

# Rent: Rates in county are all over the map

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But Smith still wants to keep prices relatively low, and she is not increasing rental rates for existing tenants. Prices are only going up for units that are being remodeled after people move away.

"I just want it to be an affordable place to live," she said.

Rental rates in Clatsop County are all over the map, but increasingly tip toward the higher end of the scale. Business and social service organizations across the county say the lack of workforce and affordable housing is at the root of a variety of problems, from homelessness to unfilled job postings. The housing crunch is a familiar topic in policy debates from Astoria to

Cannon Beach.

The Emerald Heights complex, comprised of 83 buildings, is located on the eastern edge of Astoria. Two-bedroom apartments have gone for as low as \$695 a month in the past. Now, the same apartment, remodeled, will cost between \$800 and \$825 a month. Larger three-bedroom apartments once cost \$950 and, remodeled, will go up to as high as \$1,110 a month.

Water, garbage and electricity are paid for by the property owner. Remodeled apartments include new paint, carpets, appliances and countertops, among other updates.

In Astoria this month, by comparison, a small furnished studio was advertised at \$700

a month with no smoking or pets allowed. A two-bedroom apartment — one of three units in a converted Victorian — was advertised at \$875. It's not available until June, but an application was already pending. A one-bedroom in downtown, with a view of the river and all utilities paid for by the landlord, was going for \$1,250.

One-bedroom apartments at a large complex near Youngs Bay start at \$925 a month. At another site on the city's South Slope, a 1,200-square-foot two-bedroom apartment costs \$950 a month — at Emerald Heights, a remodeled 850-square foot two-bedroom apartment will be \$100 to \$125 less than that per month.

Several large-scale hous-

ing projects are in the works in Warrenton. Housing priced for low-income renters and the workforce will eventually be available at the old Waldorf Hotel next to Astoria City Hall — but not until a massive rehabilitation and remodeling project gets underway.

Emerald Heights remains one of a handful of options for people who don't have a lot of money to spare on move-in costs and rent.

Kathleen Morgan, the property manager at Emerald Heights, said tenants are adjusting to the logistics of handling their own heating bills. Last year, some tenants worried about taking on the additional cost, and it continues to be a concern for some.



Apartments at Emerald Heights.

Last year, one woman noted any increase in her housing costs would eat into her grocery bill.

But with the new costs are plans to improve livability at the complex beyond remodeling old units.

Morgan said Smith plans to

improve park areas on opposite ends of the property, as well as reopen a community center near the administrative offices. Managing the sprawling complex is no small task, though.

"It's like a little city," she said.

# Buildings: City focused on downtown

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Warrenton only has a nuisance ordinance on the books, a set of rules that apply broadly to any number of general problems. Those rules are working, said Kevin Cronin, Warrenton's interim city planner, who previously was the community development director for Astoria.

"Where we fall short in Warrenton is we don't have a derelict building ordinance," he said, adding that a property may be vacant and a source of neighborhood blight, but there is not much the city can do to address it under existing rules.

Cronin believes Warrenton could use the Astoria ordinance as a guideline down the road.

"It's not like you can copy and paste something into the municipal code of the city of Warrenton," Cronin said, adding, "It really comes down to how aggressive the City Commission wants to get with this."

For now, city staff are focusing on properties in the downtown corridor where the commission wants to spend more resources to improve landscapes and beautify the city's entry points.

"We're growing," said City Commissioner Tom Dyer, who has been involved in helping clean up one of the properties the commission recently declared a nuisance — a long-time eyesore across the street from City Hall.

"A lot of people used to know everybody and now they don't," Dyer said. They knew each other's situations, they knew what was going on or not going on with a house or a lot.

But now, "the first impression of our city is what people see," he said. "We want it to still have that charm of a downtown and not just be a pass-through."

Cronin has tagged a few other properties after the city received complaints and several new nuisance declarations could be forthcoming. "If you just drive on Main Street, you can see the huge difference that's happening right now," he said.

Dyer points to the community library as the perfect example of what happens when the city doubles down on efforts to improve livability. The library moved from a failing building in Hammond to a much more visible location downtown last year. Since moving, the library has received much more use and has been able to expand its hours. It has become an anchor point, Dyer said.

"It's starting to attract people to downtown," he said.

He and the other commissioners would like to be able to install more sidewalks throughout downtown, another way to improve livability. But these plans are hampered by logistics — Warrenton sits alongside a highway — and money.

Dyer is happy the city is looking at properties downtown. He hopes to find ways city staff and commissioners can help the community address problem buildings, perhaps by providing additional incentives to clean up buildings.

"We want to have community involvement," he said.

For now, "one house at a time," he said.



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