

OPINION

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THE DAILY ASTORIAN

Founded in 1873

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OUR VIEW

Waldorf's comeback is a very big deal

A novelist might say that Astoria has entered the Era of Miracles. First, the decrepit Flavel house at 15th and Franklin found a buyer who has the wherewithal to restore the residence. Then, the two deteriorating blocks of Flavel properties on Commercial Street found buyers who know what they are doing.

Now, after decades of neglect, the Waldorf Hotel next to City Hall has attracted a buyer. Last week, the Astoria Planning Commission approved the development proposal of Innovative Housing Inc. to create 40 workforce housing units plus retail space on the ground floor. ("Astoria

OKs plans to turn historic Waldorf into apartments," The Daily Astorian, Jan. 10)

It could be said that the Waldorf has been the object of scorn as well as unrealistic expectations. Reporter Katie Frankowicz captured the reality when she wrote that on any given day "people want to reopen, rebuild or demolish" the building.

The majority of the studios and one-bedroom apartments that will fill the upper floors of the Waldorf will rent for \$425 to \$550 a month, aimed at people with incomes between \$19,750 and \$27,060, according to Julie Garver, director of housing development for

Innovative Housing, which has a purchase and sale agreement with the building's owners, Groat Brothers Inc.

With 30 years of experience in Portland, Innovative Housing Inc. is a credible developer. They know where to find the money, which will be some \$7.1 million. To give that number local context, it is about what Liberty Restoration Inc. spent to acquire and restore the historic Liberty Theater.

The key word in this new phase is "credible," because the Waldorf's prior developer, a Coos Bay non-profit, dropped the project after receiving a substantial grant from the Meyer Memorial Trust. Prior to that, some

30 years ago, the Waldorf had tenants who were living in dire circumstances, which this newspaper chronicled.

In other words, the Waldorf has been doubly damaged goods — a deteriorating property that could only find unreliable suitors.

At the conclusion of our 2016 series on the housing crunch, we identified the need for workforce housing as one of our region's top issues. Since then, there have been additions to our housing stock, scattered through the county, but principally not in Astoria. So the Waldorf's prospective renovation and addition to the town's housing stock is a very big deal.



LETTERS WELCOME

Letters should be exclusive to The Daily Astorian.

Letters should be fewer than 250 words and must include the writer's name, address and phone number. You will be contacted to confirm authorship.

All letters are subject to editing for space, grammar, and, on occasion, factual accuracy. Only two letters per writer are allowed 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 in poor taste will not be printed.

Send via email to editor@dailyastorian.com, online at dailyastorian.com/submit_letters, in person at 949 Exchange St. in Astoria or 1555 North Roosevelt in Seaside, or mail to Letters to the Editor, P.O. Box 210, Astoria, OR 97103.

SOUTHERN EXPOSURE

A lasting friendship, an enduring philosophy

To capture a collagist in words is a real challenge for a writer, much less a newspaper writer.

Rex Amos "cannot pass a scrap of paper on the sidewalk without stooping over to pick it up and examine it for collage possibilities," reads an introduction to his work. "His friends have been embarrassed repeatedly by his stopping to rip years' worth of pasted posters from public walls, layers of glutted paper and glue so heavy they wrapped themselves around him as he fought them into submission."



R.J. MARX

But lest I linger on the image too long, with Rex Amos, it's first things first. Or maybe it's first things before first things.

There's enough to write about Amos to fill a few storage rooms at a university, and that's where they keep his memoirs, images and miscellany. (In his case "miscellany" gains wide berth from his imagination.)

When I saw Amos at Cheri's over the holiday, he told me his colleague Graham Patrick Conroy died on Dec. 21. Amos and Conroy — a fourth-generation Oregonian, war veteran, longtime member of the Baha'i faith and a philosophy professor at Portland State University — co-founded Preliminism, the philosophy they described as "the theory and practice of practice."

'Practice Preliminism'

Amos studied at Portland State University, majoring in philosophy and literature. He and Conroy became friends in the 1960s, when Portland was a fertile creative melting pot where philosophy and literature often converged. Bud Clark was still years away from becoming mayor, but his Goose Hollow Inn tavern provided a gathering place for young creative types.

According to a 1985 profile of Amos and Conroy, the initial Preliminist



Rex Amos photos

Graham Patrick Conroy and Rex Amos, founders of Preliminism.



Rex Amos, former Portland Mayor Bud Clark and Graham Patrick Conroy.

observations were recorded in a small notebook. The notebook was washed with Rex's shirt. One word remained legible, "Nothing."

Preliminism's central truth, wrote Conroy in "Tentative Notes Toward an Archive of Preliminism," is that everything is preparation for the real thing, but the real thing never comes: "Rehearsing for the stage, but there is no stage, only the rehearsal."

According to Amos in a remembrance, Conroy lived this philosophy, including sporting "PRELIM" vanity plates on his car, and wearing a "Practice Preliminism" button on his sport coats.

The richness of their friendships crossed cultural and social boundaries, charting a path dotted with characters as diverse as the King of Sweden and the mythically reclusive author Thomas Pynchon.

According to Amos, Conroy spent a night on a Persian carpet in Lake Oswego with Pynchon on the condition that he didn't write about it. They met up with the Dalai Lama at the Shilo Inn in Seaside in 1984, Amos recalled, where they waited among hundreds of faithful before each received a blessing.

"Conroy also took great pride in being the oldest member of the Jackie Chan Fan Club," Amos wrote. "He traveled to China and Hong Kong several times to meet with Jackie Chan, including joining the crew during filming of 'Rush Hour 2.'"

Conroy was recognized upon his retirement with an official city of Portland proclamation of "Practice Preliminism Day" on March 9, 1990. The celebration held at Goose Hollow Inn has been recognized annually ever since. "Mayor Clark's official city seal with its red ribbon has gone missing but its memory is held in perpetuity," Amos recalled.

Seeing the tunnel

In this day of big and bigger nuclear buttons, bully-bluster and true lies, we need pacific — in the lowercase sense — and quick-witted believers like Conroy and Amos.

"Life is art and it is in the world of art that philosophies of living abound," Conroy wrote in Preliminist Time. "The purpose of practice is more practice."

The secret of a lasting philosophy is its ability to reach out to future generations with enduring truisms.

And what more appealing philosophy that always puts us at a new beginning? That is the essence of an optimist.

Add to that a cold beer from the Goose Hollow and you're in Portland Nirvana.

"We are all practicing for our role in the drama of life," wrote Conroy. "Preliminism is seeing the tunnel at the end of the light."

R.J. Marx is The Daily Astorian's South County reporter and editor of the Seaside Signal and Cannon Beach Gazette.