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BRIAN HAYES

The Olympian

Cottage-style homes to go on site near Lacey middle school

BY ROLF BOONE
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More details emerged Wednesday about a low-income housing development proposed near Komachin Middle School in Lacey.

The Housing Authority of Thurston County aims to build 60 cottage-style units — not tiny homes — on a five-acre parcel in the 5000 block of Mullen Road Southeast, the Lacey City Council and the North Thurston Public Schools board learned at a joint meeting.

The city of Lacey acquired the property from the LOTT Clean Water Alliance — the area's sewer treatment utility — and then agreed over the summer to sell it to the Housing Authority for \$1.

Housing Authority Executive Director Craig Chance told the joint meeting that transaction was finalized on Oct. 24.

"That kind of purchase, that kind of support enables us to offer low rents," he said.

Thirty-six of the units have been earmarked for seniors with monthly rents in the \$500 to \$600 range. He described the

future tenants as those living off nothing more than a Social Security check.

Housing Authority tenants tend to have one key challenge: They can't afford rent anymore in our community, he said.

The remaining units will be larger and offered to multigenerational families with no age restrictions, he said. Rents will be higher, too, and open to those who earn up to 80% of area median income.

What does that amount to? Chance provided this example: A three-person household at 80% of area median income



RBOONE@THEOLYMPIAN.COM Rolf Boone

Housing Authority of Thurston County Executive Director Craig Chance (standing) provides an overview of McClanahan Village to a joint meeting of Lacey City Council and the North Thurston Public Schools board on Wednesday.

could be as high as \$84,000 a year.

COMMUNITY MEETING
After the Oct. 24 transaction,

a community meeting was held Oct. 30 for nearby residents, some of whom raised concerns

SEE HOMES, 3A

Port of Olympia District 2 candidate Toompas extends lead

BY ROLF BOONE
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The Port of Olympia District 2 race between incumbent Bob Iyall and challenger Jerry Toompas, which has gone back and forth since the general election on Nov. 4, held firm after another ballot count on Thursday.

Special education teacher Toompas grabbed a 130-vote lead on Wednesday and it grew to 153 votes on Thursday, Thurston County elections data show.

Toompas is leading with 39,124 votes to Iyall's 38,971 votes.

The wider gap between the two candidates means it has moved outside the range of a hand recount, but is still within the range of a machine recount.

A machine recount is triggered when the candidates are separated by less than 2,000 votes and less than one-half of 1% or .005%, according to the Thurston County Auditor's Office.

Toompas and Iyall are separated by 153 votes and .0019%, said county elections manager Tillie Naputi-Pullar on Thursday.

Going into Thursday's vote count, the county's elections website showed they still needed to count 390 ballots. Now, it shows no ballots to count and yet another count is set for 4 p.m. Monday. Why?

Because ballots will continue to trickle in, including those from overseas and the military, and they will be counted so long as they were postmarked on Nov. 4, Naputi-Pullar said.

There also are those voters who forgot to sign their ballot, or perhaps there's a discrepancy between the signature on the ballot and what the Auditor's Office has on file. In those situations, the Auditor's Office will

SEE CANDIDATE, 3A



STEVE BLOOM The Olympian

In an interview on the steps of the state Capitol in Olympia on March, 6, Crystal Isabell, left, and Bronti Lemke, both parents and ECEAP advocates, share their thoughts on that state program, which was targeted for budget cuts.

Philanthropy grant to add up to 10,000 preschool slots in WA

BY SIMONE CARTER
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Take a deep breath. Count to five. Now you feel all calm inside.

Bronti Lemke's son is a bit older now. But when he's feeling frustrated, he still sings the lines learned from his time in Washington's Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP), which offers preschool for eligible low-income kids ages 3 and 4, the Tacoma mother explained earlier this year outside the state Capitol building.

Those lyrics made a lasting impression on her young child. "He's 6 now, so they're very impactful on him. He's very

kind, my son," Lemke said at the time, pride shining in her eyes.

She added: "And you can see the difference in — not to say it's a bad thing or anything — but kids that did not have the program, in the kindergarten. You can see the struggles and the differences that it makes, even for kindergarten teachers."

Like Lemke, many Washington parents say the social and emotional learning gleaned from ECEAP has been crucial for their child's development. But in the 2025 session, the state Legislature, facing a deep budget deficit, made cuts leading to fewer ECEAP slots statewide.

About \$60 million was re-

portedly drained from ECEAP, with roughly 2,000 fewer spots compared with the previous year. The early ECEAP program that serves kids from birth to age 3 was defunded. ECEAP entitlement for all qualifying low-income families was again delayed, getting punted from the 2026-27 school year to the 2030-31 school year.

Then, some hope for ECEAP families. On Wednesday, Nov. 12, Gov. Bob Ferguson made an announcement: A philanthropy group has stepped in to help make up for some of those losses.

The Ballmer Group, founded by Microsoft's former CEO Steve Ballmer and his wife, revealed a new grant to expand

ECEAP in Washington. The group vowed to fund up to 10,000 additional slots for the next decade, likely amounting to more than \$1 billion in early-learning support.

Ferguson noted that Head Start, a program serving more than 700,000 low-income kids nationwide, has also been in a tenuous position. The administration of President Donald Trump has withheld federal funding and threatened to nix the program altogether.

With the Ballmer grant, Washington aims to enroll 2,000 additional ECEAP kids next school year.

"It'd be hard to quantify how

SEE PRESCHOOL, 4A



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