

THE DAILY ASTORIAN

Founded in 1873



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OUR VIEW

Danny Miller/The Daily Astorian

Astoria is working through a housing crunch.

Astoria moves in right direction on housing crunch

An acute shortage of low and moderate-income housing, including a rental vacancy rate perhaps close to zero, is continuing to complicate private lives and the overall economy in communities around the mouth of the Columbia River.

It was good to see the Astoria City Council take a logical step last week that promises eventually to bring some accessory dwelling units onto the market to ease the housing crunch. As our story explained, owners of single-family homes will in some cases be allowed to remodel interior spaces, such as basements and attics, or build detached structures, to set up extra living quarters for long-term renters.

This has been a fall-back solution to housing needs for generations. It increases the number of residents who can live in the same amount of land, and does so in ways that cause less impact than tearing down single-family dwellings and replacing them with multistory apartment buildings or condos.

Similarly, taking in boarders to rent a spare bedroom or other space is a time-honored way of stretching existing housing stock, while helping owners make their mortgage payments. This goes on all the time, usually without anyone letting the government in on the fact.

The Astoria council's action wasn't unanimous, with Councilor Cindy Price raising a valid concern about making certain neighbors get some say in any changes that may impact them for years to come. But with only three applications for such units in the past decade, it appears unlikely there will be a crush of proposals by would-be developers before the council takes another look at the issue in a year.

Small step

Lack of much interest in adding accessory dwelling units under previous regulations highlights the bigger problem with the plan — not that it is too big a step, but rather that it is unlikely to do very much very soon to address our pressing housing needs.

It would have been good to see the city give more consideration to permitting more tiny houses, free-standing residences typically 400 square feet or smaller that can be situated in large yards or other underutilized land. But even this would be insufficient to make much of a dent in our housing need.

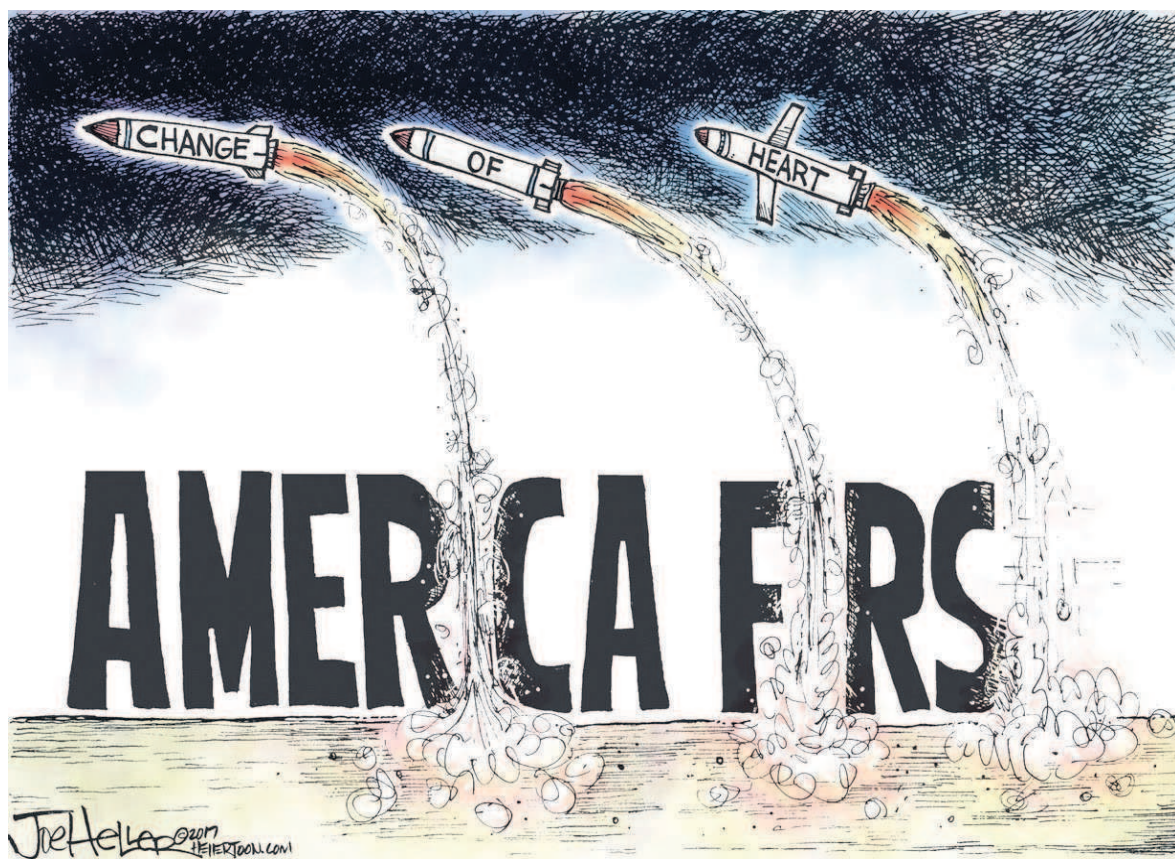
Although Astoria occupies a small peninsula of the Columbia River, and is geographically constrained by forestlands, topography and landslide-prone areas, in the past it has contained a higher population than it does today. It may be that societal expectations have changed and that once-acceptable living conditions and densities are no longer appropriate today. But as a resident at the meeting commented, the city can work to increase housing stock by encouraging developers to buy abandoned buildings and turn them into housing complexes. Planning Commissioner Sean Fitzpatrick said private parties have been doing things just like that in recent months.

It's clear that a broader regional strategy is required, something that looks in a deliberate way at enhancing the prospects for private investments in solutions like apartment complexes, well-designed and maintained manufactured housing parks, and in some cases government-subsidized housing to help meet the needs of Social Security retirees and young families just starting out.

Commuter options

There are indications that some would-be home buyers in Clatsop County are starting to explore the option of trading longer commutes for lower prices by shopping in neighboring Pacific County, Washington, where values have been slower to accelerate. This is a rational solution, but one that comes with added personal and societal costs in terms of lost time, vehicle wear and tear, congestion and greenhouse gas emissions. This comes as Portlanders are increasingly looking to the coast as a place to escape the city's even higher prices and worse congestion.

Whatever the reaction is to its action last week, the Astoria City Council should be commended for continuing to focus its energy on working toward housing answers. As a bi-state region, we would do well to get all relevant agencies together every so often to work for broader, long-term ways to address what is certain to become more and more of a problem as people crowd into this desirable area in coming decades.



The soul of a corporation

By TIMOTHY EGAN

New York Times News Service

We know from an infamous Supreme Court ruling that corporations are people. They may be heartless, like



the pharmaceutical company that jacks up the price of a lifesaving drug. Or clueless, like Pepsi with its latest ad solving racism by

having a fashion model give a can of colored sugar water to a cop. But can a corporation also have a soul? If the answer is yes, that soul passed on to higher ground a few days ago, when Mary Anderson, a co-founder of the outdoor retailer REI, died at the age of 107.

The wonder is not that she lived to triple digits. She loved clean air, a good fight and a well-told joke. The wonder is that someone born in 1909, when many veterans of the Civil War were still arguing over slavery, could live to see her common-sensical values flourish in an otherwise unrecognizable brave new world.

The corporations of 2017 that strive to do well while doing good, the ones that want to step up as global citizens while the Trump administration steps back, owe a part of their enlightened self-interest to Mary Anderson.

She was the longest-standing member of REI, formerly called Recreational Equipment Inc., the company she founded with her husband, Lloyd Anderson, in 1938. Initially, they ran the operation out of the home they built in west Seattle. Their attic was the warehouse. Their kitchen was where Mary stitched together tents. From that farmhouse grew an empire of goose down and freeze-dried fettuccine.

I interviewed this founding couple a few years before Lloyd Anderson died in 2000, at the age of 98. Mary started out as a public-school teacher. Lloyd was a city transit worker. They loved the mountains. But they were frustrated that you couldn't buy decent climbing gear without getting gouged.

And so they started importing ice axes from Austria, selling them to fellow climbers at cost. The first 23 members contributed \$1 each. This was in the 1930s, the Great Depression, and also the height of the cooperative movement. The Pacific Northwest was full of Scandinavians who didn't think consumer-owned companies were communist plots. Seattle's public power utility, City Light, and a medical cooperative, Group Health, grew from the same soil.

And maybe one day, if Medicare-for-all emerges as the



REI's flagship store in Seattle.

obvious solution to our dysfunctional and incomprehensible health care system, we'll see a little bit of the co-op spirit there as well.

The Andersons instilled their company with an unusual business ethic. "I never thought a man should make money off his friends," as Lloyd said.

To this day, REI is not a corporation in the normal sense of the word. It's a consumer cooperative — the nation's largest — owned not by shareholders, but by members.

To this day, REI is not a corporation in the normal sense of the word. It's a consumer cooperative — the nation's largest — owned not by shareholders, but by members. There are more than 6 million active members, and Mary Anderson, officially, was member No. 2.

While other retailers are struggling, REI is thriving. With more than 140 stores in 36 states, the company just recorded record revenue of \$2.56 billion for 2016. It fell astray at times. As it grew into a national behemoth, the company forced the Andersons out of their role in guiding REI's operations.

But the Anderson influence remained. REI now gives back more than 70 percent of its profits to the outdoor community and other worthwhile projects. One of the company's biggest initiatives this year is an effort to boost the profile of future Mary Andersons — women who love nature — to change the image of male-dominated outdoor sports.

A few years ago on Black Friday, that horrid stampede of Christmas season greed, REI did something revolutionary — it closed. Employees were given a paid day off and told to take a hike or spend some time with family.

Corporations behaving badly tend to get most of our attention. It will take years for Wells Fargo to dig itself out of the fiasco it created with customers who were burdened with accounts they didn't authorize. Volkswagen, once known for the little Beetle that was many a baby boomer's first car, stumbled badly when it rolled out autos that could cheat emissions tests. And Fox News, with its numerous sexual harassment settlements, is beginning to look more and more like a criminal enterprise.

On the other hand, you have Patagonia, another outdoor retailer, pulling out of the annual industry show in Utah this year to protest the state's hostility toward the public land that the company's customers depend on.

Business schools study this sort of thing — how to achieve a branding of authenticity, how to be seen as a corporation with a conscience. But it's not that complicated.

"In founding REI as a co-op, Lloyd and Mary saw a higher purpose in their work," said Sally Jewell, an interior secretary under President Barack Obama and a former chief executive officer of REI. The Andersons proved that a higher purpose with a solid bottom line does not have to be an oxymoron.

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Letters should be fewer than 350 words and must include the writer's name, address and phone numbers. You will be contacted to confirm authorship.

All letters are subject to editing for space, grammar and, on occasion, factual accuracy and verbal verification of authorship. Only two letters per writer are printed each month.

Letters written in response to

other letter writers should address the issue at hand and, rather than mentioning the writer by name, should refer to the headline and date the letter was published. Discourse should be civil and people should be referred to in a respectful manner. Letters referring to news stories should also mention the headline and date of publication.

The Daily Astorian welcomes short "in gratitude" notes from readers for publication. They should keep to a 200-word maximum and writers are asked to avoid simply listing event sponsors. They

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Or by mail to Letters to the Editor, P.O. Box 210, Astoria, OR 97103