

# Warrenton: City doesn't have much land ready to develop

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Most of Clatsop County, Ackley said, has a seller's market now — that is, one with less than six months' worth of inventory.

But even for people making good money it is a tight market, according to Community Development Director Skip Urling.

"The lack of vacancies is across the economic spectrum," he said.

Paul Mitchell, the vice chairman of the Planning Commission, remarked at a recent meeting: "I worry about where people are going to go to live in Warrenton after a while. I mean, you're not going to be able to find a place. If you're a young family just starting out, you can't find a house that's affordable."

## Relief methods

After gathering information from the building community, Urling — with the consent of the City Commission — has begun working on development code amendments that could create more housing supply and bring down prices.

One method would be to allow apartments in the general commercial zone, an area typically reserved for businesses.

Developers would need to obtain a conditional use permit, which means the Planning Commission would have to determine that proposed projects benefit the city "if their number, area, location, design, and relation to the surrounding property are controlled," the city code reads.

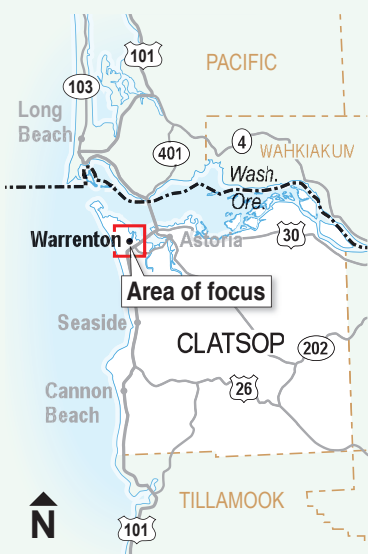
Another method — one that Urling said would be an extreme but effective course of action — would be to allow only high-density residential development in districts zoned for high-density housing.

This would represent a serious tightening up of Warrenton's flexible development code.

In most cases, developers are permitted to build low-density housing even in areas zoned for high-density housing. But it results in single-family homes sitting on large lots.

Limiting development in these zones to high-density housing — to, say, triplexes, fourplexes and above — would force developers to build more units per acre, allowing more families to live in the same area.

## City of Warrenton census and housing data



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Item	Warrenton	Oregon
Population, 2015 est.	5,282	4.03 million
Population, 2010 est.	4,989	3.83 million
Population per square mile (2010)	390.6	39.9
Land area in square miles (2010)	12.77	95,988
Under age 18, 2015	29.2%†	21.4%
Under age 18, 2010	23.8%	22.6%
65 years and over, 2015	11.8%†	16.4%
65 years and over, 2010	14%	13.9%
High school graduate or higher, age 25 or older*	90.7%	89.5%
Bachelor's degree or higher, age 25 or older*	19.9%	30.1%
In civilian labor force, age 16 or older*	63.4%	62.4%
Median household income (2014 dollars)*	\$38,693	\$50,521
Per capita income (2014 dollars)*	\$21,404	\$27,173
Housing units, 2015	2,174†	1.72 million
Housing units, 2010	2,196	1.68 million
Owner-occupied housing units*	54.6%	61.5%
Median value, owner-occupied housing units*	\$208,100	\$234,100
Median selected monthly mortgage costs*	\$1,401	\$1,591
Median gross rent*	\$868	\$894

\*2010-14 †2014 estimate

Alan Kenaga/EO Media Group

## Crist: 'We need more places to live'

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Crist has been living with her parents but is looking at moving in with a boyfriend.

"I've been considering anything, including trailers," she said. "I've looked from Manzanita to Knappa."

Making it more difficult, she said, is her dog. But Crist said she

looks young, and the dog makes her feel safer.

"I just feel it should be more reasonable based on our income," she said. "We need more places to live."

Despite her challenges, Crist said she loves living in Seaside, being close to the beach and mountains and the small-town charm. She has taken sev-

eral classes at Clatsop Community College and would one day like to own a custom-named merchandise store with her mother.

"My mom, dad and me have been looking at a house on 15th Street, Crist said. "They have a garage/loft area I'd be interested in living in. It sucks being 22, and having had an apartment, and being under my parents roof."

Urling has observed that most of Warrenton's housing units get snapped up almost as soon as they are finished.

"They get built, and they're inhabited within days," he said.

## Lack of land

Part of the problem is that Warrenton doesn't have much land left ready to develop, and many undeveloped properties are constrained by utility and wetland issues.

Mayor Mark Kujala said local developers want to build housing

units — homes and apartments — that families can afford, but many do not have the property to do it.

"That's a really big concern moving forward," he said.

With increasingly fewer development projects in Warrenton, local contractors are fanning out.

Mark Korpi, owner and operator of North Coast Classic Homes, a Warrenton-based business, said he has been personally impacted by the land shortfall. "I'm going through it every day," he said.

He used to build houses primarily

in Warrenton and is currently doing work on the Forest Rim apartments. But, he said, within roughly the last year and half, the bulk of his building has shifted to outside areas, including Knappa and Gearhart.

The city has discussed expanding the urban growth boundary to bring more land into the city limits. Nothing has happened on an official level, however, and the process can take two or more years.

Unlike Astoria and Cannon Beach, many residents in Warrenton — the home of big-box retailers —



Paul Mitchell

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vice chairman of the  
Planning Commission

are not as reflexively critical of new housing projects.

Kujala said the city may look into establishing partnerships with Clatsop Community Action and Northwest Oregon Housing Authority to provide housing options for low-income families.

Mitchell said there is definitely a need for more units. "I've always looked at Warrenton as sort of like: This is where the working man lives, you know? And we need a place for that working man to live," he said.

# Astoria: 'There are no easy choices' to solve housing problem

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In response to community concerns expressed at a Planning Commission public hearing in September and discussed last week at a work session, Cronin added several provisions:

- Only one accessory dwelling unit will be allowed per property.

- The new units created after Jan. 1 cannot be used for short-term homestay or vacation lodging, like Airbnb rentals, only for permanent housing.

- The units must have one off-street parking space, in addition to the two off-street spaces required for the primary residence. But if on-street parking is available on a city street, built to a city standard identified in the Transportation System Plan, an on-street parking credit may be given for the unit instead.

- The height of a new detached unit shall not exceed 20 feet, or 80 percent, of the height of the main dwelling, whichever is less.

- The location of the entrance to a detached unit can be anywhere if the unit is built behind the main dwelling. In cases where the new unit is in front of the main dwelling, the entrance cannot face the street.

In addition, one year after the changes take effect, city staff will bring a report to the commission

showing whether the amendments have been effective, and where they may need adjustments.

With these code revisions, "we're not trying to solve the housing problem," Commissioner Daryl Moore said. "We're trying to take a little bite out of the housing problem by maybe adding a few options."

The recommendation will head to the City Council for final approval.

## In favor

Some people who spoke in favor of accessory dwelling units at the public hearing pointed to the harm caused by the housing crunch.

Kevin Leahy, executive director of Clatsop Economic Development Resources, said the North Coast is "seeing the impact on recruitment in our community, of some of the larger employers not attracting talent because they can't find a home."

If Astoria wants young entrepreneurs to move into town and help stimulate economic growth, he said, the city needs the housing stock to support them, their families and employees.

Nicole Williams, CEO of Clatsop Care Health District, said the district is having trouble recruiting nursing staff for its care facilities, in part, because of the housing scarcity.

"This has been a real struggle for us," she said.

The health district recently shifted to a new food service management company but had to delay the contract, Williams said, because the company "could not find permanent places to live for their managers that they were transitioning to the area."

The district has also lost caregivers because of rent spikes.

## Supportive with reservations

Last month, a number of residents said they worried the code changes would lead to new dwelling units cluttering up neighborhoods and spoiling their historic character.

Rachel Jensen, president of the Lower Columbia Preservation Society, spoke approvingly of the code changes while offering qualifications.

The city should approach accessory dwelling units "in a way that does not undermine the spirit of the city's comprehensive plan and the historic preservation ordinance, and does not negatively affect the character and livability of our historic neighborhoods," she said.

Though the society supports the prohibition on using the dwelling units as homestays, she said the text is inadequately written. It is conceivable, Jensen pointed out, that an owner could stay in the accessory dwelling unit while renting out the main building for short-term vacationers.

## In opposition

Linda Oldenkamp, a 40-year resident, cautioned that detached accessory dwelling units, over the long run, could have "extreme detrimental effects on the livability and historic character of our neighborhoods."

"They probably would not be noticeable in a year," she said, "but, year after year after year, they will be very noticeable."

If dwelling units proliferate, deteriorate and become unsightly, she said, surrounding property values may drop, which is not fair to the neighbors who have spent years investing in their homes.

She suggested the Planning Commission look to the other housing-creation strategies outlined in the city's 2015 affordable housing study — for example, setting up an ad hoc housing task force to devise gradual solutions that don't put the onus on neighborhoods.

"Let us do this right, so that our city provides both affordable housing and protects its historic homes and neighborhoods," she said. "We can do both. We must do both."

## 'Tough task ahead'

Commission President Dave Pearson disagreed.

"I do believe this is compatible with the historic character of Asto-

ria," he said. "Nothing here supersedes the good work of the Historic Landmarks Commission. Nothing here supersedes the work of design review. All that still stays in place."

With respect to historic preservation, Moore said, "Of course that's important — essential, even, to the character of Astoria."

"But," he continued, "where this proposal would allow (a detached ADU), you could, today, build a garage, or a shed for your garden tools. So I don't necessarily see that allowing detached ADUs is going to create a huge problem in changing the character where that problem may have already existed, just in a slightly different form."

Given that so few accessory dwelling units have been pursued, he said, "I can't imagine that this is going to create huge demands and we're going to see structures going up all over the place, especially in the more dense urban core here, where you're just not likely to have the footprint to support another structure on your lot."

When it comes to solving the housing problem, Cronin said, "there are no easy choices here. There is very little low-hanging fruit that we can bite off. We have a tough task ahead of us to try to solve this problem."

# Dam: Blitz suggested water district strayed from flood control

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successfully operate and maintain those for the service life of the structures.

"So from our agency perspective, we look at them as an owner of those structures."

Warrenton has sought to take control of the dam, either for flood control or as an asset to remove later for wetlands mitigation credits on a development project.

The water district wants to remove the dam as a hazard and to improve water quality and fish passage on the river. But the water district does not hold title to the dam, and an agreement with the Columbia River Estuary Study Taskforce and the city to remove the dam and

construct a bridge over the river for emergency access has fallen apart, so the future of the dam is in legal limbo.

Blitz has said the water district forfeited a city easement to operate the dam when the district removed the tide gates.

Blitz had told the City Commission in September that the city is the rightful owner of the dam because of a 1938 Circuit Court ruling on the title of nearby land and the water district's decision to remove the tide gates.

But the attorney now maintains that the dam is likely a federal asset tied to the city's levee system. He wants the Natural Resources Conservation Service to find that a federal interest remains and that the

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the city should control the dam as a component of the levees.

The water district has rejected the idea that the dam is part of the city's levee system.

## Strayed from flood control

Blitz suggested the water district has strayed from a flood-control mandate and is more interested in protecting salmon.

"Their charter is water control," the attorney said. "Their clear motive is fish. They aren't in the fish business, but that's the passion of the governing body."

Tessa Scheller, the chairwoman of the water district's board, has called for a work session with the city to discuss potential solutions.

The district is also seeking legal counsel to respond to Blitz's warning that the city could file a lawsuit or seize the dam.

One possibility for mediation, Blitz said, could be Portland State University's National Policy Consensus Center.

Mayor Mark Kujala, whose family owns property near the dam, did not warm to the water district's request for negotiations.

"I don't know what we have to negotiate," the mayor said.

## Restore tide gates

Kujala and other commissioners instead discussed restoring the tide gates on the dam and operating the structure for flood control, warning that property

owners are at risk of flooding.

The water district has concluded that the dam is obsolete and has adopted an engineering plan that found no increased risk of flooding if the dam is removed. A city technical review, however, raised doubts about whether the engineering plan accurately modeled the flood plain.

Federal and state officials have said the dam could continue to function past its 50-year useful life with improvements and maintenance, but recommended more study.

Collin Stelzig, the city engineer, told commissioners that more data collection is necessary, particularly with the tide gates installed. "They're providing protection and they need to be modeled with those tide gates in place," he said.