

FORECLOSURE HOUSE UNOCCUPIED

More than four months after the Occupy Housing and Foreclosure Action Committee (OH-FAC) moved into the foreclosed home on the corner of 12th and Lawrence, it's being reoccupied by its owner. Occupiers say owner Karen Atkinson, who left the home two years ago, is in a sort of "legal limbo," but she's challenging the foreclosure.

OH-FAC member Vickie Embree says the committee will continue its education-centered work. "The state went from mostly non-judicial to mostly judicial foreclosures and it's just totally changed the landscape," she says. Unlike non-judicial foreclosures, judicial foreclosures are processed in the courts. Legislation passed in the spring guarantees mediation for Oregonians in non-judicial foreclosure, but Embree says that a

significant shift to judicial foreclosures means fewer people are benefiting than expected. She says OH-FAC is also looking into helping people in foreclosure access legal help.

Before OH-FAC moved in, the committee says the yard and house, vacant since the foreclosure process began, had been used as a dumping ground and grounds for taking dumps. "We picked it up, and we came back three weeks later, and it was a mess again," Embree says. "That's when we decided, well, we can't just clean it up and leave it — we need to stay here." The Occupiers cleaned the yard, painted the fence and helped keep the rhododendrons in the front yard alive for the summer. They also hosted an event during a September ArtWalk.

For foreclosure help, check out OH-FAC's support group, which meets at 5 pm every Wednesday in the Growers Market, 454 Willamette St., or write to oebankbusters@gmail.com — *Shannon Finnell*

COAL SPILL TRASHES OCEAN WATERS

Worse than coal in your Christmas stocking is coal in your water. A recent accident at a coal terminal in Vancouver, B.C., calls attention to the impacts that coal exports have on oceans and waterways around the ports. A large bulk carrier of coal collided with one of the coal trestles at the Westshore Terminals port in Canada on Dec. 7, spilling several tons of coal into the ocean. This is in addition to a coal carrier that ran aground in November, and another that recently docked with a large crack in its hull.

While Oregon's controversial Coos Bay Bulk Terminal coal export proposal, a partnership between Metro Ports and the Japanese company Mitsui, hasn't been making many headlines lately, it is still in play, and the Portland area just wrapped up a series of public meetings about

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- **A homeless micro-housing** pilot project requires four to six months to get a conditional use permit? Holy freezing to death on the streets, Batman. We respect the need for due diligence, but when lives are at stake, a little expediency is in order. Kudos to the council for approving the Opportunity Village pilot project, and in particular to Councilor Alan Zelenka for making sure a location was chosen before the council's winter break, but let's not fool ourselves into thinking those at risk on the streets are now safe. Eugene must lift the camping ban for the winter — calling ourselves a human rights city while we criminalize keeping warm is a human wrong.

- **Eugene city planners** have rarely shown any vision or leadership in the public interest and now we hear of staff urging the Eugene Planning Commission this week to overturn the hearings official's denial of the Deerbrook housing development in the Amazon headwaters. The vote pitted the three neighborhood-affiliated commissioners against the four development-affiliated commissioners, and the neighborhood lost. Next stop will be the Oregon Land Use Board of Appeals. City staff is on the wrong side of this important environmental issue, along with others. Why? We've met some enlightened planning staffers, but old ideas about growth and development are institutionalized.

- **City Hall belongs downtown**, and efforts to move it elsewhere are misguided. City halls are the center-points of cities all across America and in fact their precise locations are used to calculate the mileage between cities. The EWEB headquarters along the Willamette is attractive, but it is five blocks east of the city center and not nearly as accessible as the old City Hall that now stands vacant. A huge foundation of solid concrete and steel can be found at the City Hall site that can be reinforced and built upon to make a fine new City Hall, and the rebuilding can be done in stages [see our cover story May 17].

What should become of EWEB's beautiful site by the river? We still wonder why EWEB managers would want to give up those fine buildings; we would like to see that prime property remain in public ownership, perhaps becoming part of our higher education system, or leased out to a private enterprise, to be reclaimed for public use years from now when it's needed. And the adjacent excess EWEB land? Ideal would be some limited redevelopment including restaurants or a pub and lots of inviting public parkland along the river as part of a string of parks all the way to Glenwood. We've paid little attention to planning for the south side of the river. Future generations will value our riverfront lands much more than we apparently do now.

- New UO President **Michael Gottfredson** amiably repeated the university's "talking points" Dec. 7 before the City Club of Eugene, echoing interim president Robert Berdahl and former president Richard Lariviere on this same civic platform: the importance of a "premier public research university"; desperately declining state financial support [currently 5 percent];

cost shifting to students, donors and grants; rising demand with 25,000 freshman applicants this year; and the immediate need for an independent UO governing board appointed by the governor, a hot issue before the 2013 legislature since only UO and PSU are demanding such a board. We're a little wonk-weary of new education boards and czars and kicking cans down rutted roads, but let's see how Gottfredson works with the Legislature and the governor. He's only been in Johnson Hall four months.

- Big business still has **too much power in Oregon**. Take the case of Nike. We suspect the company had already decided to do a major expansion in Oregon, and then turned its fleet of attorneys to strategize reducing future tax liabilities. All it takes is a threat to *not* do the expansion and Nike gets a special session of the Oregon Legislature. Is this what Oregon's all about?

- We who are not in the 1 percent get a little envious and maybe resentful when we hear about the dozens of **EWEB salaries** that exceed \$100,000 a year, though few of us have the expertise or the fortitude to do the kinds of work EWEB workers are called to do. A front-page story in the *R-G* Dec. 2 fueled passions about these high salaries in a time of recession, and made it look like unions are to blame for high utility rates. But then way, way down in the story on the inside pages we discover that salaries are not a major factor in high utility rates. What? Most readers don't follow story jumps to inside pages. Our daily paper tends to either ignore or bash organized labor, mirroring its own dark history with its unionized employees. This story, at least the way it was edited and presented, is one more example.

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