

State lawmakers plan bill to address affordable housing

By PARIS ACHEN
Capital Bureau

SALEM — State lawmakers plan to offer an omnibus housing bill in February to respond to a shortage of affordable housing that has reached crisis levels statewide.

The House Committee on Human Services and Housing has two months to finalize details of the proposal, said state Rep. Alissa Keny-Guyer, the committee's chairwoman.

"We want to figure out what we can do to help people who are struggling right now," Keny-Guyer said.

The Portland Democrat said the committee also plans to bring back legislation to increase funding for a state program that helps build new affordable housing for families with children who are at risk of homelessness. This year, the Legislature committed \$40 million of general obligation bonds to support the program. Keny-Guyer said she wants lawmakers to approve \$60 million more.

Lawmakers also are looking at resurrecting a bill to provide more general assistance to homeless adults, especially veterans.

Committee members listened to two hours of testimony Tuesday outlining the extent of the crisis and hearing proposals for addressing the shortage.

Moratorium on evictions

Janet Byrd of the Oregon Housing Alliance called for a one-year moratorium on no-cause evictions and excessive rent increases.

She noted that 1-in-5 Oregonians move every year, an indication of a market "in turmoil."

Insufficient supply of housing contributes to the

problem. Investors who buy buildings, clear out existing tenants and raise rents are pricing low- and middle-income residents out of the market, Byrd said.

Rents in Portland increased by \$100 in the past 12 months, said Kurt Creager, director of the City of Portland Housing Bureau.

"The Legislature has an obligation to address some of that rampant greed in the market," Byrd said.

Jon Chandler, of the Oregon Home Builders Association, said onerous permitting rules, land-use laws, and fees

are obstacles to building more affordable housing units.

The Portland City Council declared a housing emergency last month and took a series of stopgap measures to address the crisis, including waiving city code to allow temporary homeless shelters.

A statewide issue

Testimony Tuesday made clear that the crisis has tentacles throughout the state.

In central Oregon, there are a handful of rental vacancies at any given time, said Lynne McConnell of HomeSource and Assets for NeighborIm-

pact, which helps families access housing. It's common for 20 people to apply for one unit, each paying a \$40 application fee.

"You can imagine how much money is going out the door just to get in line," she said.

In Astoria, an affordable housing study found a shortage of both affordable rental housing and affordable housing for sale. Property managers have said the vacancy rate in the city is "virtually zero."

The Capital Bureau is a collaboration between EO Media Group and Pamplin Media Group.

Three arrested in Astoria drug bust

The Daily Astorian

Three people were arrested Wednesday afternoon at an Astoria apartment where methamphetamine was being sold.

Astoria Police officers and a Clatsop County Sheriff's deputy searched the residence at 1824 Exchange St. after a lengthy investigation.

Inside the apartment, officers found Blaine Ogier, Jessica Gassner and Krystal Wilson.

Gassner and Ogier were arrested and charged with distribution of a controlled substance — methamphetamine.

Wilson was arrested on a warrant from Seaside Municipal Court.

Officers found methamphetamine and items that had been traded for methamphetamine in the apartment.

On Wednesday morning, officers were conducting surveillance to determine the appropriate time to serve the warrant when a neighbor posted a sign outside the back of the apartment stating "Dope sold here we are watching you, your vehicles and your friends."

Officers seized the sign as further evidence that the warrant was valid.



Astoria Police Department

A sign posted outside the apartment states "Dope sold here we are watching you, your vehicles and your friends."

Governor vows action to improve public records access

By PARIS ACHEN
Capital Bureau

SALEM — Gov. Kate Brown on Wednesday promised to take immediate action to improve access to public records after a state audit showed slow and inconsistent responses to records requests may be jeopardizing public trust.

The governor said she plans to introduce legislation in the next session that would implement the audit's recommendation to create a public records ombudsman position. The position would involve helping the public access requested documents and assisting agencies with complying with public records law.

Brown also announced that she would issue an executive order calling for more consistency between agencies in fees charged and timelines for fulfilling records requests. The audit report, released Tuesday, found that fees and timelines varied widely between nine agencies that were audited.

She plans to establish a task force to look at the more than 400 exemptions to public records law and make recommendations for improvements in 2017.

Inherited a backlog

Brown said she inherited a backlog of unfulfilled public records requests when she took office from Gov. John Kitzhaber, who resigned in February amid an influence-peddling scandal involving first lady Cylvia Hayes.

"It was clear transparency wasn't a priority in the prior administration," said Brown, who rose to the state's highest office from her position as secretary of state.

Since February, Brown's of-

fice has fulfilled more than 100 public records requests, containing 350,000 pages and involving more than 3,000 hours of staff time, she said.

The audit report found that agencies furnished records relatively quickly — in two weeks or less — for routine requests. About 90 percent of requests fit the definition of routine — commonly requested information that is easy to find, according to the audit. More complicated requests could take more than 265 days, result in high and inconsistent fees and lead to "the perception that agencies are using these tactics to block the release of public information," auditors wrote.

Brown forms working group on college violence

By PARIS ACHEN
Capital Bureau

SALEM — Gov. Kate Brown is forming a work group to examine ways colleges and universities can prevent and respond to mass shootings.

The work group came out of concerns about higher education institutions' preparedness for violent attacks in the wake of a mass shooting at Roseburg's Umpqua Community College, Brown said. The October shooting was the deadliest in the state's history.

The governor met behind closed doors Wednesday with presidents of more than 40 public and private universities and colleges to hold a debriefing on response and recovery efforts at UCC and discuss how lessons from that tragedy could inform future emergency planning.

"One of the reasons for bringing this group together today is I wanted their input and to hear their concerns before putting together the work group," Brown said after the meeting.

The group's charge is to find ways for postsecondary institutions to pool resources and swap best practices for violence prevention and response.

Fewer resources at smaller schools

Some institutions such as the University of Oregon have sophisticated emergency response teams to coordinate with emergency responders, counselors and media. Smaller institutions have fewer resources to pull that off, said Corban University President Sheldon Nord, who attended Wednesday's gathering.

"It was really clear we have this really talented and really skilled incident response team at the U of O so one of the conversations is we can't afford to replicate that incredible unit at every single campus so how do



Mike Henneke/The News-Review

Gov. Kate Brown, second from right, and Umpqua Community College interim President Rita Cavin, second from left, walk arm-in-arm to make a brief appearance before members of the media following a walking tour at the college in October. From left to right, are: UCC student body president Tony Terra, Cavin, Brown and UCC board chairperson Vanessa Becker.

we ensure that incident response team is available on any college or university campus should this type of gun violence occur?" Brown said.

"I was really heartened by this idea of pooling our resources so we can have teams in place to help administrators, faculty, staff and students feel safe and have a plan going forward," Nord said.

The governor plans to select the work group in the next few weeks.

Don't expect proposals from the group in time for the legislative session in February. Brown said the work group is a longer-term project that may result in recommendations for the 2017 session.

Oregon already has a Task Force on School Safety, established by the Legislature in 2014, to research best practices to prevent mass shootings and respond more efficiently to the state's K-12 campuses.

Brown said a separate work group will help address concerns and characteristics specific to higher education institutions.

Statewide tip line

School safety task force members recently unveiled their recommendations for 2016. They are asking lawmakers to fund a statewide tip line, where callers may anonymously report potential threats, suicidal behavior and instances of bullying.

Another priority is to create eight regional threat assessment teams to identify students who may be at risk of committing violence and give them additional supervision, mental health services or other support.

Task force leaders also want to develop a statewide database of school floor plans but agreed last month to list that as a lower priority than the tip line and threat assessment teams due to limited state resources.

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