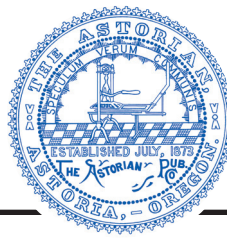


OPINION



the Astorian

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OUR VIEW

Housing crunch coming to a boil

The biggest surprise about our regional housing shortage is that it took so long to fully materialize.

There have been signs before now. For decades, places like Cannon Beach have grown increasingly out of reach for wage earners. Employers there depend on workers' ability to commute from similar — but lower priced — surrounding communities.

Lagging in prestige and lacking views of dramatic Haystack Rock, these towns had relatively affordable places to buy or rent. This was particularly true north of the Columbia, where an ocean-view building site might be found for a quarter the cost of one in Cannon Beach or Gearhart.

Thirty years ago, it was obvious to a newcomer from Seattle or Portland that the scenery, salt-water access, lifestyles, local food and other assets of towns from Ocean Park to Warrenton and Astoria were magnets that would inevitably attract enormous interest on the increasingly crowded West Coast. Driven by construction of vacation housing, the number of dwellings swelled even while the full-time population count crept up more slowly. The scarcity of good-paying local jobs and a multihour commute to the I-5 corridor kept a lid on.

But the Columbia-Pacific housing market has become unmoored from the local economy — and the “local” economy has expanded to include many who can live here and make or bring money from elsewhere. Kicked into high gear by a year of pandemic and urban social unrest, the coast is one of many places feeling the effects of an accelerating recalibration of where it feels possible to live. Partly because of limited housing stock, Clatsop and Pacific counties still represent only a tiny sliver of this trend. But it's enough to have a big impact.

Scarcity and rising home prices drive rentals off the market, especially after a year when eviction for nonpayment of rent was barred as a humanitarian measure during the pandemic. Con-



Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

Housing has become a dominant issue on the coast.

WE CAN NO LONGER ASSUME THAT UP-AND-DOWN CYCLES WILL RESULT IN ENOUGH HOUSING FOR THOSE WHO ARE GENUINELY COMMITTED TO LONG-TERM LIVING HERE. THIS COAST IS FILLING UP AND THE DAYS OF SURPLUS HOUSING JUST MIGHT BE OVER FOREVER.

struction isn't keeping up with demand for single- or multifamily housing.

Has the time arrived when someone who grew up here can't afford to live here?

Those without a foot in the door in the form of already owning a starter house or significant family help are hard-pressed to join the ranks of real estate owners. This could change without policy interventions. The winding-down of the COVID crisis could bring foreclosed vacation homes on the residential market, for example. Market forces could eventually allow investors to see the need for new apartment and condo construction.

Considering the ups and downs of real estate, some question the American fascination with own-

ing your home. There's something to be said for turning more social and political attention to making sure that people like our Coast Guardsmen, seafood and hospitality workers have clean, safe rental housing they can afford throughout our seasonal economic fluctuations. Federal and state tax policies should be designed to encourage rural apartment investment, with municipal and county zoning rules adjusted to match this priority. The Pacific Northwest's charitable foundations should find opportunities to help.

With the Washington Post reporting “more than 8 million rental properties across the country are behind on payments by an average of \$5,600,” every level of society needs to prepare for an unprecedented period of hous-

ing insecurity whenever rent forbearances are finally allowed to expire. While evictions will free up some rentals for tenants able and willing to pay, there will be real suffering on the part of those squeezed out. Their housing needs will have to be addressed, somehow.

There are no quick answers to any of this. At our local level, all high schools should have robust vocational programs to train young people in the building trades — high-paying jobs that will be in demand for many years to come. Utility fees need to be structured in ways that recapture costs without discouraging development. Cluster housing and other innovative strategies must be used to increase the utilization of residential land in ways that continue to preserve the environmental values that make our area so attractive.

We can no longer assume that up-and-down cycles will result in enough housing for those who are genuinely committed to long-term living here. This coast is filling up and the days of surplus housing just might be over forever.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Long overdue

I've spent most of my life in the Washington, D.C., area, and worked in the city for many years. Statehood for the D.C. is long overdue, and I believe it to be just as important to our democracy as balance and reason in the Supreme Court.

Oregon has been my home for the last 22 years, but I will never forget seeing the people of the nation's capital disenfranchised. Even city laws that the residents pass to govern themselves can be blocked by Congress.

Things that D.C. voters wanted, like a clean needle program, medical marijuana and funding for abortion programs, have been squashed by Congress, nullifying their decisions. There are more people living in D.C. than in Wyoming or Vermont, yet they have no voice.

Know this: Opposition to D.C. statehood is the ultimate voter suppression.
KEN POTTER
Cannon Beach

What is more important?

I disagree with the county's involvement in asking the governor to support letting us do our own thing. On the national map, we are one of the states in the red, with an increase of virus cases.

There have been more than two dozen new virus cases over the past several days in Clatsop County. A Knappa student tested positive for the virus. Closures in population-dense counties inland

will result in an increase in viral load here, due to more visitors to the coast.

Clearly the Clatsop County commission forgets what it was like here on the coast last spring. Instead, spend the next few weeks, while the risk levels are being evaluated, to make smart short-term investment of stimulus dollars to bridge the lack of tax revenue, and lend support to small business.

I also urge leaders of local government to invest their time and resources to champion an outreach campaign to get folks vaccinated, and preach the value of wearing masks.

What is more important, money or lives? A few more weeks to focus on protecting permanent residents, and our workforce, will help to blunt the expected onslaught coming our way this summer.

KYLE WALKER
Warrenton

Do your part

I listened to the League of Oregon Cities conference call on April 23, and noticed something unusual. Our Democrat governor's representative asked for the two same exact “pivotal” actions that the Alaska Republican governor has asked of his state in our battle against COVID-19: The need for people to wear masks; and the need for people to be fully vaccinated.

Please do your part to help things get back to normal; we certainly need to be ready for the employment, and money,

summer tourists can bring to our area.

RICK NEWTON
Warrenton

Bad attitude

Regarding the article in The Astorian (April 29) about visitors angry that the Astoria Column closed because of the COVID-19 virus: With Clatsop County swinging back and forth between high risk and extreme risk, it makes sense to close the Column, considering the narrow spiral staircase and crowding of people on the staircase.

Maybe visitors who are angry because

they can't go in the tower right now should consider going elsewhere. Perhaps the beach, or a walk in a park. Now is not the time to be crowding into a small spiral staircase.

It is also not the time to be displaying bad manners by harassing employees at the tower. And, to Matteo Luccio, of Portland, who wants his \$5 buck, signage and an apology, or he is threatening litigation about the Column being closed, perhaps he should stay in Portland and visit some of your lovely tourist attractions there, and not bring your bad attitude to Astoria.

SHARON DAVIS-ROBINSON
Gearhart

