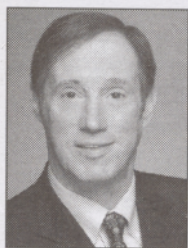


Incentive for developers would spur affordable housing



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BY DAN SALTZMAN
CONTRIBUTING COLUMNIST

This spring, the Portland Housing Bureau published the State of Housing in Portland Report, our first comprehensive look at the current state of Portland's housing market. Quite frankly, it paints a stark picture for many of our fellow Portlanders trying to buy or rent housing in our city.

Portions of our city that were considered affordable just a few years ago are now out of reach for the average Portland family. For many members of our communities of color, our seniors or households headed by a single parent, there is almost nowhere in the city where housing is affordable. It's clear that we need more tools and resources to develop more affordable housing and retain the housing we've already got — and we need them now.

Unlike a number of other cities, we can't regulate private rents in Portland or require private developers to build affordable housing; state law prevents it. But we can encourage those who want to build here to be part of the solution. One clear option before us is to find new ways to leverage the housing boom that is already happening all over the city. The city currently provides "density bonuses" to developers for including certain public benefits in their

projects — meaning they can build taller buildings or get more floor space for their projects than would normally be allowed in the zoning code in exchange for including features like eco-roofs, bicycle parking or housing.

Now is the time to restructure our density bonus regulations to prioritize affordable housing development.

Portland started using density bonuses in the central city in 1988 as a tool to spur development within our urban core. Currently, developers can choose from a list of 18 public benefits to achieve a density bonus. Most of these benefits no longer need to be incentivized; providing a bonus for things that the market already demands and many developers are already doing is no longer necessary.

Right now, we still give extra density to developers who build any housing at all in the central city, regardless of the rent level. In the late '80s, this was a great tool to encourage the development of the lively and active downtown we enjoy today. That incentive is no longer needed today. What we need more than anything else is more affordable housing.

In the next 20 years, Portland's central city is projected to gain 30,000 new households. To ensure that the central city maintains a mix of income levels while accommodating rapid growth, we need to

streamline the bonuses we provide to developers to prioritize affordable-housing development. The buildings we all see rising up along our corridors and the construction cranes dotting our skyline signal a vibrant and prosperous Portland, but I often look at these new buildings and lament the fact that most do not contain even a single unit that many Portlanders could afford to call home.

Under a proposal that will go before council on July 9, developers seeking a density bonus must either provide affordable housing within their development or pay a fee into a fund for the creation and preservation of affordable housing. This proposal would not give developers extra density or height; it would instead require them to contribute to the creation of affordable housing in order to receive the maximum density that our zoning currently allows.

This "affordable housing incentive zoning proposal" could result in as many as 60 additional units of affordable housing a year on top of those already being developed by the city, or it could mean an additional \$120 million to \$200 million in funds for affordable housing over the next 20 years.

This proposal alone will not solve our affordable-housing crisis but is a critical step to ensuring more affordable housing in our city.

Solution to the housing crisis starts with us



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BY JANET BYRD
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There's a lot of reason to celebrate this Independence Day. July Fourth is a time to look back on the founding of the United States and the documents that shape and control our democracy. We saw the system at its best during the last days of June: the Supreme Court ruled to uphold recent gains in health care access, obligations to create a housing market that is nondiscriminatory, and marriage equality.

I've had the opportunity to see democracy at work up close during the 2015 Oregon Legislative session, which is coming to an end July 11. It's been a great session for housing. There has been visible and vocal advocacy from around the state, hard issues raised and more discussion of housing needs than I've ever seen. As all legislative sessions are, it has been messy, contentious and indirect. But we expect to see real progress toward creating housing opportunity when the dust clears — including new approaches, new funding sources, stronger policy and better oversight.

There's also progress at the local level: new investments by Multnomah County, new investments by the city of Portland, as well as new policy tools and benchmarks. We've seen a redesign of the system to address the needs of folks who are homeless, with a new focus on doing things differently and reaching folks where they are. A new

coalition effort is bringing energy and focus to the work, and elected officials are taking notice.

That's all great news. But it isn't enough. We have a long way to go before everyone in our community can declare freedom and independence.

Look closely around any community in Oregon and you'll see evidence of a housing crisis of appalling scale. In Portland, my trip to work in the morning includes views of the new apartments in Northeast that will rent for more than most of us can afford, large numbers of folks camping along the river and women of all ages sleeping in doorways, some with only the comfort of their small curly-haired dogs. When I travel to Salem on Interstate 5, I pass rest stops that are doubling as permanent homes for some of the relatively lucky folks who at least have a vehicle to sleep in. The story is the same in Pendleton, in Albany, in Prineville.

Data show that while things are dire all around, communities of color are worse off due to years of gentrification and displacement, the patterns of discrimination in lending and access to housing and the disparity in income and wealth. And people living with mental health challenges and other health concerns are more likely to be homeless.

Because we are a democracy, we need to remember that this housing crisis reflects OUR choices, OUR values and OUR

priorities. How did we get here? How is it that we have beautiful redesigned urban spaces with minimal housing for folks who most need it? And more importantly, seeing where we are and what the human costs are, how do we change it?

It starts with us. What are we willing to change in our priorities, our way of doing our work and our communities to make housing opportunity a reality? In Portland, we tax ourselves for art and for libraries; are we willing to do the same to ensure we all have a home? Are we ready to take a hard look at how we work now, what we take time to advocate for or take action on, what we stand up for?

Let's declare our independence today from old patterns that keep us from moving forward together. Let's be willing to look at how we have chosen to be where we are — in the midst of a housing crisis that threatens all that we want to be as a state, as a city, as a community. Let's agree that there is no silver bullet, no simple or single answer. Let's agree that there are no topics or ideas that are off limits, and also that no one idea or solution will be enough.

Independence requires accessible, available, affordable housing for all. Home is where everything begins, where we recharge and renew so we can engage fully in the community around us and be our best selves. Let's aim for real independence this year for more Oregonians.