

Funding: Project could be completed by 2024

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Adair Annex.”

Gertler said the remaining funds for the project will come from other state and federal sources. She said the agency already owns the land, which is a significant contribution to the development cost. The project's operations budget also con-

templates the agency's partnership with Clatsop Community Action, which will be staffing the Owens-Adair Annex for resident services.

The project will update the existing 46-unit complex, which has struggled with maintenance issues. The new building, built over the housing authority's parking lot, will include 40 one-bedroom

apartments, 10 studio apartments and a basement with 55 parking spots.

Half of the units would be reserved for people on the housing authority's housing choice voucher program waiting list. Most earn 30% and below of the area median income, and many are seniors.

Thirteen units would

be reserved for supportive housing for people facing homelessness.

Now that initial funding has been approved, Gertler said a project team will meet to go over the timeline.

The project, which will go before the city's Historic Landmarks Commission for review, could be completed by the fall of 2024.

Tug of war: 'This is very discouraging'

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In the letter sent to the Magies earlier this year, the city said the fourplex was originally constructed as residential housing and has been consistently used to house people.

The Magies claim they purchased the property and began converting the units to vacation rentals before the city restricted that option, giving rise to a vested right to continue.

City Attorney Blair Henningsgaard said the city has not agreed with that assessment.

“The facts are fairly complicated and the parties have been exchanging information,” he said in an email.

Henningsgaard said the city is still trying to determine when each of the units started being used as vacation rentals. “Unfortunately, our code does not provide a clear procedure for us to follow,” he said.

The city may hold an evidentiary hearing at the Planning Commission and the issue could wind up before the City Council.

The Magies say that communication from the city has been inconsistent, including an email in 2020 which the couple interpreted as approval to convert all the units to vacation rentals.

“It feels every time there is a staff change at the city we have to revisit all of this again (with great stress) and now that we have invested so much time, money and effort, the city has now threatened to pull the rug out from underneath us after accumulating all this debt,” the couple said.

The Magies requested approval of their development as a lawful nonconforming use in May.

In the application, the couple said their intention has always been to transition the units into vacation rentals. The process started with the first cottage, they said, which was converted into a vacation rental under the business name, Astoria Downtown Cottages.

Over time, the other cottage and three units in the fourplex were also turned into vacation rentals.

The application included letters from Shannon Fitzpatrick, who owns Pacific Capital Management, and his brother, Sean Fitzpatrick, who owns Wecoma Partners, affirming the Magies' original intentions.

Pacific Capital Management managed the property from May 2018 through November while the cou-



Lydia Ely/The Astorian

Two cottages and a fourplex have been improved off Exchange Street.

ple was attending to other business and family matters, Shannon Fitzpatrick noted in his letter.

“We worked together on upgrading and updating units in a manner that would set the units up for use as future short-term rentals as tenants vacated the units and new tenants were put into place,” he wrote.

“As you and your family were winding down your other business and family matters and starting to take over more management and upgrades at the property, we started to slowly transition the units, one at a time, to short-term rentals.”

Sean Fitzpatrick, who serves on the Planning Commission and is running for mayor in November, advised the Magies as part of his role as an adviser with the Clatsop Small Business Development Center.

In his email, he noted that the high costs associated with restoring the buildings were beyond what fair market rents could support. “As a result, you would have to utilize the commercial zoning to create cash flows that could support the restoration, repairs and ongoing maintenance, which meant short-term rentals,” Fitzpatrick said.

He added that after significant investment, the buildings are safer and look better. “A great contribution to the neighborhood as it transitions from housing to commercial,” he said.

The Magies told The Astorian that they specifically searched for property with commercial zoning downtown to allow the flexibility to have vacation rentals.

They said the operation provides a full-time salary for their manager, part-time

income for multiple cleaners, generates lodging tax revenue for the city and county and brings tourism dollars downtown.

“We love our town, we love the historic architecture here, we live here and are raising our family here, we work here, we provide quality long-term housing here and have spent everything we have to restore an historic property downtown and we feel we are now, at the 11th hour, being scolded for that effort,” the Magies said. “We put our heart and soul and much blood sweat and tears to bring this property back from the edge of falling apart.”

“If we knew the city would change its mind after we'd invested so much, we would not have bought this property or done any of the restoration. Furthermore, we had no idea that the city could come and try to take our outright use away — three years after the limitations on STRs took effect, after spending so much on these buildings and getting all required approvals to operate them as short-term rentals.”

“This is very discouraging to developers and housing providers and ultimately has and will continue to reduce investment in our community as we know of investors and builders that will no longer do work in Astoria due to similar difficulty with the city.”

'It no longer felt like a home'

Austin Kettleon, a small-business owner and a veteran of the U.S. Coast Guard, has lived in a unit in the fourplex for over three years with his girlfriend and her two daughters, ages 9 and 6.

Kettleon has watched tourists replace his neigh-

bors as the units around him became vacation rentals. Eventually, his unit was the last long-term rental left.

So it wasn't unexpected when Kettleon received a termination notice in May.

“It no longer felt like a home ...,” he said. “You don't feel like decorating or anything.”

Although the 90-day notice said his apartment would be used to house one of the owners' family members, Kettleon expects it will eventually turn into a vacation rental like the rest of the units.

In a statement to The Astorian, the Magies said they provided one month's rent to Kettleon as required under Oregon law. They said they offered an alternative unit at another location, but Kettleon said he declined because it was more expensive, had less square footage and was on the other side of town.

While the couple and the city work toward a conclusion, Kettleon has been working overtime to close on a house.

He feels lucky that his family is fortunate enough to make that move. “But there's so many people that can't swing that,” he said.

Over the past three years, he has watched the number of vacation rentals tick up on the Airbnb website while workforce and affordable housing in Astoria remains scarce.

Kettleon worries about the message that will be sent to other apartment owners if the Magies are able to turn all six units into vacation rentals.

“I think it's only a matter of time before owners of those buildings say, ‘Well, these people did it with theirs, why can't I do it with mine?’ and just start doing it the same,” he said.

Disrespect: Quit rate for Oregonians was at or above 3% for seven straight months

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When school closed for Richardson's children “that support system of the education system — and all of the social benefits that are packed into our public education system — were suddenly absent.”

“Recognizing a misalignment of values is one thing, and then having it become like a very real part of your everyday professional life is kind of next level,” she said. “All of a sudden, these low-level value misalignments or dissatisfactions are very present and very immediate.”

Though she wanted more flexibility in logistics and expectations from her employer, Richardson “still thought that it was a change that I could help achieve within my workplace.” But when her current position opened up, “I decided to just take the leap.”

“In hindsight, it was past time,” Richardson said.

The quit rate for Oregonians was at or above 3% for seven straight months in late 2021 and early this year, according to the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics. Pre-pandemic, the monthly quit rate had only reached 3% or higher a handful of times since at least 2001, and never for more than two consecutive months.

In the survey, 33% of Oregonians said that they at least partially agreed that the reason employers have had difficulty filling jobs is because since the COVID-19 restrictions, “people have gotten used to not working and are continuing to live off savings and unemployment benefits and are not feeling a sense of urgency to work.”

Unemployment benefits were expanded during the height of the pandemic, but have since shrunk back. Laid-off workers, who pay into unemployment insurance through payroll, can receive roughly 65% of their weekly wages when unemployed. A person working 40 hours a week at minimum wage could receive around \$350 per week if laid off. The additional weekly payments approved by the federal government — initially \$600 and then \$300 — ended in September.

People receiving unemployment benefits typically have to demonstrate that they are searching for employment. The work search requirement was suspended during the height of the pandemic, but reinstated more than a year ago.

One in five Oregon workers switched to remote or hybrid work during the pandemic.

Workers who make \$100,000 or more were

three times more likely than workers making less than \$50,000 to have the flexibility to work from home or go into the office, the survey found.

One in four workers making less than \$50,000 had to go on unemployment at some point during the past two years. Just 1 in 10 workers making \$100,000 or more went on unemployment.

Still, 38% of working Oregonians said that nothing had changed in their employment in the past two years.

Sienna Fitzpatrick was halfway through a year-long AmeriCorps program in central Oregon when the pandemic hit. Despite the pandemic, Fitzpatrick was hired on as a full-time employee in September 2020.

Fitzpatrick's organization went to remote work and only returned back to the office this spring.

“We had a lot of really long and sometimes kind of tense discussions as a department,” about the return to the office, Fitzpatrick said, which resulted in a hybrid schedule that has had increased flexibility when needed, like for a co-worker struggling to find consistent child care.

In the survey, 44% of Oregonians said the option to work from home would determine whether they would accept a job.

“Part of the experience we all had was seeing our employers try to react and make decisions and come up with policies,” regarding both public health concerns and racial equity, Fitzpatrick said.

While they enjoy the work they do and the organization they work for, Fitzpatrick said they still see issues within their workplace. But their employer's response to issues that emerged in the pandemic — while not always perfect in everyone's view — showed they were receptive to employee's concerns.

“If I were to go to another organization that wasn't interested in hearing that kind of feedback or wasn't willing to have those kinds of hard conversations with their employees, that would definitely inform me as to how happy I would be with that group. I've definitely raised my standards for the kind of organization that I'm willing to work for,” Fitzpatrick said.

The statewide survey was conducted online from July 8 to July 16 among 1,572 Oregon residents. The margin of error was 2.47 percentage points.

The Oregon Capital Bureau is a collaboration between EO Media Group and Pamplin Media Group.

Bubble guy: Blows bubbles at sea, too

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Blowing bubbles goes beyond a simple hobby for him — it's an art.

“A lot of people, they just have this impulse to just destroy the bubbles,” he said. “It's like, well, would you take away a painter's paintbrush? Or a sculptor's chisel? You're kind of just ruining the art, running around popping them.”

Most of the time, Lampert draws a crowd of onlookers that enjoy watching the bubbles. But occasionally, Lampert gets into “bubble trouble,” as he likes to call it.

The commercial fisherman occasionally brings his “bubble sauce” with him to work. “Blowing bubbles out at sea is the best thing of all time,” he said.

The different air currents on the water create unique shapes with the bubbles to the delight of some of his co-workers.

Lampert was blowing bubbles out on a boat once while his captain was looking for a buoy. “We were going with the wind ...” he said. “He could not see where the buoy was. We were filling the sky with bubbles.”

He's also had the police called on him for blowing bubbles on private property.

But despite these encounters, Lampert's love of bubbles carries on. Going into town dressed in a clown suit or a puffy cheetah print coat and blowing extra large bubbles lets him be his “normal, weird self,” he said.

“I'm always a fan of the extra weird,” he said.



Garth Porteur, along with Gavin Lampert, is one of the 'bubble guys.'

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