

Seaside seeks to get a roof for those out on the street

Number of working homeless has skyrocketed

By R.J. MARX
The Daily Astorian

SEASIDE — Contrary to urban legend, there are no buses depositing homeless people in Seaside. But in the nearest big city, Portland, 3,800 people sleep on the streets or in shelters every night and another 12,000 people in overcrowded and often unsafe conditions. In Clatsop County, the homeless population tops 1,000; in 2013, nearly 400 homeless were counted in Seaside.

Wherever they come from, it is the city's obligation to serve them, according to Alan Evans of the Helping Hands Reentry Outreach Center.

Helping Hands houses 174 people for a night in four Oregon counties, with 60 of those beds in Seaside. Two-thirds of shelter beds are filled by working people and the other third by emergency service clients, Evans said, with the goal of transitioning them from shelters into long-term housing.

There's the rub: there's not much visitors to the center — even those with vouchers for rent or other expenses — can afford, he said. "We cannot build housing fast enough to deal with people falling out of the system," Evans said. "They're scared to death — there's no housing, and people are falling out of the system."

Scarcity, hurdles

Availability is the issue. For those with vouchers, which typically cover rentals of about \$700 a month, availability in Seaside stands at seven-tenths of 1 percent of all rentals.

Housing is at full capacity with waiting lists, "and it's going to get worse before it gets better," he said. "Right now I have people who have housing vouchers in my facility who can't find an apartment, with a voucher that says we'll pay the rent. The vouchers are, in some cases enough, but a two-bedroom unit is over \$1,000 a month."

"I just rented (out) an apartment in Seaside for \$940 — and that's the most 'affordable' I've got in Seaside." Operations Director Bonnie Belden-Doney of North Coast Rentals said. That price gets a two-bedroom 1 1/2 bath on Necanicum Drive.

"People are begging for homes," Belden-Doney said. "Usually I get a 30-day notice when someone's moving," she said. "I'll post that online 15 days before it's vacant and I usually have it rented within a week."

On the private market, in late August, a one-bedroom, one-bath rental was available on Craigslist for \$795 on Columbia Street and a two-bedroom, two-bathroom apartment on Avenue A for \$1,100.

A construction project underway on Avenue M "will be full in 10 minutes," Evans said, and those most in need are unlikely to win residence.

Landlords or building managers are able to take their pick of the applications, which limits many



Alan Evans



Lianne Thompson

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Bonnie Belden-Doney
operations director of
North Coast Rentals

applicants.

Few rental agencies accept people with prior evictions, bankruptcies or serious legal issues.

Most rental or management companies examine credit score, debt, rental history and require renters to earn three times the amount of the rent. Deposits are 150 percent of the rent. Some people can't do that, Belden-Doney said.

"Their stories will rip your heart out," Evans said. Last year, a woman with two young boys was working for \$12 an hour, but when school got out, she had to pay \$7 an hour for childcare. "You take her insurance payment for her car, her telephone payment for her cell phone, her car payment, which was minimal, and she's got about \$60 a week to pay her rent, her utilities and her bills,"

Evans said. "What do we do? I don't have an answer."

NIMBY in Seaside?

The face of homelessness is changing, Evans said. "Ten years ago 95 percent of the people we saw were addicted or ex-offenders and had no place to go," he said.

"Folks have been on the economic precipice for over a decade," Clatsop County Commissioner Lianne Thompson said in August. "Some have fallen over. Some are still at risk. What we are looking for is an opportunity ladder. How do we catch more people who can't meet the opportunity structure?"

That's a question eluding easy answer. Even well-funded programs go awry without proper supervision, planning and cooperation from the community.

"You could build barracks for the homeless, but people aren't going to want to stay there," Evans said. "We have to know how to run what we want to run. We can't just open."

The community must be behind it for it to be successful, City Councilor Jay Barber said.

An effort to develop a vacant apartment building on Edgewood Avenue in Seaside to transitional housing received such severe opposition from neighbors the project never got off the ground.

"It's understandable people have these feelings," Barber said. "We understand the intimidation that can come when you have 25 or 30 homeless people in a shelter. Our plan is to try and locate our facilities in areas that won't bump up against

residential neighborhoods."

Block grant sought

In October 2015, Seaside City Council voted unanimously to be the sponsoring agency for Helping Hands on a Community Development Block Grant, a program run by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development.

"That grant will be happening this fall, and it's quite a process," Barber said.

The grant will be prepared by Helping Hands and submitted by the city on their behalf. "It's a grant proposal under the watchful eye of the city so we're both in agreement," he said. "We will start putting that request together this fall."

Funding could raise several hundred thousand dollars for housing. If the grant is successful and property or buildings are acquired, the city will own the facility and then lease it to Helping Hands.

"The real resource is to bring the federal funds in to make this really work," Barber said. "The grant would centralize Helping Hands services, improving emergency, reentry housing, services to homeless people in terms of medical insurance, all those things that they desperately needed that are scattered through multiple sites through Seaside."

"Homelessness is an issue that should be dealt with on a level so that our city is involved in it, our county is involved in it," Evans added. "The resources need to be provided by nonprofits and local government together, because the responsibility is ours as a community."

Seaside: Not everyone agrees on the need to expand

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"We've worked very well to be come as popular a destination as we are, but now we have to figure out how to get workforce housing so they can live in the area and go to work," Johnson said.

Clatsop Economic Development Resources has cast the problem in dire terms.

"You know where employees are living now?" Executive Director Kevin Leahy said. "They're living at Fort Stevens. They're living in campgrounds. They're living in cars."

Leahy said there is a misconception that new construction is going to be "cheap housing."

"People say, 'There goes the neighborhood,'" he said. "But this is not focusing on Section 8 or subsidized housing. This is for the service workers. In our community, Clatsop County's median wage is 80 percent of the state of Oregon's average. We know the struggles we have. We know this great economy is also increasing the rents we pay."

Vacation homes cut in

The impact from vacation rentals has cut into the available long-term housing. Of the vacant rental stock, the city reported in a 2011 analysis, 76 percent are vacation, recreational or occasional use units.

"This segment of the market has a strong impact on housing development, availability and pricing in Seaside," city staff wrote.

With so many people buying up property and making them second homes and vacation rentals, it's taken away from the pool of long-term rentals for professionals and service workers.

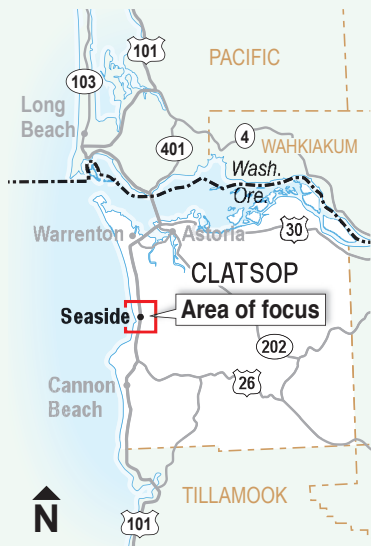
"The economy is doing better, and if the economy is doing good, a lot of the people who own houses want to turn them into vacation homes as opposed to full-time rentals," Morrissey said. "So a lot of those flipped and there's not a lot of low-income housing."

Developers seek incentives

The 15-acre Blue Heron development at Avenue S and Wahanna stalled in 2006.

The project had preliminary approval for 58 single-family homes. Developer Max Ritchie recently examined the possibility of a zoning change that would allow for multifamily units to provide workforce housing. City officials discouraged the idea, however, citing transportation issues, a lack of high-density zoning near the site and anticipated opposition from neighbors.

City of Seaside census and housing data



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Item	Seaside	Oregon
Population, 2015 est.	6,540	4.03 million
Population, 2010 est.	6,457	3.83 million
Population per square mile (2010)	1,640.9	39.9
Land area in square miles (2010)	3.94	95,988
Under age 18, 2015	20.2%†	21.4%
Under age 18, 2010	20%	22.6%
65 years and over, 2015	20.4%†	16.4%
65 years and over, 2010	17.4%	13.9%
High school graduate or higher, age 25 or older*	87.5%	89.5%
Bachelor's degree or higher, age 25 or older*	23.2%	30.1%
In civilian labor force, age 16 or older*	55.1%	62.4%
Median household income (2014 dollars)*	\$41,037	\$50,521
Per capita income (2014 dollars)*	\$27,127	\$27,173
Housing units, 2015	4,501†	1.72 million
Housing units, 2010	4,638	1.68 million
Owner-occupied housing units*	47.1%	61.5%
Median value, owner-occupied housing units*	\$285,900	\$234,100
Median selected monthly mortgage costs*	\$1,624	\$1,591
Median gross rent*	\$872	\$894

*2010-14 †2014 estimate

Alan Kenaga/EO Media Group

population growth, estimated to jump from 6,500 in 2013 to more than 8,000 in 2030. Using revised forecasts, the amount was scaled back to 137.5 acres.

An urban growth boundary expansion would be needed to acquire that land, and officials are looking to the east of U.S. Highway 101.

Four areas are under consideration for expansion: the South Hills, the Lewis and Clark Hills, the North Hills and the East Hills.

The South Hills was found to yield the greatest amount of units per acre.

The East Hills was found to be the largest area for potential growth, "allowing for the widest range of potential housing types."

Not everyone agrees on the need to expand. Oregon Coast Alliance Land Use Director Cameron LaFollette, who lives in Seaside, said earlier this year she was strongly opposed to expanding the city's urban growth boundary.

"It's clear that Seaside does not have the population increase or housing need for expansion," LaFollette said. "There is a great need for affordable housing, but expanding the hills by 200 acres — not an area where affordable housing would go. It is much more likely to be developed into second homes."

Urban specialist Mia Nelson of 1000 Friends of Oregon told the city in a 2015 letter that the housing need could actually decrease within the next 20 years. She advocated use of existing stock rather than new land for construction.

In April, the Seaside Planning Department postponed the urban growth boundary discussion until new 14-year population figures become available from the state next year.

Meeting the need

The Planning Department does not have a list of affordable projects, according to officials, but a 26-unit apartment building on Avenue M is the only apartment project in development.

The City Council could consider the reduction or waiver of system development charges, like cities such as Portland, Grants Pass and Roseburg have done as an incentive.

"If there could be some kind of formula for discounted development fees for people who are dedicating at least a significant portion of a facility to low-income housing, that would be a big step forward," Barber said.

Community partnerships

Leahy said he hopes to bring more housing online by working with developers to form private and public partnerships, including incentivizing private development.

Clatsop Economic Development Resources seeks to "deal with perceptions and misconceptions" by bringing more residents into the discussion.

"Communities can be strengthened by providing housing affordable to all income levels," Leahy said.

Hotel manager is 'fortunate' to find an affordable apartment

It is difficult to hire workers

Lisa Bonati moved to Seaside in May 2015. In finding an apartment, Bonati went through three different management companies, she said, before finding a little place near the beach.

"I was very fortunate to get this place," Bonati, manager of the Ashore Hotel, said. "People are having a very difficult time hiring people because they're aren't any places to live on the salaries they're making."

As a result, businesses are short-staffed, which leads to a stressful work environment.

"We're short in housekeeping and the front desk," Bonati said. "We're having people coming from Adrift Long Beach (Washington) to fill in. If we didn't have those people I don't know what we'd do. I'm hoping they'll start building some sort of multifamily housing, maybe dormitory housing for the summer, where people could come and have roommates, just for the summer."

— R.J. Marx



R.J. Marx/The Daily Astorian

Ashore Hotel Manager Lisa Bonati was fortunate to find an affordable apartment in Seaside, where housing is hard to find.

Another hurdle to development comes from the high fees for parks, sewer, stormwater, transportation and water levied by the city, about \$9,000 per new unit.

"One of the reasons for the huge unmet need of workforce housing in Seaside is that the high cost of system development charges deters builders from taking on projects in the city," Ritchie said. "With such a huge demand for housing, I think the city

should enact a temporary waiver of system development fees to encourage builders to meet the housing need."

City Councilor Jay Barber agreed that development fees can be a big barrier.

"By the time a builder pays those development fees, they can't afford to do that. It doesn't pencil out," he said.

But if system development charges are reduced, the difference

could be passed to taxpayers, Morrissey said.

"We're not going to have Seaside residents subsidize development," he added.

Expansion debate

A report delivered to the city Planning Department early this year by Otak Inc., showed Seaside would need about 197 additional acres to satisfy the city's 20-year projected