

Amazon board asks to shed debt fund

By MARY BETH ALLEN
Of the Emerald

Initial efforts to abolish the Amazon debt service were among the items passed by the Amazon Family Housing Policy Board at its Friday meeting.

The board agreed to send a letter to the State Board of Higher Education asking them for assistance in abolishing the deficit that

saddles the Amazon budget.

Walt Sheasby, chair of the board, said Amazon residents feel it is unfair for them to pay into a debt service that is also applied to the Westmoreland Housing Project.

"Amazon and Westmoreland offer unequal services and quality," Sheasby said. He said he feels Amazon tenants should not

be required to pay into the debt service.

Sheasby stressed that in instances where housing facilities are of similar quality, such as dorms, the debt fund is logical and fair.

"We feel our situation is dissimilar because of the quality of accommodations and services," Sheasby said.

In the wake of recent support for

a housing office audit, including that of University Pres. William Boyd and Rep. Jim Weaver, D-Eugene, Dick Romm, assistant housing director, said the housing office also desires the audit.

Amazon policy board members are requesting a historical, performance and fiscal audit of the housing office.

The board also voted to commission the Office of Student Advocacy to research the legal role of the board in housing office decisions involving Amazon.

Judith Baker, president of the Amazon Community Tenants, said the housing office has "not played by the rules of the game" by arbitrating alone on matters that are supposed to be joint housing office-policy board decisions.

Barker said she feels the board's power has been usurped by the housing office on occasions, saying the board is involved in a "crisis," and must re-establish its policy-making power.

In other business, the board decided to send a letter to the Amazon Family Housing Appeals Board asking for direction on matters such as the debt service.

A standing budgetary committee was also chosen to work with and review the controller's office and determine the actual state of the Amazon budget.

The budget committee would consist of a representative from the Oregon Accountants for the Public Interest, an ASUO representative, two Amazon residents, a housing office accountant and a policy board member.

Gorham

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When a discrimination complaint is filed against an employer or landlord, the city encourages mediation at every level of the complaint process. If a conflict is not settled, however and discrimination can be proved in hearings (by overwhelming evidence), the discrimination laws use their teeth.

At first offense, a discriminator can be stuck with a fine of up to \$1,000. At second or third offense (or if the first one is "intentional or willful") the discriminator may be fined up to the same amount and face a jail sentence of up to 100 days.

But just because few official complaints are filed, it does not mean Gorham has little to do. He spends another third of his time checking the compliance of city agencies and private contractors to affirmative action rules.

The city requires its agencies and contractors who do more than \$2,500 of business with the city per year or employ more than 15 workers to develop affirmative action programs for employment, promotions and transfers.

Gorham spends the remaining third of his time answering people's questions about laws and referring them to appropriate commissions.

Of the issues he researches for his two commissions, housing for the handicapped is one. A Eugene builder has so far constructed two apartment complexes for handicapped persons, and is planning another.

Gorham would like to see more, along with more extensive public transportation, so the people won't be trapped in their apartments.

As for accessibility of public buildings and of private ones used publicly, the city requires buildings of over 20 feet in height and over 4,000 square feet to be made accessible to the blind or wheelchair-bound.

This means removing all architectural barriers, and with older buildings, it can cost, he says.

"If in a particular building the vital services can't be transferred to the first floor, the law says you have to put in an elevator, if there's no other way to get access to higher floors," Gorham says.

Since the law requires all new buildings to be constructed without barriers he says, they can be made accessible more cheaply.

Street curbs are another barrier that Gorham would like to see removed. Every new street corner in Eugene is built with a cut, and an additional 1,200 existing ones have been cut.

Curb cuts, Gorham says, aid the elderly as well as the handicapped.

icapped. People who are young enough to step over street curbs ought to think of cuts as an investment in their "future mobility," Gorham says.

In addition to thinking about curb cuts and ramps for wheelchairs, Gorham is also concerned about how Eugene fits into international issues of human rights.

He supported the city council's recent resolution urging Eugonians not to buy or sell the Krugerrand, a South African gold coin, because he believes its sales aid that country's government and its policy of racial segregation.

"My view of the world," Gorham says, "is that we're all here on the spaceship 'Enterprise,' and none of us can get off."

After working both in the jungles of Brazil for the Peace Corps and the jungle of New York City as a lawyer and a schoolteacher, Gorham feels social and political motives behind discrimination are about the same everywhere.

"You're going to find an 'S.O.B.' in every color and handicap," he says.

"Eugene is no Shangri-la, either," Gorham says.

Perhaps that's why Eugene hires human rights specialists.

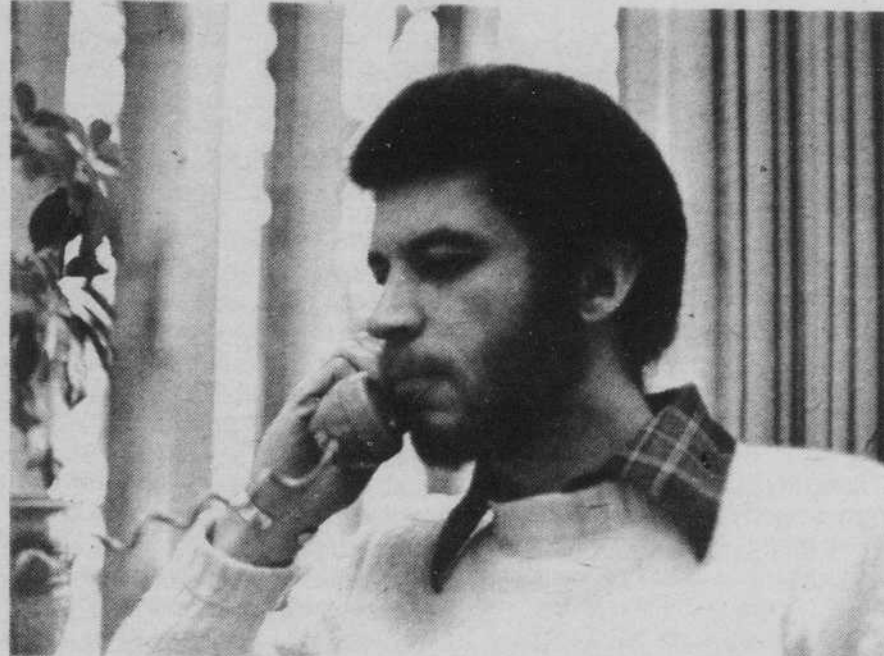


Photo by Pat Sullivan

Kent Gorham: 'Discrimination is more subtle now'



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