

A VISION FOR EMERALD HEIGHTS

Part of the reason that Clatsop County Commissioners and our community are struggling over Emerald Heights is that there is no community vision of a useful flourishing asset which Emerald Heights could become. It is usually talked about as only a problem. Let me outline my vision.

The property is turned over to a non-profit antipoverty agency with a solid track record in low-income housing, as well as in successful grant acquisition and program management. This would most likely be the tri-county Community Action Team (CAT), which operates out of St. Helens and serves Columbia, Clatsop and Tillamook Counties. CAT would quickly appoint a three component advisory board with equal representation from CAT, Emerald Heights tenants and concerned local citizens, including a banker, a representative from local government and local antipoverty activists. A package of grants, government and private loans is put together to make necessary repairs and upgrading. Pacific Power takes over the electrical system, and the City of Astoria takes over the streets, water, sewer, police and fire protection, just as they do for the rest of Astoria.

The City, the County and Northwest Housing Authority would, together with the local advisory board, press our congressional delegation and HUD for fifty project-based units of subsidy for low-income renters. Emerald Heights itself would also subsidize fifty units in which federal guidelines of rent = 30% of income would apply. One-third of the 300 units would be for low-income families. Clatsop Community Action and the EH Advisory Board would prepare and submit a federal McKinney Grant package for the establishment of a four-unit emergency shelter for homeless women and families, and eight units for a transitional housing program for victims of domestic violence and for families coming out of the shelter. The transitional program would offer up to two years of rent subsidy, counseling, education and job training services leading to self-sufficiency. The program would be coordinated with community agencies and programs which offer services to women and families. These programs would be funded by grants (which are available), state homeless funds, United Way and volunteers.

There would be pre-school, day care and latchkey along with Head Start. These operations, along with project maintenance and construction crews and management team, would include positions to provide on-the-job training for clients of the transitional program.

A close relationship between a local bank or credit union and Emerald Heights would be



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profits would go into individual accounts for tenants, which they could draw on in emergencies, or in a planned way or when they leave the co-op. The other 50% would remain in the local bank as an investment fund to be used for making loans to establish other co-op enterprises.

The bank would agree to have at least one staff person become expert in cooperative business. These funds could be loaned at preferential rates to groups of employees who want to take over an existing company, perhaps a fish processing plant; or to a group which wants to start a business or to changeover to co-op operation. These new enterprises would be chartered like EH, with part of the profits going into the general fund. The bank's developing expertise would help the co-op enterprises to create sound, workable business plans, advise on all facets of operation, on making changes to cope with market demands, and oversee the health of the enterprises. The bank would be alert to warning signs that an enterprise was slipping and be able to move in with advice on restructuring, retooling and would be able to provide low or no-interest loans from the general fund to get the enterprise back on track. The fund could also be used, along with EH as collateral, to establish smaller low-income housing projects around the county, which could be set up as part of the co-op system.

This kind of system would create sustainable jobs in businesses which operate for the benefit of the employees, citizens of Clatsop County, not for the benefit of wealthy investors who live elsewhere. The employees and the business would pay taxes here, and they would be invested in keeping our community safe, prosperous and healthy. The bank's increasing expertise in guiding new businesses through start-up, and established enterprises through flexible responses to economic shifts and disruptions, would make the bank an asset to the whole local business community. If, for instance, Astoria Plywood had had this kind of expertise and backup available all along, they might still be in business.

So, perhaps we can develop a shared vision of Emerald Heights as an opportunity for our community; we can stop focusing on each other's ethics, political postures or the special interests we represent, and work together to actualize the vision.

BY HARRY JOHNSON

established. The bank would handle EH deposits, make loans and fill a seat on the advisory board.

A plan would be developed by CAT and the advisory board to turn EH into a tenant-owned cooperative. The charter would require that one-third of the units be retained for low-income subsidized housing, and that space remain available for the shelter and transitional housing programs. Co-op managers would set rents, make operating rules and hire management (or do it themselves). All tenants would share in the profits. When fully occupied EH takes in about \$110,000 per month. Remember that federal subsidies pay 100% of the rent, so they are no drain on the project. Fifty percent of the

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