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Astoria needs more workforce housing

After decades of having too many dwellings for its population, Astoria's housing market is much tighter.

Although this is a good thing for property owners and agents, a significant mismatch between supply and demand will make the city less interesting and hold back economic prospects.

Rentals are a particular challenge. Employers are finding it more difficult to match new hires with places to live within the city. For those with adequate transportation, options still exist elsewhere in Clatsop County and across the Astoria Bridge. But housing affordability is such a major part of a livable and economically sustainable town that it behooves civic leaders to pay close attention.

The study commissioned by the city of Astoria and our Wednesday report on it contain both empirical and anecdotal evidence that should serve as a call to action:

- "City planners took the general definition of affordability — households that devote no more than 30 percent of annual income to housing — and found that 30 percent of homeowners and 45.6 percent of renters exceeded the threshold in 2013."

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

- "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."

Pearson's reference to Cannon Beach is eye-opening. Even five years ago, the idea that Astoria might find itself in a housing situation in any way analogous with

Cannon Beach would have been laughable. Now, it increasingly feels conceivable. Such a scenario would mean many of the wage-earners who support the economy of the city would have to commute from more affordable housing markets. Such a situation is understandable — if still regrettable — in cities like Seattle and San Francisco. It should not happen in Astoria without a fight. The vibrant mix of different age groups, economic classes and business activities is what makes Astoria a fascinating, living, breathing place.

The situation of affordability has become worse since 2013 and will deteriorate further in the absence of intelligent and proactive collaborations between government and private property owners. The U.S. Coast Guard will have to participate in housing discussions; the prospect of additional personnel being based at the mouth of the Columbia is highly desirable from an economic standpoint but will crank down the overall availability of dwellings.

The city's study makes a number of worthwhile suggestions, which largely revolve around making the most of the space and existing housing, while facilitating future building and investment.

Some of the current situation is a direct consequence of the nationwide 2008 housing bust and the resulting tightening of lending. To a certain extent, construction will eventually catch up with demand. Space will always be at a premium in Astoria, however, considering the small river peninsula it occupies. Maintaining a healthy mix of housing will demand ongoing attention for many years to come.

Trump-ward, Christian soldiers?

By FRANK BRUNI
New York Times News Service

Let me get this straight. If I want the admiration and blessings of the most flamboyant, judgmental Christians in America, I should marry three times, do a queasy-making amount of sexual boasting, verbally degrade women, talk trash about pretty much everyone else while I'm at it, encourage gamblers to hemorrhage their savings in casinos bearing my name and crow incessantly about how much money I've amassed?

Seems to work for Donald Trump.

Polls show him to be the preferred candidate among not just all Republican voters but also the party's vocal evangelical subset.

He's more beloved than Mike Huckabee, a former evangelical pastor, or Ted Cruz, an evangelical pastor's son, or Scott Walker, who said during the recent Republican debate: "It's only by the blood of Jesus Christ that I've been redeemed."

When Trump mentions blood, it's less biblical, as Megyn Kelly can well attest.

No matter. The holy rollers are smiling upon the high roller. And they're proving, yet again, how selective and incoherent the religiosity of many in the party's God squad is.

Usually the disconnect involves stern moralizing, especially on matters sexual, by showily devout public figures who are then exposed as adulterers or (gasp!) closet homosexuals. I'd list all the names, starting with Josh Duggar and working backward, but my column doesn't sprawl over an entire page of the newspaper.

Or the disconnect is between evangelists' panegyrics about Christ's penury and their hustle for funds to support less-than-penurious lifestyles. John Oliver, the host of HBO's "Last Week Tonight," has been making brilliant satirical fun of this by promoting his new tax-exempt church, Our Lady of Perpetual Exemption. Last Sunday he apologized to viewers that his wife, Wanda Jo, "cannot be with us this evening."

"She's at our summer parsonage in Hawaii," he continued, "for a week of spiritual introspection and occasional parasailing."



Frank Bruni

What's different and fascinating about the Trump worship is that he doesn't even try that hard for a righteous facade — for Potemkin piety. Sure, he speaks of enthusiastic churchgoing, and he's careful to curse Planned Parenthood and to insist that matrimony be reserved for heterosexuals as demonstrably inept at it as he is.

But beyond that? He just about runs the table on the seven deadly sins. He personifies greed, embodies pride, radiates lust. Wrath is covered by his anti-immigrant, anti-"losers" rants, and if we interpret gluttony to include big buildings and not just Big Macs, he's a glutton through and through. That leaves envy and sloth. I'm betting that he harbors plenty of the former, though I'll concede that he exhibits none of the latter.

In 2012, inexplicably, he was invited to Liberty University, where he digressed during his remarks to extol the prudence of prenuptial agreements. But all was forgiven: His host, Jerry Falwell, told audience members that Trump could be credited for "single-handedly" forcing President Barack Obama to release his birth certificate. Oh how they cheered, as if ugly, groundless partisan rumor-mongering were on a saintly par with washing lepers' feet.

Maybe it's Trump's jingoism they adore. They venerated Ronald Reagan though he'd divorced, remarried and spent much of his career in the goddess clutch of Hollywood.

Maybe their fealty to Trump is

payback for his donations to conservative religious groups.

Or maybe his pompadour has mesmerized them. It could, in the right wind, be mistaken for a halo.

I'm grasping at straws, because there's no sense in the fact that many of the people who most frequently espouse the Christian spirit then proceed to vilify immigrants, demonize minorities and line up behind a candidate who's a one-man master class in such misanthropy.

From Trump's Twitter account gushes an endless stream of un-Christian rudeness, and he was at it again on Monday night, retweeting someone else's denigration of Kelly as a "bimbo." Shouldn't he be turning the other cheek?

For politicians as for voters, devotion and grace can be fickle, convenient things. Courting the evangelical vote, Cruz used his own Twitter account last week to say that his "thoughts and prayers are with President Jimmy Carter," whose struggle with

cancer was riveting the nation. But then Cruz pressed on with a speech that bemoaned the "misery, stagnation and malaise" of Carter's presidency. He couldn't have hit pause on the Carter bashing for a week or two?

Carter pressed on, too — with his usual weekend routine of teaching Sunday school, which he has long done with little fanfare. His own Christianity is not a bludgeon but a bridge.

As for Trump, I must not be watching the same campaign that his evangelical fans are, because I don't see someone interested in serving God. I see someone interested in being God.

The holy rollers are smiling upon the high roller.

Living in the northwest Ring of Fire

By TIMOTHY EGAN
New York Times News Service

The West has been on fire all month, with dream homes falling to a combustive punch, wild horses seared by flame and suffocated by smoke, even a rare "firenado" dancing across a landscape in which seven million acres have been burned this year.

It was shocking to be lazing through the rituals of summer at Lake Chelan, one of the world's most beautiful bodies of water, in Washington's eastern Cascades, when wildfires arrived with a cannonade of lightning — blazes that have now taken lives and forced towns to evacuate.

But even as eye-tearing smoke, red sun and yellow-shirted firefighters have become a part of life this summer, many of us on the West Coast can't stop thinking about a greater threat — earthquakes, specifically the Really Big One. The unclenching of two large plates along the Pacific shore from Northern California to Vancouver Island would be, by consensus predictions, the worst natural disaster in North American history.

It happened once, more than 300 years ago, a magnitude 9 shake that was 60 times stronger than the 1906 earthquake that left San Francisco in ruins. It most assuredly will happen again, perhaps tomorrow, perhaps in a hundred years.

It's ghastly to think about: 10,000 or more buildings crumbling. Bridges swaying, buckling, shucking off cars. A tangle of natural gas lines causing explosions no terrorist could pull off. And then, just as the shaken crust of

the North American plate has finally settled, a tsunami from an ocean heave would bury small coastal communities. More than 13,000 people would die, most of them under a mountain of seawater. Throughout the region, a million people would be temporarily displaced.

We've known about all of this for some time. The Pacific Northwest is so beautiful because of the still-active tectonic forces that have shaped it. But this summer, *The New Yorker* published a piece that wrapped old news in new terror. And what had been buried in the recesses of Northwestern minds suddenly flared. The collective anxiety has not gone away.

The larger question, from Seattle to Sagamore Hill, is how we fit disaster into our daily lives — a pact with the known unknown. There is no such thing as a safe place on this earth. More than 90 percent of Americans live in an area with at least a moderate risk of tomadoes, or wildfires, or hurricanes, or floods, or earthquakes. Not to mention the larger threat of climate change, exacerbating

most of the above. You gauge the odds; that's really the crux of choosing where to live. And you hope your political leaders have the foresight to spend money on things that may not have an immediate benefit.

In the Northwest, these are the odds: There is a 10 to 15 percent chance of a magnitude 9 earthquake happening over the next 50 years, and a 30 percent chance of a smaller, though still enormous, collision of plates. If you live in the Ring of Fire — that horseshoe of seismic activity running along the Pacific shore from Chile to Alaska, Japan



Timothy Egan

to New Zealand — you live where most of the world's earthquakes happen.

I've been trying to make peace with these calculations ever since geologists mapped out the Seattle Fault, more than 20 years ago. Smaller than the big Cascadia line along the coast, this east-west fault runs right under Interstate 90, beneath the city's downtown skyscrapers and the new buildings of Amazon's corporate kingdom, under the stadiums where the Seahawks and Mariners play, and below my family's 110-year-old house.

So yes, I'm living on top of the Seattle Fault. It's somewhat reassuring that the thick walls of my home's foundation have survived three relatively minor earthquakes, in 1949, 1965 and 2001, without even a hairline fracture. And I certainly sleep better knowing that the timbered frame of my old house is now bolted, in most places, to that foundation. Wood homes are shaken, but generally not stirred, in a big quake if latched to their footings.

The Seattle Fault was confirmed, in part, by discovery of the remnants of giant trees that slid into Lake Washington 1,100 years ago. That quake turned bluffs into beaches, and beaches into cliffs, so my little earthquake fixes are hardly adequate if the backyard drops 20 feet.

I've got my water filter from REI, my emergency supplies, my propane. I have a woodstove for emergency heat, decent vino in the cellar, canned goods with an expiration date far beyond the Donald Trump moment.

But it's laughable, all of it, in the big scheme of things. All you need to hope that the surface plates remain stuck, in a wrestler's tension grip, for another century or so. And you obsess, or try to parse, those odds, all while realizing that you wouldn't have stayed here without the conditions that created that risk.

Gov. Brown makes a signature hire

Upgrading state computer systems will bring enormous efficiencies

Clyde Saiki is not a household name. But he will shortly become one of the most significant players in Oregon state government.

Saiki (whose name rhymes with Nike) on Tuesday becomes the state's chief operating officer and head of the Department of Administrative Services.

This is Gov. Kate Brown's signature hire. A good measure of Saiki's task will be to move state government's computer operations from antiquated to up-to-date. Many of the state agency computer systems cannot talk to other agencies' systems.

Gov. Brown inherited two malignant strains upon taking office unexpectedly last January. There were scandalous revelations about how Gov. John Kitzhaber's companion Cylvia Hayes had used the imprimatur of first lady to pursue private business from inside the governor's office. Secondly, the Cover Oregon fiasco revealed how naive the governor had been about a major software rollout. No one with a relevant background was advising

Gov. Kitzhaber on the state's dealings with the software giant Oracle.

Saiki said the goal of his agency and the new state chief information officer is to identify computer issues sooner and deal with them quickly.

Saiki told Oregon Capital Insider that Gov. Brown spoke to him about the need for transparency. The governor believes that knowing why government is doing things is as important as knowing what government is doing.

State government is enormously important to all citizens. It reaches into every community with services ranging from employment to economic development to human services to law enforcement. It is also a huge enterprise.

Well beneath the headlines is where the real work of state government happens. Updating the state's computer systems is not sexy or eye-catching. But it will bring enormous efficiencies. And as Saiki has said, money saved through efficiency can be directed to Oregonians' needs.