

Heritage Square: Construction could start in August 2023

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as some affordable housing needs.”

The mayor said the project will finally address a pressing community need by also taking some homeless people off the streets and into permanent supportive housing.

The City Council will consider entering into the agreement with Edlen & Co. during a meeting on Feb. 7, as well as code changes to enable development at Heritage Square.

To apply for the state's affordable housing funds this year, the developer must have “property control,” such as an option to purchase or a purchase sale agreement, by time of the application deadline in the spring. If the city signs the agreement and the team secures state funding this year, construction could start in August 2023.

Scenarios

Edlen & Co.'s team partnered with several local interests, including Clatsop Behavioral Healthcare, to design two scenarios for the block between 11th and 12th streets bordered by Duane and Exchange streets.

The first scenario involves 53 to 75 workforce housing units, depending on whether the building is three or four stories tall, along with 55 parking spaces and a ground floor devoted to a mix of residential uses and common rooms.

The second scenario involves 44 to 66 workforce housing units with common areas on the ground floor, retail concentrated near the corner of 12th and Duane and a possible child care facility at 12th and Exchange.

Both scenarios would target households earning between 60% to 80% of the county's median family income, which for a household of one would be someone who earns between \$14.74 and \$19.65 an hour.

Two-thirds of the units in both scenarios would be stu-



Lydia Ely/The Astorian

Signs announcing a public hearing on Feb. 7 to review potential code changes are posted at Heritage Square.

dios or one-bedroom apartments. The rest would be two- or three-bedroom units.

Both scenarios include a separate four-story building on the smaller lot at 11th and Exchange in partnership with Clatsop Behavioral Healthcare, Clatsop County's mental health and substance abuse-treatment provider.

Amy Baker, the agency's executive director, said the building would house clients who are part of the Open Door program, which provides the most intensive wraparound services. She said between 70 and 80 people participate in the program at a given time.

Offices for the Open Door program are planned for the ground floor, with 33 micro units on the upper floors.

Baker said housing has been the biggest barrier in supporting these clients. She said the office for the program was located at 12th and Exchange for more than a year and most people did not know it was there, so she expects the proposed location will also be quiet.

“If we do our job right, you've got a bunch of folks there who feel like they are responsible to one another, and

that they're responsible for the quality of the living arrangement and the building itself,” Baker said. “There's a lot of models that have done this in other regions, and they've done it very successfully.”

The building would not include parking, since the agency's clients typically do not drive. The micro units would be priced very low, at about 30% of area median family income, using project-based housing choice vouchers.

City Councilor Tom Hilton, who voted against moving forward with the Edlen & Co. concept, asked why the Clatsop Behavioral Healthcare piece has to be part of the project. He asked if housing for the agency can go somewhere else so market-rate housing can be built on the site instead.

Income range

Jill Sherman, of Edlen & Co., said the team proposed using income averaging to make the project more affordable while serving a broader range of incomes.

With income averaging, she said, you can receive tax credit equity for all the units

if the average affordability is at or below 60% area median income. Because the project would include Clatsop Behavioral Healthcare units at 30% area median income, the project can have units for people earning wages up to 80%, she said.

However, several leaders in the business community took issue with the income range, arguing that the project should address workforce housing for people earning higher wages.

David Reid, the executive director of the Astoria-Warrenton Area Chamber of Commerce, and Walt Postlewait, a developer and the executive vice president for nonprofit lender Craft3, were on the panel that recommended the Edlen & Co. proposal to city councilors.

While both are supportive of the project, they believe the income range misses the mark.

Reid said people working for many of the major employers downtown earn too much to qualify for housing with a cap of 80% area median income.

“Even though time is of the essence on the front end,

that's not a good reason to rush into this,” Reid said. “I'm afraid it's going to turn into a trap for City Council in that you were looking for a housing project, you sought workforce housing, you're not getting that.”

Postlewait advocated for capping the cost of rent, not income, so the housing is accessible to more downtown workers.

He suggested the city search for another partner that can design a project for workers earning higher wages.

Others, including Kevin Leahy, the executive director of Clatsop Economic Development Resources, and Chris Nemlowill, the owner of Fort George Brewery, also advocated for an option that includes workers earning higher wages.

Leahy said businesses like Fort George and Buoy Beer Co. are part of the Clatsop Enterprise Zone, which offers tax breaks on new investment in return for creating new jobs that pay at least 150% of the average county wage. Their workers would not qualify for the housing at Heritage

Square, he said.

Jessamyn Grace West, the executive director of the Astoria Downtown Historic District Association, also served on the panel that selected Edlen & Co. She said the county's 2019 housing study showed that housing for the proposed income range is the greatest need.

Determining the greatest need is one consideration, she said.

“The other half of that is how this can get funded,” West added. “So if either of these proposals were to serve higher incomes, the funding from the state and federal levels is not going to be available.”

Jones echoed West's point, adding that while the project is not full spectrum workforce housing, it does serve the workforce.

“You're not going to have police officers, for the most part, or experienced firefighters or school administrators or radiologists that are going to qualify for this housing, but it will cover a segment of the workforce that does need housing,” the mayor said.

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Tide gate: ‘This is a long-standing problem’

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Nearly two decades ago, the Port teamed with the Columbia River Estuary Study Taskforce to make improvements to the Vera Slough tide gate, including raising the water level to add acres of wetlands. However, the raised water tables are now “dangerously high,” Matt McGrath, the Port's deputy director, said.

McGrath, who presented a picture of significant flooding near the Airport Industrial Park to the Port Commission on Tuesday, said that while the problem is not new, the recent flooding is indicative of the challenge.

“In our mind, what is happening is the Vera Slough tide gate, because it raised the water table so much at the airport, it's causing the erosion of a lot of the infrastructure — you're talking runaways, all of those types of things,” McGrath said in an interview. “Especially if we're looking at development land ... that's really not good for the industrial park, especially when people are putting millions of dollars into their infrastructure out there.”

Scouler is midway through the construction of a fishmeal processing plant at the Airport Industrial Park. The Port hopes to bring in more businesses in the near future.

Port Commissioner Dirk Rohne said during Tuesday's meeting that he spoke to the installer of the tide gate, who has made improvements to the concept in regard to evacuating water more efficiently.

McGrath is unsure about the solution or cost to fix the tide gate, but expects the grant and ensuing study to answer those questions.

“This is a long-standing problem that hopefully the Port will make progress on through this grant,” Shane Jensen, the Port's grant consultant, said.

At Tuesday's meeting, the Port Commission also raised several base rates at the airport that hadn't been adjusted

for about three decades.

The landing fee for aircraft will be raised to \$2 per 1,000 pounds over 10,000 pounds. The original fee was set at 50 cents.

The callout fee for retrieving Port staff to fuel after hours will also be raised to \$50 per hour, with a two-hour minimum. The fee was originally \$50 per callout, regardless of the time span.

The new fees were approved unanimously.

Port commissioners also voted to raise the overnight parking fee for aircraft from \$5 to \$10. The motion was approved 4 to 1, with Commissioner Robert Stevens voting against it.

Columbian: ‘Has a clientele that we hope to maintain and grow’

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Back then, Hulsey said the cafe was unique because it had an espresso machine, didn't allow smoking and served fresh fish — rather than deep fried — bought directly from boats and local canneries.

“Because we built this, I'm sorry to see it go of course,” he said. “But no one lasts forever.”

Hulsey hadn't listed the sale, and instead approached several local business owners directly about buying the property.

He said the Allens were the first to respond, and he is glad they asked him to leave the decor. Hulsey has removed some personal items, but will be sorry to part ways with some others, like the Ouija board table, which he thinks belongs in the Voodoo Room.

He said he's happy that the staff, who he sees as family, will be staying on.

Hulsey will continue to make the jellies that have been served with each meal at the cafe, and plans on traveling more with Fairchild, his



Lydia Ely/The Astorian

The Riviera Building includes the Columbian Theater, the Voodoo Room and the Columbian Cafe.

wife.

Stephen Allen said he hopes to carry on the previous owners' legacy, and has been getting ideas and recommendations from employees for adjustments to the business.

The theater plays second-run movies three days a week. Allen is considering expanding to movies both historic and newer, but said there's still a lot to plan.

“We're trying to have more movies that the community will be excited to come and see,” he said. “We want to expand on what he's been doing there, but we need

to figure it all out.”

One plan is certain, though: they'll be selling Astoria Brewing's beer. They are looking into the potential for a doorway to the brewery, too.

“We're very excited about owning it. We want to carry on what Uriah has created over the years and not make major changes,” Allen said. “It certainly has a clientele that we hope to maintain and grow.”

Marco Davis, a massage therapist and lifelong Astoria resident, worked for Hulsey in the cafe for more than 20

years. With the Riviera Building businesses, Hulsey and Fairchild created a space that felt like it accepted everybody, he said.

“It was a safe haven for a lot of us,” he said. “It was the central heartbeat for downtown Astoria for local misfits.”

The Columbian Theater stage was where Davis and his friends found a home for their performances — where Davis hosted what became the annual “Dragalution” drag shows that drew large crowds from many corners of Astoria.

The Allens are known for doing a good job at fixing up the buildings they own — and certainly the Riviera Building will need a lot of work.

But Davis and others hope the Allens retain more than just the eclectic aesthetics that helped define the Voodoo Room and the Columbian Cafe spaces in particular. They hope the building remains a space where people can be themselves. A place for the misfits.

Katie Frankowicz of KMUN contributed to this report.



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