rebecca Roberts submitted an application last year to construct a 2,712-square-foot oceanfront home on a steep hillside off of Hemlock Street. The proposal, however, did not advance because it did not meet the city’s oceanfront setback standard, which, if applied, would sig-

nificantly reduce the possible footprint for any building on the property.

The couple was unsuccessful before the state Land Use Board of Appeals and the Oregon Court of Appeals and is now appealing to the Oregon Supreme Court.

Meanwhile, the Roberts have applied for a second building permit for a smaller house that would meet the oceanfront setback standard.

The City Council held a public hearing last week for a driveway access easement — a requirement before the building permit is considered — but held off making a decision pending the out-

come of the legal challenges and other information.

Prior to the hearing, Haystack Rock LLC, which owns land to the north of the Roberts’ property, filed a claim for declaratory relief in Circuit Court to determine the rights and obligations of the city and the Roberts.

The court filing claims the Roberts do not have the right to build a driveway on an unimproved public right of way. The city, the filing claims, has the authority to deny the easement request for failure to adequately demonstrate safety, code compliance or that it is in the public’s interest.

Haystack Rock LLC also argued that the city may not grant the proposed private easement, and that the right of way cannot be used for anything other than a public thoroughfare.

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