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police department that's set up for 25,000-person county and you have 75,000 people here on a weekend visiting, they can get overwhelmed."

Baertlein said police get bogged down with calls for both emergencies and petty annoyances, such as tourists parking in people's driveways, blocking them in or out.

"If they could just pretend like they are at home," he said, "if they wouldn't do it at home, then don't do it here."

Serving tourists while living homeless

While checking out of the Wacoma Inn in Lincoln City, Street Roots asked the woman at the front desk, Nemoria Viallagomez, what she thought about the coast's housing situation.

"I had to live in a tent," she responded.

She said she moved to the area from Salt Lake City about four years ago to live with an aunt who had a job lined up. But the job fell through, and her aunt never arrived. Viallagomez quickly found consistent work at area hotels, but couldn't find anywhere to live.

She and her 3-year-old son survived in a tent for months, escaping the elements at an area warming shelter that temporarily opened during extreme temperatures. She saved up and bought an RV for \$1,000, but soon discovered that most RV parks will only allow newer vehicles. She eventually found a parking spot at Agate Beach RV Park, where she stayed for a couple of years. After a three-year wait on a Section 8 list, she's finally in an apartment with her son, who is now 6.

"If I won the lottery, I would build a shelter here because that's what the county needs – a decent shelter," Viallagomez said.

Stories such as hers are common along the coast – just ask your server, bartender or hotel housekeeper about housing next time you visit.

You might hear about the people living in storage units behind Aquarium Village in Newport, of squatters inhabiting falling-down and mold-ridden dilapidated buildings along Highway 101 or of families making campgrounds in the dunes their full-time home, even with two working parents.

It's not just service-industry and other low-wage workers affected by the housing shortage. Many white-collar professionals are jumping ship because they don't want to be a doctor or teacher by day and a trailer park or campsite dweller by night.

Lincoln County lost two mental health supervisors in a row – who were hired at about \$80,000 a year plus benefits because the new recruits could not find housing in Newport.

"One gentleman had that position for nine months and resigned," said Lincoln County Commissioner Claire Hall. "Loved the community, loved his colleagues, loved the work, but after months of living in camp grounds, because he couldn't find a place that he considered decent on his income, he left. ... I hear that from so many business owners, managers, public sector, private sector. I was hearing it when I first ran for office in 2004, and it's only intensified. It is probably the No. 1 barrier to workforce recruitment and retention," she said.



PHOTOS BY EMILY GREEN

Tillamook County Commissioner Bill Baertlein (left) wants to use transient lodging taxes to help fund much-needed affordable housing. Jennifer Thiele (right) at the Tillamook Pioneer Museum where she works. Thiele was unable to find housing in Tillamook until she got on a waitlist for an apartment that had not yet been built. Now she spends 80 percent of her income on rent.

Jennifer Thiele, 26, was living in Minnesota with her parents when the Tillamook Pioneer Museum in Garibaldi offered her a job as its new cultural acquisitions educator. She had recently graduated from the University of Oregon with a degree in American history, and it was just the sort of job she was hoping to get.

For months, she called apartment complexes and scoured online ads, looking for somewhere to live. Homes for sale were too expensive and apartment complexes all had wait lists of 30 people or more, she said.

When she suggested buying an RV, her parents were hesitant and thought perhaps a motel would work.

Her father was having a hard time believing the housing situation in Tillamook could really be that bad, so he drove there to help her look. He soon learned his daughter was not exaggerating.

As he was driving along Highway 101 in the midst of his search, he saw an active construction site on the side of the road in Garibaldi. He pulled over and asked to talk to the foreman. He got his daughter on a nearly-full list for the apartments that hadn't been built yet.

Today Thiele has an apartment in that building, but it's costing her 80 percent of her income to rent.

"I budget meticulously," she said. "Everything is down to the pennies."

Other community members said she's known to wrap up food that's leftover at museum events and take it home.

Albright, Thiele's employer, said Tillamook seems to be headed in the direction of more touristy coastal cities, such as Seaside, where vacation rentals have long been an issue.

"A lot of people don't like that," he said, "there is a great resentment of that. But the bottom line is that people coming for short term stays now are taking housing that Jennifer could have had five years ago."

Enough is enough

With increased tourism driving Tillamook County's housing shortage, Commissioner Baertlein thinks using money collected from transient lodging taxes for affordable housing might make sense. After all, tourists like to eat at the restaurants and shop in the stores where locals work, but those locals need a place to live in order to serve tourists.

He's working on a bill for the 2019 session that he said would more "equitably split up the monies" from the tax. If passed, it could potentially serve as a funding stream to build affordable housing in cities struggling with the effects of vacation rentals across the state. The bill's details are still being worked out.

But for the full potential of the lodging tax to be realized, governments need to ensure short-term rental owners are paying the tax to begin with. That's why Tillamook County is buying a software program and service that will pinpoint unlicensed Airbnbs that aren't paying it.

"They did a preliminary search in Tillamook, and there were over 200," said Baertlein.

He estimates that in the unincorporated areas of the county alone, \$600,000 to \$700,000 in taxes and permit fees is going uncollected. Plus, unlicensed rentals aren't getting inspected for safety.

"We're going to be the guinea pig," he said, adding that if the software works, cities in Tillamook County will likely follow suit and do their own audits.

In January, the city of Newport formed an ad-hoc committee to figure out what regulations on vacation rentals should look like – a move that many residents see as long overdue.

According to Newport's city planner, Tokos, there are 195 licensed vacation rentals in Newport. Like Tillamook, Newport also had an independent company search for unlicensed short-term rentals. It showed about 80 to 85 percent were

compliant, he said.

Newport's vacation rental committee is considering placing a cap on the total number of vacation rentals, limiting where they can be located and their density.

The next step is public input, and then city council and planners will vote on the final recommendations in the fall.

Some coastal communities with regulations in place, such as Gearhart and Lincoln City, initially battled legal challenges to limits and rules they applied to short-term rentals, and ultimately prevailed. But the effectiveness of these regulations relies heavily on compliance.

In Astoria, short-term rentals are only allowed in residential areas if the owner occupies the unit while guests are there. But illegal rentals persist on sites such as Airbnb. As recently as December, Astoria City Council considered adding a permit requirement to all Airbnb's in an attempt to figure out where they are for better tracking and enforcement.

While it hashes out its own vacation rental regulations, Newport may build its way into a slightly better housing situation over the next two years with the multiple apartment complex projects it has in the pipeline. Three projects will add about 200 new apartments, with the majority available to people making 60 to 80 percent of the median area income, according to local government officials.

And the developments couldn't come at a better time. With a new Samaritan hospital and a \$58 million expansion of Oregon State University's Hatfield Marine Science Center under construction, locals have wondered where workers filling all the new jobs at these facilities will live.

But for Boxer, those units may not come soon enough. After a long career working as an affordable housing financier for U.S. Bank and other financial institutions, she said she doesn't have the energy at her age to keep vetting, hiring and retraining employees at her café. In the meantime, she sits on the city's ad-hoc vacation rental committee, and has been a vocal participant at its meetings.

"I want to give the people who live and work here, the opportunity to live and work here," she said. "I have just hired my 93rd employee in 4 years and 3 months, and I am absolutely sick to death of the turnover. I just don't want to do it anymore."

**When Street Roots analyzed homes purchased in Tillamook County, Lincoln City and Newport between 2008 and 2018, we found that 8 percent of the purchasers' permanent addresses in Lincoln City and Newport, and 15 percent in Tillamook County, were listed as a local P.O. box. We did not count these purchasers as living at the property they purchased, but we did count them as local purchasers. It's possible some buyers with a local P.O. box may not actually be local. It's also possible that they are residing in the home they purchased, but do not take their mail there. In Newport and Lincoln City, 142 of the properties purchased were vacant lots.*