

Oregonians share stories, visions for state

Neighborhood Partnerships and the Oregon Housing Alliance asked: What do you want to see?

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Last month we asked community members to share their vision. We asked: What does building Oregon's future mean to you? What would change in your life, in your experience, with available and affordable homes? What are you excited to bring to the table to help create housing opportunity?

Because we know the numbers: more than 20,000 children experienced homelessness last year, one out of four households spends more than half its income on housing, and homeownership rates are at historic lows. The National Low Income Housing Coalition's Out of Reach Report released last week highlighted the continuing growing gap between wages and rental prices (to afford a market-rate two-bedroom apartment, an Oregonian would have to earn \$16.61 an hour).

But we wanted to hear some of the voices behind those numbers.

We heard about challenges, need and suffering

We heard from a mother of three small children with a husband who was not dealing with the stresses of life well and became physically abusive. She had to leave him, taking her three kids. She has not been able to make a wage that would make it possible to raise three children, pay the going rate for housing, and be able to provide the necessities of life.

We heard from a couple who are considering splitting up in an effort to find housing opportunity in different places, due to a rent increase they cannot afford.

We heard from a family with two working teens who have to contribute the majority of their earnings toward the rent rather than save for their education.

We heard from service providers who receive over 100 calls per week from seniors with low incomes who recently had a rent increase and can no longer afford their apartment on their fixed income.

And we heard from those who have witnessed on the street the death of friends experiencing homelessness.

We also heard about resilience, hope and success

A single mother living in a Home Forward property has been able to not only be a parent to her children, but to take pride in being able to afford a comfortable home and provide her children with the things that they need.

Faith leaders wrote about our responsibility to create communities where everyone belongs, where diversity is valued, and where the dignity of the most vulnerable is safeguarded.

Many community members said they want to live in neighborhoods populated by people of all income levels because this creates compassion and provides connections and opportunities for all.

And others wrote about men and women re-entering the community after incarceration, having safe, affordable housing from which they can rebuild their lives.

And we heard that we are ready with solutions

Leaders from Douglas County told us they were ready to take a manufactured home park with worn-out, falling-apart trailers and build snug little houses in their place. They are also ready to take a neighborhood with 65 percent rentals and help those residents purchase homes and rehab them in their own neighborhoods.

Affordable-housing providers in Jackson

County shared their ideas to leverage resources, including setting aside rent vouchers to combine with new construction to create affordable homes in their areas.

Oregonians from the north central region noted that their region's Community Health Improvement Plan has identified affordable housing as a priority issue and is developing strategies for action that ensure measurable health improvement for their communities.

Providers in Portland shared their enthusiasm for rehabilitating homes to be able to serve members of our diverse communities in culturally appropriate settings.

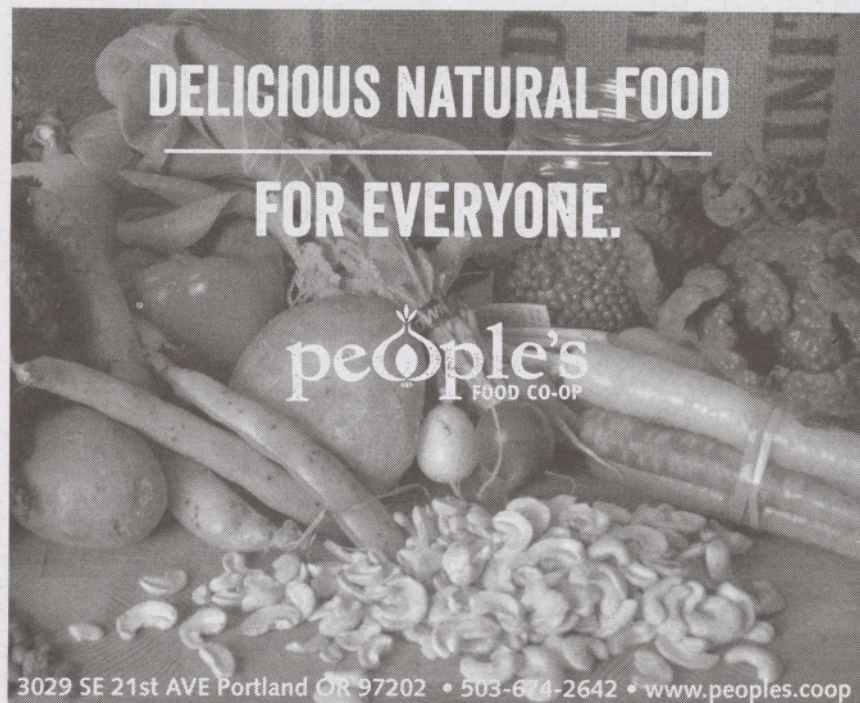
The time is now

Housing is among the most crucial investments we can make in our communities' health and prosperity. It is an investment in our present and our future. It is summarized best by one of our responses:

"My children have enjoyed the ability to go to one school district, make friends and keep them for a long time, and become upstanding citizens in the community that they grew up in. Those things don't come with a price tag on them, but they add value to the communities that they live in. We need to build on a firm foundation of strong families that are an asset to the communities that they live in. This begins with the ability to afford housing in a community that supports that family."

Let's continue to share our stories and continue to push our leaders to take action to create the communities we envision.

Join us, along with Gov. Kate Brown and House Speaker Tina Kotek, in calling on legislative leaders to make a historic investment in Oregon's future. \$100 million for new housing is a meaningful first step toward the Oregon we know we can be.



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