

■ COMMENTARY

Save, renovate Amazon Complex

Sharon Singer Millman

"Safe, affordable and adequate family housing at the Amazon site that will serve students far into the future." — Vice President for Administration Dan Williams

That's great! That is certainly what all of us want. Unfortunately, proceeding with the demolition will not meet those goals at all. In fact, quite the contrary is true. If we were getting better buildings or cheaper rents, tenants and community members alike would not stand in the way. The brutal facts are that rent will triple, the facility will be in the same state of disrepair in a few years as it is right now, we will have lost an important historic neighborhood and access to higher education for the low-income families who are already scraping through school to get themselves off of welfare will be just one more American dream flushed down the toilet by the so-called stewards of our public resources.

As parents of small children, tenants are the first to be concerned about safety at Amazon. The Amazon Community Tenants' Council has received numerous complaints regarding situations that require immediate attention and which have been reported repeatedly to University Housing, which has then ignored them for long periods before getting around to fixing the problem (quick fixes only, if at all) and sometimes will even claim that they had never been notified of the problems.

- Housing did nothing about the lead paint dust and other debris left by a staff person "repairing" the ceiling in a two-year-old's bedroom (the parents finally got the mess tested and cleaned up by themselves).

- Housing does not replace the broken pickets in the wood fence along Patterson — pickets which keep toddlers from wandering out onto a busy street. Damage to the fence around the unoccupied zone was dealt with immediately — an entire second fence was put up! A big chain link fence with concrete feet which just happens to prevent the local school bus from picking our up children safely inside the complex and some of our disabled tenants from having a direct line to the laundry room.

- Housing did not respond when a family's sink did not work for nearly two months, or when tenants reported the sudden appearance of gang activity in the complex last summer (a routine patrol — too expensive for Amazon by not for Westmoreland — but the University did send three public safety officers to a small rally to save Amazon).

- After hearing about Housing's concerns over emergency vehicle access to Amazon, some tenants called the fire marshal for more information, did some surveying to reconfigure the parking, and presented the details to Housing. (Well, said Mike Eyster, Director of Housing, the historic designation might relieve Housing of that requirement and Housing would not want to disturb the tenants...)

- Our Area Manager assured us that the graffiti was removed just as soon as it was noticed. After looking at a gang tag on the big map at our main entrance for several months, I volunteered to repaint the sign. More than six

months later, Housing has not bothered to put the map back up. How will emergency vehicles find our apartments?

- On a tour of the complex, this same Area Manager told visitors a gruesome story (one of many) about a porch collapsing. Gee, Frank, I said, has anyone taken a look at the other porches to see if they are also about to collapse, maybe giving them a little tap tap to test them and make some structural repairs? Why, no, said Frank, we would be too scared to do that. Well, I said, if you are actually scared to, don't you really think you should? Frank quickly changed the subject to gutters falling down. (And why did tenants finally have to put a gutter back up on a two story building by themselves?)

At a recent Family Housing Board meeting, residents in the new Family Housing projects complained that proper maintenance is not being done there, that there are leaks in the ceiling, that fixtures are falling off the walls and that they are paying above market rents? Gosh. It seems that the real problem is not the age of the property but the way it is managed.

Apparently nobody has bothered to tell Mr. Williams (who has never been to a Design Advisory Group meeting) that we determined that the rehabilitation of Amazon was not only physically feasible, but also the most economical option for Amazon. This was for the same 50-year life cycle and the same safety, energy and comfort standards as entirely new construction. And of course there would be the added benefits of preserving a tried and true design, materials that we cannot afford to buy new (straight grain fir floors, genuine cedar shingles, floor joists some contractors have begged for should the demolition take place...), a minimum of disruption to students, a longer-term project creating longer-term jobs, the preservation of a healthy, stable, low-crime, low income student family neighborhood close to the University that just happens to be designed by Pietro Beluschi, Oregon's most famous architect and now nominated unanimously by the State Historic Review Board to the Nation-

al Register of Historic Places. Gee. A real win-win situation. With the money it plans to spend replacing Amazon, the University could rehabilitate Amazon and build new housing elsewhere too!

The University often states in public that rents at the new Amazon will be \$400/month. Where does that number come from? The debt service alone on the new construction cost will be \$355/month and then there is the \$200/month in operations. \$355+\$200 is \$555, not \$400. Dan Williams himself wrote a letter early on in this project that the difference between the cost of the new Amazon and the target rents would be made up by rent increases on other Family Housing units ... so we guess there will be no more low-income student family housing in Eugene at all.

Dan Williams says, "Let's look at the facts." Yes, Dan, please look at the facts. They do not support your conclusions. And it is too bad that Mr. Frohnmayer got the same tour from the Area Manager, but didn't bother to chat with the Tenants' Council (he refuses to see us), the DAG, or the Family Housing Board.

As a final note, the University does not actually have a plan to replace Amazon. At this point in time, the only official plans are for demolition. There are no designs, no designers, no bids, no contracts and no contractors. So what's the hurry?

Better yet, a local nonprofit has volunteered to take the whole low-income student family housing at Amazon burden from the University's tired shoulders. They have put together their own financing, contractor estimates and rehab plan. They will even buy the property and still keep it available for low-income student families. Their projected (and thoroughly documented) rent figures are \$350 for at least 30 years — \$200 per unit per month less than the University's new construction. \$600,000 in free aid every year for low-income student families. Why not take them up on it and spend the state bond on some other University project?

Sharon Singer Millman is a resident of Amazon and an officer of the Amazon Community Tenants' Council.

■ COMMENTARY POLICY

The Oregon Daily Emerald welcomes commentaries from the public concerning topics of interest to the University community.

Commentaries should be between 600 and 800 words, legible, signed and the identification of the writer must be verified when the letter is submitted.

The Emerald reserves the right to edit any letter for length or style.

great scores...

GMAT

Last chance to prepare for the March test.

GRE

Last chance to prepare for the April test.

great skills...

Call 345-4420

to reserve your spot for a free diagnostic exam. GRE diagnostic Feb. 11 • GMAT diagnostic Feb. 12

get a higher score

KAPLAN

720 East 13th, suite 303, Eugene

Kaplan helps you focus your test prep study where you need it most. We'll show you the proven skills and test-taking techniques that help you get a higher score.

Ronny's
STEREO

JVC, SONY,
DENON & ONKYO

What's a Buck Worth?

TRADE IN DAYS

Your used stereo components are worth lots of BUCKS!

Minimum of \$25* — working or not!
*per new component

Come in for details!

344-2454 • Tues-Sat 12-6 • 1744 Willamette St.

PEANUT BUSTER PARFAIT



99¢

Good Thru Feb. 26th
At Participating Dairy Queen® stores.

HOT EATS
COOL/REATS

**Dairy
Queen**

©AM D.Q. Corp. / 1995 TM Trademark AM D.Q. Corp. ®Reg. U.S. Pat. Off. AM D.Q. Corp.

Get Wired!



Looking for the latest in technology? We can plug you in! Apple and Dell computers, Supra modems, Hewlett-Packard printers, and software from giants like Microsoft, Adobe, Claris and more.

Drop by the Microcomputer Support Center and check us out. We'll get you connected!



MICROCOMPUTER SUPPORT CENTER

202 Computing Center • Monday-Friday 9am-5pm • 316-1102 • email: mpp@oregon