



The Daily Astorian/File Photo

From left: Capt. Daniel Travers, Capt. John Healy, Mayor Arline LaMear, Lt. Cmdr. Christiane Weber, Jim Wilkins, Gabe Duus of Integrity Structures, Tony Ewing of Columbia River Excavations, and Mike Gabe, with Integrity Structures, stand for a portrait with ceremonial shovels during a groundbreaking ceremony for a Coast Guard housing expansion project in April. It is increasingly difficult for Coast Guard families to find places to rent.

## Housing: Many solutions were proposed

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Cannon Beach is somewhat land-locked and the available land is mostly considered oceanfront property, which inflates its value. Seaside has high system-development charges. Gearhart is facing an influx of short-term vacation rentals that appeal more to landowners than long-term rentals. Warrenton is filled with property classified as wetlands; and Astoria presents some topographical and geological challenges to development.

### The housing shortfall

Don Lee, the U.S. Coast Guard's housing supervisor for Sector Columbia River, said it is increasingly difficult for him to find places for Coast Guard families to rent, and that includes the officers, which seems to indicate the housing shortfall "is pretty much across the board."

"There are just not enough multi-family rentals, or single rentals, in this area to accommodate the need," he said, adding if private and public partnerships focused on the lower "end of the stick, it would give breathing room."

Some said once more affordable housing is available, people staying in cheaper places, who could afford more, would be able to do so, and vice versa.

"Our market is not breathing," Lee said. "It's going up like a rocket."

Ideally, occupancy rates

should be at about 95 percent to allow landlords and management companies to do maintenance on rentals, "You have two people waiting for every one that comes open," Steve Olstedt, president of Olstedt Construction, said.

### Pinpointing the obstacles

The commonly accepted standard for affordable housing is families who pay more than 30 percent of their income toward housing are considered cost burdened and may have difficulty paying for other necessities, according to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Randy Stemper, a general contractor, said he is involved in a development underway in Seaside that will offer 26 two-bedroom units at a cost of about \$1,000 to \$1,150 per unit. That is what it takes for developers to make a return on their investment — at least in Seaside, he said.

Developers won't build new facilities at a loss, he said, which leads to the question, "How do we lower the costs to the investors?" Olstedt agreed there is land available to develop, particularly in Warrenton, but securing a good interest rate is key because costs are ultimately passed to the end users — the renters.

Developers need to be able to "build cheaper, so we can offer (housing) for cheaper," said Ben Johnson of Sunrise Homes.

### Solutions around the state

Richard Krueger, of Krueger Property Management, shared viable solutions he has found in other Oregon cities. In Pendleton, the state backed a loan for the developer to get a better interest rate and the city helped provide land. For the trade, 30 percent of the units had to be low-income housing, and the rest could be rented at market value, Krueger said.

"That's an example of the state and the city's involvement with the private sector, which I think would be nice to have," he said.

In Tigard, he is working on a 118-unit apartment complex with a 19-year tax abatement that must provide 40 percent of the units for low-income housing. Additionally, 1 percent of the development must be owned and operated by a non-profit agency.

A number of potential solutions were proposed at the meeting, including:

- Identifying possible buildable lands on Clatsop Plains, between Seaside and Cannon Beach or Seaside and Warrenton;
- Cities offering relief from system-development charges, tax abatement and incremental financing;
- Communities collecting funds to use for gap financing;
- Local governments legislating and enforcing control mechanisms to limit short-term vacation rentals;
- Helping homeowners utilize

garages and basements or build tiny homes to offer for rent;

- Finding areas for potential accessory or infill housing;
- Forming housing equity partnerships;
- Institutions and businesses helping to provide housing to their employees and
- Increasing mix-use structures, such as libraries or other public buildings that provide housing on upper stories, which might require cities to grant zoning variances.

"There are lots of tools out there, you just have to agree as a community what those tools are and see if those work," Astoria Community Development Director Kevin Cronin said. "If they don't work, you go back to the drawing board and try something else."

### Next steps

At the end of the meeting, participants were asked to sign up to participate on one of four unofficial committees.

One committee will take inventory of buildable lands in the region and quantify the need, or determine the true supply and demand. Another will research best practices or solutions being used in other cities, such as the examples Krueger provided.

The third committee will craft a model budget of what it would take for a developer to build a multi-family dwelling. The fourth group will research and generate ideas for non-traditional solutions, such as tiny houses or accessory housing.

# How to spot a fake review

By SARAH SKIDMORE SELL  
AP Business Writer

Do you trust online reviews? Now that Amazon is suing more than 1,000 people who allegedly offered to write glowing product reviews for cash, you might reasonably be concerned.

Turns out, deceptive reviews are commonplace online — and so are doubts about them. The research organization Mintel found that 57 percent of surveyed consumers are suspicious of companies or products that only have positive online reviews. And 49 percent believe companies probably give incentives for online reviews.

Fortunately, there are a few good techniques that can help you tell truth from fiction.

### Don't trust yourself

A team of researchers at Cornell University created a computer algorithm for detecting fake hotel reviews by analyzing the language used in legitimate and phony write-ups. The computer program, Review Skeptic, is accurate about 90 percent of the time, but humans alone performed poorly at determining the truth teller.

"People are terrible," said professor Claire Cardie, who helped develop the system. "I was very surprised. We just cannot tell the difference much more than chance."

### Listen to the language

Beware of extremes — overly enthusiastic or negative reviews are red flags. False reviews tend to use more extreme language to get their message across. So if someone says "It is the most comfortable bed ever," perhaps in all caps, take pause.

Additionally, the Cornell researchers found that when it comes to hotels, fake reviewers tended not to talk about the spatial details — such as the floor or bathroom. Instead, they focused on the reason they

were there, such as describing a recent fake vacation or business trip. In practice, this makes sense because someone who has never been to a location might have a tough time describing it accurately.

### Junk the jargon

On the flip side, beware of recommendations that read like product manuals. Reviews that repeat the full product name or model number may be an attempt to game the search engine system. And if they use excessive technical or marketing jargon, odds are they aren't providing a genuine review — most real people don't talk like that.

### Review the reviewer

Check out the profile of the person providing the review, said Louis Ramirez, senior features writer with online deal site DealNews. If they only write reviews for a particular company, that's a huge warning sign they could have a vested interest in that business. Some sites let people upload pictures of the item they bought, which can help add credibility.

Amazon verifies some of its reviewers, indicating they actually bought the product (although some of the people it's suing allegedly found ways around that). Some other sites only allow posts from people who've made a purchase there. Look closely on the site for their review policies.

### Pay attention to detail

If you think about your own experiences with an unpleasant experience or product, you can probably explain exactly why it was bad. Ramirez suggests if you're unsure about a review, put more stock in someone who provides details of why they didn't like a product ("Oh, the battery only lasted four hours") that in someone who complains more generally ("I hated this laptop. It was horrible").

## Marriott: Hotelier wants hotel on Port of Astoria property in Uniontown

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The 20-year lease has four 20-year renewal options. Hollander will pay the Port \$2,000 a month during a 120-day feasibility study period, which can be extended. After Hollander receives a certificate of occupancy for a hotel, the lease says, he would annually pay the Port 7.5 percent of the fair market value of the land, which will be appraised every 10 years.

The proposal by Hollander ran into opposition from Commissioner Stephen Fulton, who said he was concerned over potentially tying up the property indefinitely in the feasibility study, paying only \$2,000 a month.

Using Clatsop County's property system, Fulton said he found the value of the property Holiday Inn is on to be \$1



Joshua Bessex/The Daily Astorian

Hotelier Mark Hollander wants to build a Marriott Hotel on Port of Astoria property in Uniontown between the Red Building and Astoria Bridge.

million, comparing it to what Hollander might erect. Using that value and the 7.5 percent figure from the lease, Fulton estimated the Port stands to make \$75,000 a year once a hotel is built.

Fulton said \$75,000 a year is not much revenue, and add-

ed the Port should advertise the property, just like it is doing with the Riverwalk Inn, which is being operated by Fulton's brother-in-law William Orr and Chester Trabucco while Port staff develop a request for proposals for a long-term operator. Cliff Fick, an Astorian who

worked in the hospitality industry and is consulting on the Riverwalk Inn for Orr and Trabucco, spoke against the lease. He said leasing the land to Holland-

er could negatively impact the Riverwalk Inn and fragment the Port's ability to create a master plan for its Uniontown property.

Before the commission voted to accept the lease with Hollander, Fulton made a motion to table the issue so staff could bring back comparable data on the value of other hotels. He and Bill Hunsinger, phoning in from Salt Lake City, voted yes, while commissioners Robert Mushen, James Campbell and John Raichl voted no.

"Here we are once again with 'hot paper,'" Hunsinger said, using a term for documents he feels he did not have enough time to review. He said Hollander's proposal lacked public

input, could impact the nearby Maritime Memorial and that the proposal came out of nowhere.

"Didn't I say three months ago I was going to build a hotel in Astoria?" asked Hollander, who previously said he was interested in both operating the Riverwalk Inn and building a new hotel. Hollander was at times visibly perturbed by Hunsinger's and Fulton's comments against his proposed lease.

Hunsinger had also opposed Hollander's attempts to lease the Riverwalk Inn on a short-term basis, even though Hunsinger was part of a consensus reached in a closed session to go with Hollander.

## Gearhart: Verdict expected in November

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After two violations this summer, one in June and one in August, she was ticketed under the city's zone code for operating as a business without a conditional use permit, and pleaded not guilty to the charge last month.

Two more \$500 zone code violations were delivered in September.

Since 2012, Smith has racked up an additional \$30,000 in civil administrative fines issued by the city's Building Official Jim Brien for using the barn without a permit.

At the continuation of the trial hearing Monday, Watts said Smith failed to meet conditions needed to use the barn, primarily a certificate of oc-

cupancy issued by a building official.

If she did have an active conditional use permit, it would have expired anyway, Watts said.

One of her 13 conditions — certificate of occupancy — has not been met and is required for her to "rent the barn for remuneration," Watts said.

Complicating Orr's decision is a Land Use Board of Appeals ruling earlier this year. The board sent Smith's request for an extension of her expired conditional use permit for construction at the barn back to the city for "remand."

Lawyers disagreed over the meaning of remand, and whether the lack of a conditional use permit even matters. "In order to have a conditional use permit, it requires

a certificate of occupancy, and she doesn't have one," Watts said. "How can she have commercial events? She can't."

"If an occupancy is required for weddings in Gearhart, I'd say that everybody who holds weddings at their house in Gearhart is in violation of that," Kearns said. "I think, at the minimum, it's highly unfair how many people advertise their homes as wedding venues as Gearhart."

"My client is the only person in Gearhart who needs a certificate of occupancy and a conditional use permit," he added.

Orr closed the proceedings after asking for both parties to address legal issues. Responsibilities are due by end of day Monday. Orr said he expects to render a verdict in November.



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