

# Heritage Square: Code changes under review

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include up to 75 housing units serving households primarily earning 60% of Clatsop County's median income. Some units could serve households earning up to 80% of median income or be rented at market rate.

The income range would mean most workers would need to earn around \$14.74 up to \$19.65 an hour, or \$30,660 and up to \$40,880 annually, to be eligible. The building would include common areas on the ground floor, retail, a possible child care facility and 55 parking spaces.

A four-story building on the block's smaller lot at 11th Street and Exchange would provide 33 micro units of supportive housing for clients of Clatsop Behavioral Healthcare, the county's mental health and substance abuse treatment provider. Services for residents would be on the first floor, and there would be an outdoor area for residents.

Since Heritage Square is challenging and expensive to develop, Edlen & Co. has proposed using income averaging. With income averaging, the project can receive tax credit equity for all the units if the average affordability is at or below 60% of area median income.

Because the project would include Clatsop Behavioral Healthcare units at 30% of area median income, the project can also have units for people earning wages up to 80% of median income.

Jill Sherman, of Edlen & Co., indicated that if the city approves an exclusive negotiating agreement, the developer could adjust some of the details in the initial concept. However, she said the average affordability has to remain at or below 60% of area median incomes for the project to qualify for the financial support necessary to be feasible.

While the county's 2019 housing study showed a need for housing for people who earn between 60% to 80% of the area median income, some Astoria business leaders have argued that the range in the Edlen & Co. concept is too low and would not capture enough of the workforce downtown.

And while the mental health component of the project has drawn broad support among the City Council, the county Board of Commissioners and social services agencies



Lydia Ely/The Astorian

**The City Council held a public hearing Monday night on the development of Heritage Square.**

such as Clatsop Community Action, it has also provoked some strong reaction from people opposed to having more social services concentrated downtown.

## 'True workforce'

David Reid, the executive director of the Astoria-Warrenton Area Chamber of Commerce, has called the mental health component the "bright spot." But he has urged the city to consider a housing project that would serve workers earning higher wages, which he referred to as the "true workforce."

"We have a pinch on our ability to build living wage, higher-income jobs because of housing," Reid said. "This is a chance to address that. I think the city is in a unique spot to do that."

Mayor Jones asked Reid for his definition of "true workforce."

Reid said there is no definition. However, he said he would like to see workers at businesses like Fort George Brewery and Buoy Beer Co. prioritized. Both breweries are part of the Clatsop Enterprise Zone, which offers tax breaks on new investment in return for creating new jobs that pay at least 130% of the county's median income.

"Those are the jobs that are going to help to build the AMI (area median income) for everybody in the county — if we can get those higher-wage jobs filled," Reid said. "We can't do that if they don't have any place to live."

Jones agreed that there needs to be equal effort in developing housing for workers earning higher wages.

"I do find the term 'true workforce' problematic in that it seems to suggest that working people, working full time, who make less than 80% AMI are not part of the 'true workforce,'" the mayor added. "That would include a new EMT (emergency medical

technician) hire right out of EMT school."

Jones said a new teacher or new EMT would qualify within the income range proposed at Heritage Square, "but by your definition is not part of the 'true workforce.'"

Reid acknowledged the income range in the Edlen & Co. concept would capture a number of people working in the community.

Zetty Nemlowill, a former Astoria city councilor, expressed similar concerns as Reid, and asked the city to take more time to find a developer that would create housing that better serves the workers of Astoria. Nemlowill is married to Chris Nemlowill, the owner of Fort George Brewery, and used to work in marketing for the Astoria Co+op.

"We're hearing from economic development leaders that this housing won't serve a large part of the Astoria workforce due to the ceiling on income," Nemlowill said. "So I wonder who it will support. My concern is that the employers who will benefit will be big-box retailers and fast-food chains that pay workers as little as possible."

"Representatives from the chamber, CEDR (Clatsop Economic Development Resources), Craft3, Fort George, the co+op and Hyak (Maritime) have all said the current proposal won't serve many local workers," she said. "The city would reap the benefits of being more proactive about economic development. The only way to continue providing the level of city services that we all need and enjoy is by growing the tax base."

"We can do that by supporting our businesses. Workforce housing is one way to do that."

Others took issue with the mental health component of the housing project, warning that it would attract more homelessness and bad behavior downtown.

The potential loss of

parking and open space were also issues for some people.

Seniors gathered at the Astoria Senior Center to watch and participate in the meeting remotely. The senior center is located on Exchange across from Heritage Square, and many seniors are concerned about the impact of development on parking.

Many of the people who spoke in opposition to the housing project said they supported the idea, just not downtown.

## 'NIMBY-ism'

Arline LaMear, a former Astoria mayor, has been vocal about the need for more workforce housing.

"One of the things that was very frustrating to me when I was leader was realizing how slowly the gears of government turn," she said. "And one of the reasons that they grind so slowly is NIMBY-ism — not in my backyard."

LaMear said Astoria is a working-class city that does not have the funding to build a city plaza or a surplus of buildable land for housing.

"We have Heritage Square," she said. "Our heritage is working class." Teresa Barnes, the executive director of the Astoria Warming Center, also addressed the perception that the housing project would not serve enough of the workforce. She said most people she knows would qualify within the income range.

"That has been my reality for the 20 years that I've lived in Astoria," she said. "That has been my reality for most of my adult life. And it kind of feels wildly out of touch for people to think that that's not the experience of a lot of people living here."

While Barnes said she is proud of the work at the Astoria Warming Center, she is disappointed more has not been done to support people.

She pointed to Maslow's hierarchy of human needs, a theory in psychology that people are motivated by basic needs.

"I don't think parking is anywhere on there," Barnes said. "I mean, when we're talking about where people can live and how we can take care of our fellow citizens who maybe can't take care of themselves, that to me is on a completely different scale than if we have to walk a few more blocks or park a little bit further away from something than we'd like to."

# Housing: 'We are very dependent on the rest of the county to help us for housing'

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the ball moving, and used examples from a few destination towns in Colorado and Utah that have successfully increased affordable and workforce housing.

The city, for example, could incentivize building accessory dwelling units as workforce housing and increase regional coordination with the county, cities and the Northwest Oregon Housing Authority.

Adams said he has started conversations with planning officials throughout the county, but he would like conversations to include elected officials and become more regular and focused.

Over the next couple of years, the city will also conduct a code audit to review and update policies to better support the city's vision in the comprehensive plan.

During a meeting in January, the City Council

unanimously adopted an ordinance prohibiting the combination of lots for the purpose of building larger homes. The council also repealed the city's planned unit development chapter, blocking any future proposals.

Mayor Sam Steidel told The Astorian he hopes the City Council can address affordable housing through the code audit.

And while he wants to continue the conversation around affordable housing, he said he would like to see the county take on more of a leading role.

Steidel said Cannon Beach has several constraints, including a lack of buildable land.

"We are very dependent on the rest of the county to help us for housing," the mayor said. "I would hope that the county itself is looking more into what they can do in South County rather than depending ... on the cities."

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# Harned: The news is tearing open old wounds

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Supervision confirmed.

Harned, who babysat Carlson, hid the girl's body, then participated in law enforcement's search for her. He was convicted of aggravated murder in 2000 and sentenced by Clatsop County Circuit Court Judge Philip Nelson.

The sentence was later upheld on appeal, District Attorney Ron Brown said, "because of how heinous the crime was."

Harned, who has changed his name to Jessie Davin Payne-Rana, is among the inmates whose sentences are under reassessment in light of Oregon's changing policies and attitudes toward criminal justice. The state has reformed how the judicial system prosecutes and punishes young offenders.

A 2019 law allows youths



**Ashley Ann Carlson was murdered in Astoria in 1999.**

who commit Measure 11 offenses — the most severe crimes, such as murder and rape, that demand mandatory minimum sentences — to have their age and the circumstances of their crimes considered by judges before sentencing.

A spokesperson for Gov. Brown told The Orego-

nian that the governor's plan is meant for some offenders who were imprisoned as teenagers before the law was passed and therefore could not benefit from it.

The governor's decision to commute sentences for people whose crimes were serious enough to warrant decades or life in prison has provoked fierce backlash from some prosecutors and from victims' families who feel the original sentences brought a sense of justice, if not closure.

Carlson's mother, Tessa Carlson, is "suffering big time" by the idea that her daughter's killer could be let out, Ron Brown said. The news is tearing open old wounds for her, he said.

"We strongly hope that they will not just let (Harned) out with the floodgates," the district attorney said.

Harned's hearing has not

been scheduled, but he will likely have one later this year, according to the parole board. He is housed at Snake River Correctional Institution in Ontario.

Carlson's mother is incarcerated in Idaho on drug charges. In an interview with KOIN 6 News that aired this month, Tessa Carlson said she was frustrated. "It's all really hard right now. It's all bringing up everything all over again," she said. "He helped me look for her, we found her on the 15th and we buried her on the 20th. So February's a really, really hard month."

"The irony isn't lost on anybody that she is doing time in the pen in Idaho for a small amount of meth, by all accounts, and (Harned) is being considered for parole after murdering her daughter," Ron Brown said. "That is just ... Something wrong with that picture."

# Emergencies: Center 'makes us a much safer community'

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A former American Red Cross trailer in need of repair was refurbished and put into use as emergency supplies storage.

An additional parking area will allow room for operations and staging outside of the tsunami inundation zone.

The time frame for the alternate center's opening

has yet to be established, McBride said. "Our next project is to ground the poles and place the four antenna brackets," she said.

Mayor Jay Barber said the alternate center "makes

us a much safer community. Even in the worst-case scenario, there will be people up there making sure that we're communicated with. It's a great thing to have in place."



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