



GATEWAY

Plan scrapped to bring high-speed internet to Herron Island

BY JULIA PARK
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Pierce County and Astound, a telecommunications company, are canceling the towers they were going to build to bring high-speed Internet to Herron Island, to many residents' disappointment.

"The needed permitting processes took on more complexity and time than planned, which will prevent Astound from moving forward with the original approach, as we needed to complete the build within certain timeframes to be eligible for needed grant support

that made the project feasible," Kevin Stamey, vice president of operations for Astound, wrote in an email Nov. 25 via a spokesperson.

The News Tribune reported in October 2024 that the company planned to transmit signals through the air from a tower on the mainland Key Peninsula to a tower on Herron Island, using microwave technology.

The project was part of a larger initiative in Pierce County to bring Internet to underserved and rural communities including on the Key Peninsula and in the Nisqually area, and was to be completed by the end

of 2026, according to a press release Sept. 30, 2024. The county expected to ultimately provide over 3,200 homes with high-speed Internet, the release said.

Pierce County spokesperson Jenny Burger confirmed in an email Nov. 25 that Astound is moving away from their original plan for Herron Island.

"Astound expressed concerns this fall about completing the Herron Island portion of the project by the ARPA deadline," she wrote. "We are working with them on a contract amendment that would remove the Herron Island portion of the project. That negotiation is

still in progress."

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THE FEDERAL FUNDING FOR THE PROJECT?

It's unclear what will happen to the chunk of federal funding set aside for the project.

The \$12.1 million partnership between the county and Astound included \$7.15 million from federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) dollars contributed by Pierce County and \$4.95 million from Astound, per the press release. Astound spokesperson Mark Peterson told The News Tribune in October 2024 that the Herron Island portion was expected to cost about \$1.75 million.

The Nisqually area portion of the project is moving forward as planned, Burger told The News Tribune.

The News Tribune also asked if the county expects there to be any leftover ARPA funds remaining after the Nisqually portion is complete, and if there are any discussions or

SEE INTERNET, 3A

Woman hospitalized after head-on wreck on state highway

BY JULIA PARK
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A Gig Harbor woman has been hospitalized for two weeks and counting after she and her husband suffered a serious head-on wreck in Okanogan County on Nov. 10.

Cindy Morgan, 70, has been in the acute care unit at Harborview Medical Center since Nov. 16, according to her husband Bill Morgan, 62. He said from the hospital Nov. 24 that improvements in her condition have been inconsistent. She spent several days in a medically-induced coma and has had multiple operations since she was hospitalized, he said.

"When Cindy came out of her coma, her first word was 'Ouch,'" Bill said. "Her second words were, 'I'm mad.' And her third words were she told me she loved me. And I understand all that."

An initial press memo from the Washington State Patrol about the wreck, which occurred around 3:50 p.m. Nov. 10 near Pateros, Washington, said that a 2015 Acura RDX entered the southbound lane of state Route 153 at milepost 2 for an "unknown reason" and struck the vehicle Bill Morgan was driving, a 2023 Kia Sportage. Both vehicles were totaled and came to rest blocking the highway.

Washington State Patrol troopers posted on X that the road had reopened, about five hours after the crash occurred.

The driver of the Acura was a 21-year-old man from Omak, Washington, the press memo said. Prosecutors charged him on Nov. 12 in Okanogan County Superior Court with vehicular assault while under the influence of intoxicating liquor or any drug and causing "substantial bodily harm to another," according to court records. His trial is pending following his initial court appearance and arraignment.

Bill Morgan told The News Tribune that the couple had been heading to Manson, a small town on Lake Chelan, when they were hit. They have a timeshare in Manson and were heading there from another town where they'd spent the afternoon, he said.

Cindy Morgan had to be extricated from the vehicle and airlifted to Confluence Health Hospital in Wenatchee. The State Patrol press memo said Bill Morgan was unhurt, but he explained in a phone call with The News Tribune that he suffered a broken back and internal bleeding. He declined to be transported by first responders because they were going to take him to a different hospital than the one his wife was going to, and he wanted to stay with her, he said. A friend picked him up instead and drove him to the hospital in Wenatchee.

The 21-year-old driver was also injured and transported to Three Rivers Hospital, the press memo said. That hospital is in Brewster, Washington.

Cindy Morgan's daughter set up a GoFundMe to help cover her mother's extensive medical care and other needs. The wreck left her with broken bones throughout her body, a lacerated liver, internal bleeding and

SEE WOMAN, 2A



Great Peninsula Conservancy closed a deal Friday, Nov. 21, 2025, to purchase about 21 acres of forested land next to Sehmel Homestead Park for just over \$1.2 million near Gig Harbor, Wash. PenMet Parks will take over ownership and plans to open the site, named Butterfield Forrest, to the public for hiking, nature-viewing and passive recreation in early 2026.

Hikers to get more trails after preservation of 21 acres

BY JULIA PARK
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Hikers and nature-viewers will get more space to roam on the Gig Harbor peninsula following the preservation of 21 acres adjacent to Sehmel Homestead Park.

Great Peninsula Conservancy, a regional land trust, purchased the property from a private seller at just over \$1.2 million and will transfer ownership to PenMet Parks, a news release from the organizations said Nov. 24. Great Peninsula Conservancy spokesperson Samantha Hale told The News Tribune that the deal closed on Nov. 21.

PenMet Parks plans to leave the property unchanged, park district spokesperson Brynn Grimley told The News Tribune Nov. 24.

"... the really amazing thing about this property is the prop-

erty owner actually had really taken great care of this land and created walking trails already on site, so our plan is to just continue that use of the property," she said.

The site is named for the seller's father, Forrest Butterfield, but flipped: Butterfield Forrest, keeping the double "r." It includes a salmon-bearing stream and mature forest next to Sehmel Homestead Park, and combined with the park will bring the total acreage of protected land to over 100 acres. Over half a mile of freshwater stream runs through the site, including over 1,000 feet of Nelyaly Creek, the news release said.

"Nelyaly Creek has documented use by coastal trout, coho, and chum salmon," Great Peninsula Conservancy's Senior Conservation Project Manager Ali Querin wrote via a spokesperson. "The estuary habitat at the mouth of Nelyaly Creek,



Great Peninsula Conservancy Executive Director Nathan Daniel stands next to a large Douglas Fir in the newly-conserved Butterfield Forest, near Gig Harbor, Wash.

which is approximately 1,000 feet from the newly protected Butterfield Forrest, includes habitat utilized by Endangered

Species Act-listed (threatened) Puget Sound Chinook Salmon.

SEE HIKERS, 3A