Study: Council will discuss study on Sept. 14

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Bureau, but property managers now put that figure closer to the single digits. The median gross rent in 2013 was \$693, but property managers believe it is now closer to

"The bottom line is that we are in dire need of affordable housing and maybe housing in general," said Mike Morgan, the city's interim planner and the lead author of the draft study, which was presented to the Astoria Planning Commission Tuesday night.

The City Council, which has made affordable housing a goal, will hold a work session to discuss the study on Sept. 14.

The housing landscape

Housing units in Astoria, according to the study, are about evenly divided between owners and renters.

City planners took the general definition of affordability — households that devote no more than 30 percent of annual income to housing —



Joshua Bessex/The Daily Astorian Workforce housing could be part of a new library project at Heritage Square. The city has a lack of affordable housing.

and found that 30 percent of homeowners and 45.6 percent of renters exceeded the threshold in 2013.

Surveys of property managers, community leaders and owners and renters produced similar feedback about the low vacancy rate and the need for more affordable housing. Property managers, however, stressed the need for workforce housing, not more low-income housing.

The city does not have a

solid grasp on the exact number of vacant units.

"There really is virtually zero vacancy," said Sean Fitzpatrick, who serves on the Planning Commission and is a property manager.

A task force to identify options

The study recommends the City Council assign a task force to look at options for affordable housing and identify potential locations.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

A draft study by city planners documents the affordable housing challenge in Astoria. Conclusions

• There is a shortage of both affordable rental housing and affordable housing for sale.

Rents and sales prices are high for most middle-income families.

• The number of remodeling permits has significantly outnumbered the number of permits for new units in recent years.

• The Hispanic population has more than doubled since 2000, and a large proportion of the Hispanic community lives in Emerald Heights, a low-income apartment complex.

• The number of homeless people has grown as available housing has diminished

• U.S. Coast Guard housing demand has driven up the price of housing because of housing

allowances and the reliability of Coasties as tenants.

Recommendations • The City Council could establish a task force to explore options for affordable housing

The city should be proactive in promoting housing development.

 The city should discourage vacation rentals in residential areas that are not owner-occupied. The city should consider allowing accessory dwelling units — now only allowed in a basement or other part of a house — over garages, as garage conversions or as separate structures.

• The city should identify locations for workforce housing downtown in public-private partnerships.

Planners also urge the city to be proactive in promoting housing development, citing the city's support for the Mill Pond project and U.S. Coast Guard housing.

The city has looked at public-private partnerships to help with new housing, including workforce housing as part of a new library at Heritage Square, but the public's appetite for subsidies has not been tested, and may not be sufficient to satisfy demand.

While city councilors and others have called on the city to address affordable housing, specific policy decisions will likely be fraught with politics.

There is vocal opposition, for example, to market-rate condominiums or other housing projects near the Columbia River, which many believe cater to second-home buyers. Neighborhoods have also balked at new housing in other pockets of the city.

Now that Astoria has be-

come a destination, there is a backlash among some residents — including politically active transplants who moved to the city to retire — against development of any kind.

"I think we need to be creative and also a little careful that we are creating affordable housing for residents of Astoria," said Dave Pearson, the president of the Planning Commission. "Not that we become the next Cannon Beach."

Historian: Story details 'the adventure of getting across the continent'

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"I'm providing the public and scholars with the original sources so they can do the interpretive, revisionist work," Moulton said. "Here are the raw materials at your hands. You don't have to go all over the country and pore over documents.'

Dismal Nitch

Last week, Moulton visited the Dismal Nitch site where the Corps of Discovery barely survived in mid-November 1805. The location of the nitch somewhere near Highway 401 on the Washington-side of the Columbia River — is the focus of debate between two local historians.

Historian Rex Ziak of Naselle, Wash., puts the campsite close to the Washington State Department of Transportation's Dismal Nitch Rest Area.

Historian Jim Sayce, of Seaview, Wash., interprets the journals as saying the campsite was east of the rest area. Sayce — the Washington State Historical Society's liaison to the Lewis and Clark National Historical Park — was recently elected to the board of the National Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation.

Moulton said he experiences similar disputes when he visits other locations along the Lewis and Clark Trail. He stays out of the debate. "It's hard to say," Moulton said. "There is no archaeological evidence at this point to pinpoint Dismal Nitch."



Joshua Bessex/The Daily Astorian

Seen reflected in a nearby picture, historian Gary Moulton discusses the Corps of Discovery expedition at the Seaside Public Library Aug. 18.

'It's a grand story. The adventure of getting across the continent. The miserable, incredible situation they were in coming down the Columbia. Wet, cold and dangerous."

— Gary Moulton

Tale of Two Forts

Moulton is soaking in his time at Fort Clatsop, which he considers a fascinating part of Lewis and Clark's journey. He said historical scholars, including himself, enjoy comparing Fort Clatsop and North Dakota's Fort

Mandan, the two places the corps wintered.

Scholars contrast how the group felt about natives, the situations and the climate of the Great Plains compared to the coastal environment.

Many concluded that the

Lewis and Clark Expedition had a difficult time at Fort Clatsop.

Part of the hardship at Fort Clatsop related to the corps not understanding the native tribes from their point of view. Moulton notes that the science of anthropology was years away. Not only did Lewis and Clark not understand the different cultures, but they refused to accept them, Moulton said.

"They were so put off by the natives that the cultural habits were alien to them," Moulton said. "They viewed them negatively. It was the age they were in. They didn't know how to cross that cultural barrier."

Despite the difficulties with the natives and the harsh weather at Dismal Nitch, Moulton believes the experience on the coast ended up being positive since if exposed the corps to a new environment and cultural area. In a broader sense, it helped the United States plant a flag on the West Coast so the country would have claims in future years. It set the stage for the settlement of Astoria, and the Oregon Trial.

Before leaving Fort Clatsop in March 1806, William Clark wrote in the journal, "We lived as well as we had any right to expect."

"That is a great philosophy for life," Moulton said. "His feeling wasn't all negative."

A grand story

As Moulton finishes "Lewis and Clark Day by expected to be completed by the end of the year — he reflects on what has drawn him and many others to the story of Lewis and Clark.

"It's a grand story. The adventure of getting across the continent. The miserable, incredible situation they were in coming down the Columbia. Wet, cold and dangerous. They pushed into the shore at Dismal Nitch. What a name. It says it all. It wasn't a happy time," Moulton said. "The drama of the story appeals to people."

OLCC: The agency will start licensing retail around fall 2016

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"Seed to sale" also helps ensure that a licensee maintains compliance with the U.S. Department of Justice's "Cole Memorandum," which spells out the federal government's marijuana-related prohibitions. These include not selling weed to minors and keeping the drug off the black market.

"We want to see people who can play by the rules, and who play by the rules even when markets are tougher," Marks said.

He added that "seed to sale" serves as a substitute for the three-tiered system the OLCC applies to alcohol but not to marijuana.

Someone involved in the distribution of alcohol must be licensed as a producer or a wholesaler or a retailer, but never more than one at a time. But someone involved in distributing marijuana can be licensed in any number of capacities at once: grower, processor, wholesaler, retailer, laboratory tester, researcher, etc. This complicates the agency's ability to follow product, a deficiency for which the barcoding of plants may compensate.

Though the agency has been moving at full speed in recent months, "there hasn't been resistance to doing this," Ranee Niedermeyer, OLCC government affairs and communications director, said. "People know it's hard, but they're in there, and they're doing it."

Hashing out details

Once hired and trained, the new OLCC workforce won't have a great deal to confront on the North Coast - at least not right away.

Astoria has three officially licensed medical marijuana shops, and when Oregon Senate Bill 460 kicks in Oct. 1, the shops will be allowed to sell recreational marijua-

Across the bay in Warrenton, however, the City Commission voted not to allow medical marijuana dispensaries to sell recreational marijuana. Warrenton doesn't have any medical marijuana

dispensaries operating. Neither does Gearhart, and there are none in the works, according to Gearhart City Manager Chad Sweet. However, in October 2014,

the city voted to implement a 5 percent tax on gross sales of marijuana and marijuana-infused products to cardholders under the Oregon Medical Marijuana Program, and a 10 percent tax on gross sales to non-cardholders.

Seaside has two medical marijuana dispensaries, but City Manager Mark Winstanley doesn't know if the City Council will allow them to sell recreational marijuana come October.

Cannon Beach's business license application doesn't allow for businesses that violate federal law, so, at the moment, medical and recreational marijuana facilities are off the table since marijuana remains federally ille-

Once the OLCC starts accepting applications in January, the agency will likely prioritize the licensing of growers so that they can to get their product to retail sooner rather than later, Marks said. The agency will then start licensing retail around fall 2016, he said.

One pressing question hasn't gone unmentioned within the agency: Will the Oregon Liquor Control Commission change its name?

The agency hasn't taken a position, Marks said. However, some people have floated

the suggestion "Oregon Liquor and Cannabis Control"

commission. It would be cost-efficient at any rate: the commission wouldn't necessarily have to change the acronym on its letterhead.

