

# County, city leaders discuss housing at work session

By **NICOLE BALES**  
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The Astorian

Housing, micro housing and services for the homeless.

The joint work session at the Clatsop County Fairgrounds in May was the first time the governing boards gathered together since before the coronavirus pandemic. The boards agreed to schedule quarterly regional housing meetings to con-

tinue the discussion.

"I want to point out, while the county is made up of distinct cities, unincorporated communities, rural areas, employment opportunities and housing needs do not stop at these jurisdictional boundaries," said Jeff Adams, Cannon Beach's community development director, who proposed the quarterly meetings.

"Our workforce, our lives, are regional. They've been regional for as long as we know, but more so now,"

he continued. "So we've got to use our regional collaboration to build that capacity for the future."

Adams noted that little action has been taken since Clatsop County's 2019 housing study, which also called for a regional approach.

"If we're going to move this forward as a group, we've got to find that regional organization that can take this project on and move it forward," Adams said.

He said he reached out to

the Columbia River Estuary Study Taskforce, an organization specializing in environmental planning and habitat restoration for fish and wildlife.

Adams said the organization could take the lead, noting that housing authorities typically fill that role.

Susan Prettyman, the social services program manager at Clatsop Community Action, also presented to the group.

Prettyman said the nonprofit's long-term goal is to

see micro shelter villages in Astoria, Warrenton and Seaside. These units would serve as transitional housing for people having trouble securing permanent homes.

Ideally, Clatsop Community Action would hire full-time on-site managers, Prettyman said. Social services providers could work with people where they live, providing mental health care, domestic violence counseling and other support.

Clatsop Community

Action estimates micro shelters could cost between \$12,000 and \$15,000 a unit. The nonprofit said it would manage the villages and secure funding if jurisdictions can provide the land.

In April, the county put up 15 surplus properties for child care, low-income housing and social services.

By the May 13 deadline, the county had received proposals from Clatsop Community Action, Clatsop Care Health District and Seaside.

## Park district: Changes set for September

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Park district revenue is generated from property taxes, timber taxes, donations and grants, program fees and facility rentals. The district's permanent tax rate is 0.9280 per \$1,000 of assessed value, generating about \$1.89 million in tax resources to be collected. The average district resident pays \$21.95 monthly in taxes to the park district.

In 2021, district residents accounted for 71.5% of the total from program revenues, passes, and other sales income. Nonresidents accounted for the other 28.5%.

"Our district residents are really providing the bulk," Archibald said. "Without our permanent tax rate and our district residents supporting us, the district wouldn't

be what it is and we would have a hard time maintaining operations for very long."

The district proposal suggests keeping in-district resident rates intact. The non-resident rate would increase from 50% to 75% higher than the in-district costs. An annual family swim pass, for example, would be \$525 for a district resident, a cost that would remain the same. Out-of-district residents would see the fee rise from \$780 to about \$920.

Open swim single rates would increase from \$3.25 for out-of-district residents to \$4.

The board could also consider eliminating out-of-district punch passes or open swims.

The district's boundaries follow that of the Seaside School District, excluding the incorporated areas

of Gearhart and Cannon Beach, who have to date rejected joining the recreation district.

"I would say I think there's an opportunity there," Archibald said. "But it has to be dealt with the right strategy and with care and relationships. And I think what we need to do as a district is to position ourselves to be a really attractive recreation hub."

Archibald said he expects one more meeting before bringing this proposal up in the public meeting for approval and adoption.

Enactment of the fee changes are proposed for September.

"Even though the amount may or may not turn out to be hundreds of thousands of dollars, this is a big deal to us and to our patrons and to our community," he said.

## Homeless camp: 'Not everybody here is a drug addict'

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seeking its shutdown.

With a homeless camping ordinance that took effect in late May and a new site open for RVs and tents, the city now has enforcement authority. Overnight campers and RVs received hand-delivered notices 45 days and 30 days out and a 72-hour notice late last week, Ham said.

The homeless ordinance prohibits overnight camping at most locations throughout the city, including public parks, residential areas and city streets.

The City Council passed the ordinance in the hopes of responding to the growing numbers of homeless and federal and state court rulings and laws that require cities to offer alternatives for people without adequate shelter.

Campers must apply for an overnight camping permit, which enables camping from 8 p.m. to 8 a.m. for three weeks, at which time the permit can be renewed.

Whether the new ordinance will provide options for the neediest remains to be seen, Seamus McVey,



R.J. Marx

**Chuck and Traci have a working RV but no way to move it from its location at the 10th Avenue and Necanicum Drive lot.**

a homeless advocate and member of the Seaside Homeless Task Force, said.

"Most of the RVs in here are not insurable and that one factor alone will prevent them from even being able to utilize the park once it is opened," he said.

McVey said the new Mill Ponds camping area fails to meet requirements for shelter specified in state and federal court decisions.

Dale McDowell, the city's public works director, said belongings or vehicles left behind at the Necanicum lot will be held for 30 days before disposal.

The city's overnight camping area off Alder Mill Avenue opened last Saturday night, he said, with about 10 tent campers.

Facilities include running water, portable restrooms and garbage collection. Gates open at about 7:30 p.m. and campers leave the lot by 8 a.m. Once everyone has moved out, police close the gates for the day.

Patricia Tewalt, who has lived in the Necanicum lot for a year, said she has found housing. But she worries what will happen to others, including a disabled neighbor.

"Not everybody here is a drug addict," she said. "Not everybody here is crazy. Everybody has a different story, but nobody wants to hear it. Everybody just wants to judge the people that are here."

## Rural veterans are at higher risk for suicide

By **ABBEY McDONALD**  
The Astorian

Each seat at American Legion Post 99 had several take-home items: a resource packet, a blue stress ball and a firearm safety lock with suicide prevention hotlines printed on either side.

Together With Veterans held its first regional community event last month, bringing together service groups, veterans and family members from Clatsop, Columbia, Tillamook, Lincoln and Washington counties to discuss suicide prevention with a public health perspective.

"We want to promote connectedness, because that is one of the most important things when it comes to preventing things like suicide," said Donna-Marie Drucker, the president of the Oregon Firearm Safety Coalition.

"Having that sense of community, that sense of belonging, that sense that we have something bigger than ourselves and to serve. All the things that veterans really talk about and often miss when they leave the service," she said.

Together With Veterans, a community created program run through U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, is the first of its kind in the state, Drucker said. They selected this region of Oregon for the proximity to Portland and the high rates of veterans in rural areas with access to firearms.

Rural veterans have a 20% increased risk of death by suicide, due to contributing factors such as isolation, firearm access and limited access to mental health services.

In 2020, Oregon had the 13th highest rate of suicide in the country, 18.3 per 100,000 of population, with 833 deaths, according to the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Suicide rates on the North Coast are typically higher than the state average.

"There's amazing people doing really amazing work out here, but you're not close to a VA, there's not a vet center out here, and we

feel like this is an area where we can actually make some changes," Drucker said.

Around 30 attendees at the American Legion, including homeless liaisons, veterans services officers, case managers and clinical teams, were asked to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of services for veterans in the community. The majority of attendees were veterans.

During discussion, one theme stood out: accessibility.

"Right now, for a veteran to get into the North Coast Clinic at Camp Rilea, it's a three-month wait," said Josh Davis, the veterans services officer for Clatsop County, where around 4,000 veterans live.

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**Donna-Marie Drucker**, the president of the Oregon Firearm Safety Coalition

"It's everything from the VA not paying practitioners enough to come to work for the VA, to low availability of housing for professionals coming to work way out here. It's a lot," he said.

For those needing services, getting there is a challenge. During the discussion, the word "transportation" elicited groans from a table in the back.

The Sunset Empire Transportation District has a van service in place to drive veterans to local health care appointments. Sometimes it takes them as far as Portland.

Jason Jones, the transit district's mobility manager, said the majority of veterans

live off of the fixed-route bus system and can't afford to repeatedly call taxis.

The veterans transport service has one volunteer, and is struggling to find more.

"There's a lot of need out there in this community," Jones said. "We need to get to medical appointments. This seminar has a lot to deal with what ails our community of veterans out there: mental health. We want to make sure that if there's someone in crisis, that we can be available to them to take them where they need to go."

Attendees also discussed a lack of internet access or understanding of technology, especially for the elderly. They said services often require email addresses.

Further marginalization can increase suicide risk. Jones said homeless veterans, veterans of color, LGBTQ veterans and those who have been incarcerated need additional support and resources.

Together With Veterans is receiving \$100,000 over three years from the VA, and is working on an action plan for the funding, which will incorporate suggestions from the event.

"We are being creative as to how the funding is used," Davis said. "The suggestions from the SWOT event will help us determine the community's readiness to tackle rural veteran suicide prevention."

Davis said he was pleased with the turnout. He hopes it will start a longer conversation about suicide prevention.

"I would like to see folks who are part of our community take an interest in how we can make it a priority. If you look at the long-term plans of the county commission, or long-term plans of Clatsop Behavioral Health or any number of agencies that would assist veterans or families in crisis, suicide prevention is not even on their radar," he said.

"So what are we, as a community, going to do to make it a priority and have it be in front of us?"



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