

County commission: 'I'm so grateful for their vote of confidence'

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the people, love the place, and am delighted I get to continue to serve them."

The outcome keeps the ideological split on the five-member nonpartisan board that until 2020 was dominated by commissioners with more progressive policy values.

Political issues at the national and state levels did not drive much discussion among the candidates, who largely focused on the county's shortage of affordable housing and child care options and the business community's post-pandemic future.

The election came as commissioners are tackling vacation rentals, a long-standing activity that, except in Arch Cape, has never been a recognized use in the county's development code. The county has a moratorium on new vacation rental permits in unincorporated areas.

Commissioner Pamela Wev led Nathan Pinkstaff, a deck mechanic from Astoria, 61% to 38% in Astoria's District 3.

"I am honored by this opportunity to continue to serve District 3 as your county commissioner," Wev said in a statement. "I want to thank my supporters and my team of volunteers for all their hard work. We are very proud of the positive campaign we ran. Especially, a huge 'thank you' to the voters who believe in my leadership. I look forward to serving my district and Clatsop County for another four years."

"I want to thank Nathan Pinkstaff for a hard-fought campaign," she continued. "I sincerely hope he remains involved in Clatsop County issues. I commend him for running a positive campaign, focused on important issues."

First elected in 2018, Wev ran for reelection on her government experience in land use and economic development. She contrasted her background with Pinkstaff's inexperience.

Wev represents the commission on the board of the Northwest Oregon Housing Authority, which manages low-income units in Clat-

sop, Columbia and Tillamook counties.

Pinkstaff, a third-generation Astorian who works for Tidewater Barge Lines, embraced his outsider status. He ran on a promise to help unite people across the political divide.

Thompson, the longest-serving commissioner, was first elected in 2014. After almost eight years in office, she said the county was poised to make progress on housing, child care and bringing broadband to areas with spotty internet.

She emphasized relationships — among elected leaders and agencies, as well as among neighbors — as a key to getting things done and did not attack her opponent.

"We're on a roll, we're really committed to doing good work, and the voters saw that, and they want us to keep on working for them," Thompson said.

Dillard ran on advocating for businesses recovering from the state's COVID-19 shutdowns that disrupted the local economy and led to some closures.

As in the District 3 race, the challenger was more conservative than the incumbent.

Both Dillard and Pinkstaff said they wanted to address the housing crunch by taking a closer look at the development code and making it easier for developers to build units. Dillard said he would have supported a Planning Commission recommendation to ban vacation rentals in neighborhoods, other than Arch Cape, not zoned commercial and multifamily residential.

District 5, the largest district geographically, encompasses the South County communities of Cannon Beach, Arch Cape, Hamlet, Elsie, Jewell and part of Seaside.

Thompson collected more than \$15,000 in campaign donations, while Dillard had almost \$5,000.

Commissioner Mark Kujala, the board's chairman, ran unopposed in Warrenton's District 1.

Ballots will continue to trickle in up to seven days after the election, according to the county. Voter turnout in the county so far was 33%.

Bond: 'The voters have spoken'

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Volunteers in 1958 donated their time and efforts to build a cinder block fire station on Pacific Way. In the decades that followed, the fire station served the community through fires, medical emergencies and the Great Coastal Gale of 2007.

But with a crumbling infrastructure, lack of training facilities and more precise disaster scenarios, firefighters, city staff and some residents saw the urgency for a new firehouse at a higher elevation.

A 2006 campaign collapsed at the polls when voters objected to a new firehouse — along with a City Hall — at the current site. Residents voted on a \$3.75 million general obligation bond measure. The proposal included plans for a 17,000-square-foot building that would have housed the fire and police departments and City Hall. Voters decisively rejected the measure, thought to be too ambitious a project.

A decade later, city leaders formed a committee to determine the safest sites in a Cascadia Subduction Zone earthquake and tsunami.

In 2018, after considering nine locations, the committee recommended three concepts and locations to the public to help guide the decision-making process.

The committee recom-



Lydia Ely/The Astorian

In early results, voters appear to have rejected the \$14.5 million firehouse bond vote.

mended part of the park at the end of Pacific Way as the optimal location, at a cost of about \$5 million, of which \$3.4 million would go to a 12,800-square-foot public safety building.

But after a public survey showed widespread opposition, the committee dropped the proposal and considered purchasing privately owned land along N. Marion referred to as High Point.

Legal concerns and rising costs made that site untenable and negotiations came to a stop.

With N. Marion and High Point out of consideration, the city turned to a property originally not considered because of its location outside of the city's urban growth boundary.

Officials signed a land purchase agreement with

developers of The Cottages at Gearhart LLC, a 34-acre development on county land. The property offered elevation to withstand most tsunamis and better access for fire and emergency medical responders.

According to the agreement, the city would receive a portion of the property owners' development rights, with one portion of the property proposed for a future firehouse and a second 2-acre parcel used for city parkland. If approved by the state and county, developers of The Cottages at Gearhart would transfer two lots and benefit from rezoning of a planned residential subdivision at a higher density within city limits.

A proposed November vote on the Highlands Lane site was delayed after

an unsuccessful ballot title challenge by Zimmerman and other resident.

In February, city councilors approved returning the proposal to the voters.

While financing scenarios had not been decided, the city estimated the bonds would have cost property owners \$1.213 per \$1,000 assessed value per year for up to 20 years.

The city also needed to obtain approval from the state Department of Land Conservation and Development to bring the land into the city's urban growth boundary.

Robert Morey, a co-owner of the former Gearhart Elementary School, said the land transfer agreement was "grossly undervalued" and the city's negotiating position had been hidden from public scrutiny.

"The 'no' vote has prevailed," Morey said. "Now is the time for the community and council to come together and support a new fire station with a realistic budget at the current location."

Mayor Paulina Cockrum said she was sad about the outcome.

"But the voters have spoken," the mayor said. "I envision that the City Council will want to reevaluate, survey our constituents and discuss next steps, as a new modern space for our police and fire department is still a top priority."

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NEWS NOTE

Morris honored with educator award

Les Morris received the Master Educator Award from Concordia University, in Concordia Seward, Nebraska at the Commencement Honor Dinner on May 6.

Born in Astoria and raised in Seaside, Morris graduated from Seaside High School in 1960.

Morris received his diploma from Concordia College, Portland, Oregon, in 1962. He graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in Education from Concordia Teacher's College, Seward, Nebraska in 1964 and continued his education at Pepperdine University, receiving his Masters in School Administration in 1966. Morris also received a Master's degree in Theology from Simpson College, San Francisco in 1979.

Morris began his teaching career at First Lutheran School, in Culver City, California. His next teaching position was at Bethany Lutheran School in Menlo Park, California. In 1985, he joined the faculty at West Portal Lutheran, where he serves as head teacher and also teaches English and religion.

Morris began his ministry at First Lutheran School, Culver City, California, teaching fifth and sixth grade and counseling the middle school and high school youth group.

He was called to Bethany Lutheran School, Menlo Park, California, in 1966. He was a teacher, administrator, principal and pastoral assistant during his time at Bethany. Morris then spent one semester substitute teaching in the Mid-Peninsula Public School system and the second semester as a fourth-grade teacher at Bethel Lutheran School, Cupertino, California. In 1985, Morris began serving at West Portal Lutheran School as the sixth-grade teacher. Morris spent over 30 years at West Portal fulfilling many roles including teacher, principal, counselor and advisor.

Morris volunteered his time in both his church and community. His long list of service includes many in the education sector including adult reading tutor, reviewer of children's literature, proofreader, evaluator of Lutheran and Catholic local schools, mentor to new teachers and leadership roles in many education conferences and committees.

Morris gave much of his time to student athletics serving as Commissioner and treasurer for the Lutheran Athletic Association, director of the Lutheran Basketball Tournament and cheerleading Contest and vice president of Nabata Yero Gridiron Club. Morris also served his community by leading devotions at local convalescent hospitals, visiting shut-ins, serving the needy with clothes, food and shelter as coordinator of Mid-Peninsula Ministry and teaching Vacation Bible School.

He retired in September and recently purchased a home in Seaside.



Leslie R.W. Morris

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