

# Housing: Fixing property wasn't easy

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"I think it's changed all of our thinking on it," county Assessment and Taxation Director Suzanne Johnson said.

## Alternative idea

County Commissioner Kathleen Sullivan lives in Alderbrook and sees the derelict property often. Earlier this year, she approached Bruce and county staff with an alternative idea for the foreclosed property. Her original vision was different from what the project eventually became.

"When I saw that house, I said, 'Boy, it would be a perfect co-op,'" Sullivan said. "It seemed like a nice fit."

The county slated the property, designated one of the top five nuisance properties, for auction in January after it was foreclosed in October. But after Sullivan pitched her idea a few weeks later, the property was removed from the auction list. Citing a county policy and state law that allows for the transfers of properties to non-profits, the Board of Commissioners voted to hand them the house key.

Johnson has worked for the county for more than 34 years. Responsible for collecting taxes, Johnson admits she initially was leery of simply giving a property to a tax-exempt organization.

"We saw dollar signs in our eyes," Johnson said. "I said, 'Are you kidding me? We're just going to give it away?'"

But after further discussion, Johnson warmed to the idea. She learned that the non-profits, rather than convert the home into a low-income housing unit, planned to ready the house for sale.

Because of the scenic view and cultural significance, it made more sense for the organizations to partially fix it, flip it to a buyer, split money from the sale and save for future housing projects.

"Do you build an affordable house with a view like that? Or do you get it on the tax rolls and take that money and do something else with it," Casey Michell, the Community Action Team's single-family housing director, said at a Board of Commissioners meeting. "It would be nice if people with low incomes had good views, but funds are so scarce right now. We're just trying to get as many people in houses as we can."

The county will not be able to recoup more than \$21,000 in taxes owed on the property after eight years of non-payment. But once the house is sold to a new owner, the county hopes to see a steady stream of tax payments.

## Not a simple task

Fixing the property proved not to be a simple task, however.

Roughly 100,000 pounds of debris needed to be removed from the property before it could be fixed and sold. Despite its assets, an appraiser estimated the market value of the house was just over \$38,000 immediately after foreclosure.

"When you have a structure that is that full of stuff, the market is really low," Mitchell said.

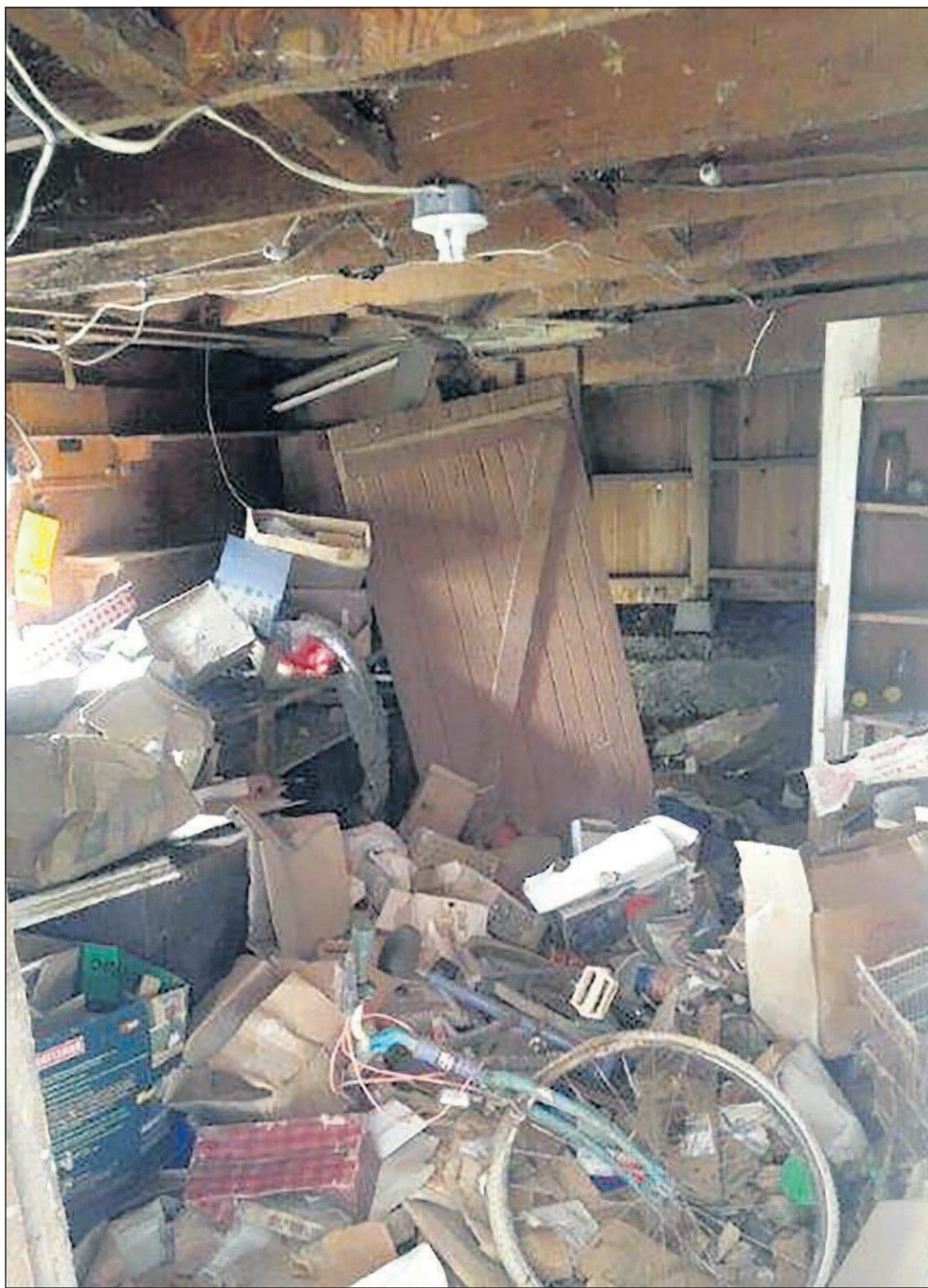
Days before the commissioners' decision, Mitchell and a group of workers began the arduous task of cleaning it out and performing other tasks like installing plywood. But they were not lacking community support. Neighbors, thrilled that the home would be beautified, observed as workers removed the junk and even offered to let them use tools, Mitchell said.

"It's been like a parade these last three days," Mitchell said at the meeting. "They're so excited and very friendly."

Larry Bryant, an Alderbrook resident, expressed his support at a meeting for refurbishing the house and turning it into a single-family home.

"After many years of continuing decline on this eyesore property in Alderbrook, it is a great relief to finally see hope for its renovation and the enhancement of the surrounding neighborhood in Alderbrook," Bryant said.

Mitchell said no major structural damage, save some



Roughly 100,000 pounds of trash and debris had to be removed from this Alderbrook home before work to refurbish the property could begin.

Photos by Casey Mitchell



This restored home in the Alderbrook neighborhood of Astoria will be sold and the profits used to build low-income housing.

dry rot in the kitchen and an awkward layout after a past attempt to turn it into a duplex, were spotted after the cleanup. Workers did, however, uncover a garage that had been blocked from view by storage sheds by as long as neighbors could remember.

The nonprofits will spend more than \$60,000 cleaning and renovating the home before it's sold, Mitchell said. His target price once it's listed for sale is between \$90,000 and \$150,000.

"I'm kind of hopeful someone is going to fall in love with it," Mitchell said.

He and others are also hopeful that this model can be replicated with other county properties. Sullivan said she was happy with the outcome of the property, though she stressed the county should start acting more aggressively to open opportunities for low-income and cooperative housing.

"It has to be a whole community concern," Sullivan said. "We need to be creative and committed in creating a housing inventory."



After removing nearly 100,000 pounds of debris from this Alderbrook home, the property was restored and will now be put on the market.

## SPORTS IN BRIEF

### Ilwaco girls cruise past Willapa Valley in 69-28 pummeling

ILWACO, Wash. — The average margin of victory for the Ilwaco girls basketball team over the last three games is now 44.6 points.

The Lady Fishermen scored another easy victory Friday, 69-28 over Willapa Valley. Ilwaco led 23-2 after one quarter.

Four players scored in double figures for the Fishermen, led by Makenzie Kaech with 20 points. Eliza Bannister and Erika Glenn scored 15 points apiece, and Madeline Jacobson added 14 points for Ilwaco, now 4-0 overall.

### Naselle boys knock off Knight

NASELLE, Wash. — A 29-5 run by Naselle in the third quarter helped the Comets post another easy win Friday, 74-35 over visiting Mary M. Knight in a Coastal 1B boys basketball game at Lyle Patterson Gymnasium.

Jacob Eaton led a trio of players in double figures for the Comets, with 15 points. Erik Lund added 12 and Oggie Lopez scored 11 for Naselle.

### Naselle girls beat Mary M. Knight

NASELLE, Wash. — Kenzie Glenn scored 15 points and Taylor Gudmundsen added 13 to lead Naselle to a 41-30 win over Mary M. Knight Friday night at Naselle.

The Comets held a slim 20-17 lead at halftime, before going on a 13-4 run in the third quarter.

— *The Daily Astorian*

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## Food cart: 'My bucket list had one thing on it. This is it.'

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property. Hollander also leases property from the Port of Astoria under the Astoria Bridge and has been studying the feasibility of siting a Marriott-branded hotel in Astoria.

"There's so many people that were so bummed about The Ship Inn closing," Baeten said.

Her menu has incorporated much of the fare at Ship Inn, including halibut, cod, scallops, oysters and prawns, along with clam chowder. The menu also includes more Americana offerings such as burgers, sandwiches and hot dogs, along with desserts.

"We just kind of tried to appeal to something everybody would want," she said.

Baeten has worked at quite a few restaurants, she said, starting at The Ship Inn at 16 bussing tables, hostessing, washing dishes and cooking. She has been a local real estate agent and hairdresser, and owned a salon and auto detailing business. She and her husband own Neal Baeten Autobody Inc. in Lewis and Clark near her food cart.

"He has a bucket list with many things on it," she said of her husband, who provides support at the food cart. "My bucket list had one thing on it. And this is it."

## Team: Bridge 'one of the best games there is'

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retiring. He was an avid chess player. But when his wife died a little more than 10 years ago, he searched for more ways to interact.

"Bridge is more social than chess," Richardson said. "I needed to get out of the house and do something."

Taylor moved to Astoria from California in 1974. A longtime nurse, she retired after working at Columbia Memorial Hospital for 10 years. She recalls playing bridge with dormitory mates an hour each night while studying chemistry at the University of California, Berkeley. When she heard about others in the area who taught and played bridge, she jumped on the chance to end her 40-year hiatus from the game.

"It's just a mental fascination with the game, one of the best games there is," Taylor said.

Taylor and Richardson met each other after taking classes and attending local tournaments. After forming the team, they set a goal to play American Contract Bridge League tournaments in all 50 states and even some Canadian provinces.

"He hadn't seen much of the country and neither had I, actually," Taylor said.

They hit their final mark in October, and they possess a bundle of memories to show for it.

They visited the Nantucket Whaling Museum in Massachusetts, where they learned how young boys would be lowered naked into the skull of a sperm whale to fetch a bucket of oil from the animal's sonar system. During a bus tour through Denali National Park and Preserve in Alaska, they gazed as several bears and a pair of coyotes chased a lynx up a tree where a squawking magpie was perched.

Other experiences were more dangerous. The pair once landed in Oklahoma City soon after a tornado hit the city and as warnings were still

in effect. Later, a manager at their hotel interrupted a tournament and asked players to take shelter. They reluctantly obliged, placed their cards on the table and scattered to safer locations. Richardson and Taylor huddled together in a brick hallway as flash flooding, baseball-sized hail and uprooted trees slammed the hotel's exterior. The large, fatal tornado that hit less than a mile away spared the hotel, though, minus the inch of water that flooded the hallway carpet.

The next day, they resumed the tournament.

**'It's just a mental fascination with the game.'**

**Monica Taylor**  
avid bridge player who moved to Astoria in 1974