

Evictions: ‘Landlords are actually increasing rent throughout the county’

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Clatsop Community Action, a nonprofit agency that serves low-income residents, received funding from the Oregon Housing and Community Services Department to provide rental assistance.

Viviana Matthews, the executive director of Clatsop Community Action, said the agency saw a record number of people during the pandemic. “We’ve never seen anything like during COVID,” she said.

Recently, Clatsop Community Action has experienced a significant increase in people asking for rental assistance. The agency received around 30 calls within two weeks of the deadline for safe harbor protection passing in June, Susan Prettyman, the social services manager, said.

“We’re hearing stories from clients that are really, really, really sad to be honest with you,” she said. “And it seems like they owe significant months at a time.” Some landlords are losing patience with people not paying rent during the pandemic and have begun to serve eviction notices.



Oregon State Tenants Association

During the coronavirus pandemic, a series of moratoriums on evictions and foreclosures in Oregon helped prevent evictions from surging.

Ludek Winkler, the owner of a convenience store, rents out a duplex to two tenants who he said have frequently failed to pay their rent and utilities over the past two years.

The tenants received rental assistance once, but that was quickly used up.

Not receiving consistent payments hurt Winkler financially.

He said he was stuck with \$3,000 worth of electricity bills his tenants hadn’t paid.

Winkler said he wanted to work with the tenants for a while and tried to persuade them to catch up on the electric bill rather than evict them. He said they applied for rental assistance again but were recently denied.

By that time, Winkler had found out the tenants were letting other people live at the property for free, he said.

In early July, he filed an eviction notice for nonpayment of rent. “It’s just wonderful,” he said. “I can finally get rid of them.”

Matthews said COVID-19 increased tensions between landlords and tenants.

With rising rents in Clatsop County, many tenants are renting apartments they have difficulty affording. It became even harder for people to pay their rent when the pandemic hit.

And while some people still haven’t returned to work, rents continue to grow.

“Landlords are actually increasing rent throughout the county. It’s not just big corporations, it’s lots of mom-and-pop landlords, too, that have increased their rent,” Prettyman said.

When Cook’s rent increased on the house where she was staying, she explained to her landlord that she was struggling to keep up with payments. She said she asked to work something out so she could get caught up, but they

weren’t willing to work with her. That’s when she received an eviction notice.

While Cook lives in her car, she is looking for a new place for her and her boyfriend, a U.S. Army veteran, to stay where she can afford to pay the rent. But she said the chances of them qualifying for another house anytime soon are poor.

“They want you to make three times the amount of the rent that you’re going to pay,” she said. “And if your rent is almost \$2,000, I mean people that make that much money, they don’t rent houses, they buy them.”

Cook said there are many people like her and her boyfriend who have full-time jobs but can’t afford to pay the county’s high housing costs. She sees it daily in her store, where she knows many customers with jobs who sleep on the streets.

She said she thinks the government needs to offer more assistance for those who face eviction and struggle to pay rent.

“I really hope that it opens up people’s eyes in this community and things can start changing,” Cook said.

Housing: Parking would be calculated by the number of bedrooms

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The amendments approved on Tuesday include removing the permit requirement for accessory dwelling units, reducing lot sizes and removing lot coverage requirements to make adding accessory dwelling units more feasible.

A maximum lot size was included as a result of removing lot coverage requirements to prevent lots from being combined to build McMansions. The measure is also intended to encourage higher-density housing. Setbacks would guide the buildable land.

Based on feedback from the business community and developers, Leatherman said the minimum lot size was further reduced.

Planning commissioners were supportive of the changes, but asked city staff to clarify the language around maximum lot size.

Commissioners noted concerns raised by residents about prohibiting homestay lodging in low-density residential areas, and moved to allow them under conditional use.

Currently, homeowners in residential areas can apply for licenses to rent bedrooms in their homes to visitors as long as the homeowners live on-site. An earlier version of the draft amendments prohibited homestay lodging in low-density residential areas and allowed it under conditional use in medium residential areas instead of permitted outright.

“I’m concerned about removing short-term rentals — homestay lodging — from R1 because I don’t see any evidence that that impacts the housing supply,” said Daryl Moore, the president of the



Lydia Ely/The Astorian

Mailboxes for multifamily housing units in Astoria.

Planning Commission. “It is a way for people to generate extra revenue to stay in their home and pay their property taxes or whatever.

“So I don’t see that that impacts the housing supply in any way. All it does is take away opportunity for local residents.”

The amendments would move hotels in commercial zones along the Columbia River and Port of Astoria from being permitted outright to being allowed under conditional use. The change ensures the public has an opportunity to weigh in prior to a building permit being issued.

Multifamily homes, which include three dwellings or more, would be permitted outright in medium- and high-density residential areas instead of conditional. Duplexes will be allowed everywhere single-family homes are allowed.

Cottage clusters, which usually have shared open space, would be permitted outright in residential and commercial zones.

Parking for homes would be calculated by the number of bedrooms, which Leatherman said would reduce parking requirements, but not significantly.

Open seat: Election filing period goes through Aug. 30

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positions itself for the future, especially coming out of the coronavirus pandemic. She also hoped her decision would inspire other young people, women and artists to run for City Council.

Along with the downtown Ward 3 seat, terms expire this year for the mayor and the Ward 1 seat, which covers part of the Port of Astoria, Uniontown and the western edge of downtown.

Mayor Bruce Jones and City Councilor Roger Rocka, who represents Ward 1, have indicated they do not plan to seek reelection in November.

Sean Fitzpatrick, who owns Wecoma Partners and serves on the Astoria Planning Commission, has announced his plans to run for mayor.

The election filing period opened on June 1 and extends through Aug. 30.

During the Astoria-Warrenton Area Chamber of Commerce’s monthly chamber breakfast Tuesday, Jones made an appeal for people to run, citing concerns about single-issue candidates

seizing the opportunity.

The mayor said he is interested in getting “good, quality folks” to serve on the City Council who have the ability to have an open mind and be civil with city staff and the public.

Jones told The Astorian that he would like to see candidates who care about the full spectrum of issues facing the city.

“I think, generally speaking, a councilor who is able to keep an even keel and be able to take the ups and downs and strive — it best serves the community,” he said.

Jones also believes it is important that a candidate respects the strong role of the city manager in Astoria’s government and not direct city staff themselves.

“There may have been times in the past when we had a councilor who crossed that line,” he said. “And it makes things work a lot more smoothly if we respect our form of local government and let the city manager manage the staff and the City Council manages the city manager.”

Alexis Weisend contributed to this report.

Broadband: Oregon Coast Wireless, the contractor hired to build the towers, upgraded internet service in Tillamook County

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Oregon Coast Wireless, the contractor hired to build the towers, upgraded internet service in Tillamook County.

“They’re very community-based. They want to provide a service ... They’re not doing this because they’re going to get rich operating this system long term,” Gardner said.

He is looking for two things from the wireless company to determine whether the project can go forward.

First, he needs to know if, after the county and school district pay for the infrastructure, Oregon Coast Wireless will have enough customers in that sparsely populated area to pay for ongoing costs, such as the use of the trunk line and maintenance of the towers. “I want to see a plan for that,” Gardner said.

The project was never going to be highly profitable, Gardner said — hence the subsidies to make the cost pencil out. “We do need, at least, sustainability,” he said.

Gardner also asked the wireless company to show progress on obtaining land

lease agreements for siting the wireless towers.

At one point, project developers approached Weyerhaeuser to raise towers on the timber company’s property, but the company may charge a fee that would make the project unaffordable, Gardner said.

“If we don’t go the Weyerhaeuser route, we’re going to have to go with smaller towers, but more of them,” Gardner said.

The school district and wireless company are trying to get permission from private landowners in hopes the landowners will allow a tower on their property.

“It’s a complicated issue. There’s not an easy answer (to) how to get internet to very rural and secluded places, you know?” Gardner said. “That’s why it hasn’t been done.”

A county spokesperson said that an update on the project may be ready in a few weeks.

Commissioner Lianne Thompson, whose district encompasses the Jewell area, said, “The county is committed to getting better broadband in the heart of Clatsop County.”

Access to broadband is limited in Jewell and other rural corners of the county.

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Preschool: City has to receive OK from voters

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Third Street, that the city owns and maintains. The city will look to transfer the building to Community Action Team, an agency that combats poverty in Clatsop, Columbia and Tillamook counties and guides Head Start.

Because the property’s real market value exceeds \$100,000, the city has to receive approval from voters before it can be transferred. The City Commission voted unanimously on Tuesday night to put the transfer on November’s ballot.

“This is in the best interest of both the community that can continue (to use) the services of Head Start, as well as (Community Action Team) to enable them to better their operations and take

an asset that’s not really assisting us with anything,” Mayor Henry Balensifer said.

The city has been looking to transfer the building for a number of years, City Manager Linda Engbretson said.

Warrenton partnered with Community Action Team in the 1990s to build the facility with a community block grant. The city assumed ownership and took responsibility for repairs and maintenance.

The lease agreement at the time outlined that the city will get \$225 per month in perpetuity, which does not cover the cost of necessary work on the building, Engbretson said.

Engbretson said the city put tens of thousands of dollars into the upkeep of the building a few years ago.

“That was the worst lease in the history of — ever,” City Commissioner Mark Baldwin said at a meeting in June.

Engbretson added that it was an opportunity to create something good for the community at the time and that the Head Start program has impacted many.

By taking ownership of the building, Community Action Team will be able to apply for grants and plan its own work on the building, Joyce Ervin, the director of Head Start, said in an email.

If the transfer is approved by voters, the agreement will feature a reversionary clause for the property to be returned to the city in the event Community Action Team ceases its operation as a Head Start facility.