

County: Solutions remain a work in progress

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The cities and county are also at the mercy of private developers willing to invest. Developers are able to build more homes and make more money in the Portland metro area than they can on the coast.

"In the end, you need somebody with the buildable land, and the money to build something that hopefully people can afford," Rohne said.

Local developer Richard Krueger recently proposed building a 48-unit apartment complex in Miles Crossing south of Astoria, but the project was denied by the Clatsop County Planning Commission based on concerns from neighbors. Krueger withdrew his appeal to county commissioners this month.

When adding up all the housing limitations in the region, County Manager Cameron Moore said, it does not leave the community much to work with.

Moore, however, remains optimistic.

"If the economy continues to do well here, and we continue to experience population growth, I'm sure we will see developers that are interested, much like the developer in Miles Crossing," Moore said.

Political will

Inside the Clatsop County Community Development Department, staff is actively looking for ways to address the housing crunch.

Community Development Director Heather Hansen said the county has teamed up with Clatsop Economic Development Resources and the Columbia-Pacific Economic Development District on an affordable and available housing task force.

In addition, the county works closely with the nonprofit Clatsop Community Action.

"The frustrating part is we all describe what the problem is, but then we are not really sure what to do about it," Hansen said. "It takes a lot of political will and land. What is needed is pretty much every kind of housing."

After several task force meetings, local leaders have decided

Clatsop County census and housing data



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Item	Clatsop	Oregon
Population, 2015 est.	37,831	4.03 million
Population, 2010 est.	37,037	3.83 million
Population per square mile (2010)	44.7	39.9
Land area in square miles (2010)	829	95,988
Under age 18, 2015	19.6%	21.4%
Under age 18, 2010	20.5%	22.6%
65 years and over, 2015	20.0%	16.4%
65 years and over, 2010	16.6%	13.9%
High school graduate or higher, age 25 or older*	90.9%	89.5%
Bachelor's degree or higher, age 25 or older*	23.6%	30.1%
In civilian labor force, age 16 or older*	60.3%	62.4%
Median household income (2014 dollars)*	\$47,337	\$50,521
Housing units, 2015	21,928	1.72 million
Housing units, 2010	21,546	1.68 million
Owner-occupied housing units*	62.7%	61.5%
Median value, owner-occupied housing units*	\$248,300	\$234,100
Median selected monthly mortgage costs*	\$1,526	\$1,591
Median gross rent*	\$825	\$894
Building permits, 2015	208	17,510

*2010-14

Alan Kenaga/EO Media Group



Danny Miller/The Daily Astorian
Richard Krueger, left, listens during the Clatsop County Planning Commission's deliberation on his proposed Miles Crossing property in July. The Clatsop County Planning Commission denied the proposed 48-unit property near Lewis and Clark Elementary School in Miles Crossing.

to take on the housing crunch one project at a time. "Each city has its own issues, that's why we shifted gears saying lets do this project-by-project," Hansen said.

Alternate housing

The county's Community Development Department is doing



Joshua Bessex/The Daily Astorian
Clatsop County Manager Cameron Moore gives his report during a meeting of the county Board of Commissioners.

its part by staying open minded to alternative housing. If someone wants to put a boat on their yard, live in a sheltered home or even build a treehouse, county staff is willing to work with the applicant.

Every type of housing helps, Hansen said, especially for those

relocating to the region for work.

"It came to light that businesses are having problems. They're having to put people in hotels, living on people's sofas or living in their cars," Hansen said. "People are actually accepting jobs and then pulling out at the last minute

because the couldn't find a place to live."

When looking at unincorporated Clatsop County, some point to the Knappa area as a place for housing. Yet most of the east county is already privately held by owners who are not interested in building large developments.

Rohne, who represents the eastern part of the county, said his inland region is not as sought after as the coast. There is a house next to Rohne's farm in Brownsmead that is for sale, he said, and no one seems to be looking at it.

"Honestly, I don't know if people want to live out here," Rohne said. "They want to live between Astoria and Cannon Beach."

Solutions

A hurdle for housing on the coast is state regulations that discourage high density housing in unincorporated areas. The idea is to protect farm and forest land, but in Clatsop County, such land is mostly what is left to be developed.

Rohne said the county could get creative and try to get permission from the state to rezone certain forest land for housing.

If the state approved the zone change, it could be done in specific areas close to transportation and sewer systems without impacting much of the existing farm and forest land.

"We could work out a deal and get land that is out of the flood zone," Rohne said.

The housing crunch is something government alone cannot fix.

Moore said a solution will take collaboration between the public and private sectors. Many residents point to elected leaders for results, but Moore said the government should not be solely responsible. "I'm not sure everyone wants to see your county government, for instance, building and managing housing and selling housing," Moore said. "That's not really what we are equipped to do."

Solutions remain a work in progress.

"It's one of several issues we are going to have to figure out," Moore said. "I think there are some good efforts underway to at least identify the scope of the problem."

Gulasky found space in Nehalem after renting week-to-week in Cannon Beach

Steady income not always a fix

Jordan Gulasky and her partner recently relocated from Cannon Beach, where they rented week to week, to Nehalem, where they found a "super affordable" home to buy.

Gulasky and her husband worked at Sea Level Bakery in Cannon Beach. With a combined income of about \$40,000 a year, they struggled to find a new place to live after leaving their old residence.

"In spite of our connectivity and how much we are in the community serving coffee and baking bread, we gave up that lease for a myriad of reasons and are now in a friend's extra space paying her week to week," Gulasky said this summer. "There's no rental agreement and we would have loved to find one."

Gulasky also spoke about the lack of community in Cannon Beach in connection to the lack of housing.

"It's been pretty frustrating and there's definitely the idea of being a young person and wishing there

was a community, that there were other people in my age range who work similar jobs," she said. "No one else can find a way to live here, so we have a severe lack of youth community. I travel pretty far to engage in activities with people my age."

Gulasky, who now works at Oregon Coast Cannabis in Manzanita, said the move was positive in that she found "more of a community" just south of Cannon Beach. She said Cannon Beach has many second homes and little affordable housing.

—Lyra Fontaine

Mom with autistic child in Cannon Beach makes too much for affordable home



Lyra Fontaine/The Daily Astorian
Amber Gage struggled to find affordable housing when she moved to the Oregon Coast.

Lives with sister, and four others

When Amber Gage moved to the coast from Oklahoma to work for Vacasa in the summer, she moved into a unit at Shorewood Apartments, a subsidized housing development in Cannon Beach with a lengthy waitlist.

However, the move became the "worst experience of her life" when the apartment management told her that the \$27,000 she makes each year was too high for her to be eligible for the apartment. Gage, a single mother, has an autistic child who has "backtracked" due to the experience, she said.

Gage and her two young children had to relocate to her sister's home in Manzanita. There are seven people living in a two-bedroom home. Gage said she felt homeless.

This week, Gage hopes to hear back from a possible house to rent in Rockaway Beach. If she ends up getting the house, she will shift her housekeeping duties to the area.

—Lyra Fontaine



Danny Miller/The Daily Astorian
Michael McNickle, Clatsop County public health director, commutes daily from McMinnville while he searches for a rental in Astoria.

McNickle: 'I miss four hours everyday. I lose all of that time with my family'

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Rather than spending thousands a month on rent for a place near his Astoria office, McNickle prefers making the daily commute. Paying rent on a place in Astoria does not make much sense when McNickle already has mortgage payments to make in McMinnville.

"Why would I spend more to rent when I could just live at home?" he said.

While it has been difficult for McNickle to find a home in Clatsop County suitable for his fiancée and two teenagers, he is also stuck waiting to sell his home in McMinnville. He is also helping his fiancée sell her home in McMinnville. Prices are so high in Clatsop County, McNickle anticipates having to sell both

McMinnville homes to afford one in Astoria.

"We don't really want to buy anything right away because we have to sell the ones we have before we buy something new," he said.

McNickle continues to search for the right place, and the right buyers for his McMinnville homes. All the while, he continues to commute.

"I'm just going to drive until we can sell it," he said.

In the winter months, McNickle said, he sometimes has to find a hotel in Astoria because of weather or crashes on U.S. Highway 26. In the summer, he is often stuck in traffic.

"I miss four hours everyday," he said. "I lose all of that time with my family."

—Kyle Spurr