

Family Living

How Expensive is Housing in the Portland Area?



By SUSAN EMMONS

After years of appearing on "most livable city" lists, Portland has now been cited as the second least affordable place to live in the nation. Throughout Multnomah County, thousands of eligible people are currently on waiting lists for federally rent-subsidized apartments. According to Housing Authority of Portland (HAP) staff, as of July 1, 1998, 2,000 low-income households are on the Low Rent Public Housing Waiting list, 450 individuals on the sub-

dized SRO waiting list, and 1,100 households on the waiting list for Section 8 tenant based vouchers or certificates, a list which would be much longer but for the fact that the sign-up period is open for only one week each year.

While there is a shortage of affordable housing throughout Portland, there is a desperate shortage downtown. Currently downtown contains only 3,832 affordable rental units. The numbers confirm what has long been sensed by minimum wage earners, the disabled, and the low income elderly: downtown affordable housing continues to disappear. This past year, we created 203 new affordable rental units downtown, yet in the same period lost 392, for a net loss of 189.

Any loss of existing affordable building in a tight housing market entails a social cost. Increased homelessness means more publicly-funded shelters, clean-up centers, and meal programs. When large num-

bers of homeless people live on the street, the city is perceived as dangerous. This, in turn, affects the city's livability, night-time vitality, and commercial success. Low-income citizens, forced to compete for an ever diminishing supply of affordable units, feel desperate and hopeless. Personal and social costs include increased levels of stress, alcohol abuse, drug abuse, mental illness, hospitalizations, unemployment, and crime. The entire community pays these costs.

For many reasons, it is in the public interest to maintain and replenish affordable housing. Lower paid workers, unable to afford a car, will be able to live close to their downtown jobs. Disabled and elderly citizens will be able to live near mass transit and cultural events, and fully benefit from public investments in the inner city.

In the case of the 199 new units built at the Pearl Court, at Northwest 9th and Kearney, affordability is al-

ready in question; just one year after NWPP helped 15 former Roosevelt Plaza tenants relocate to the Pearl Court, rents in the one-bedroom units are up to \$539 per month, \$70 over the payment standard which HAP allows on Section 8 vouchers. In other words, we are creating "affordable housing" which is not affordable to the poor.

Development of the River District is already taking shape along similar lines: although 5,555 housing units are proposed, in fact, none of these units will ever show up in this directory, unless the City insists on setting a priority for housing affordable to citizens living at 36% of median income, which is all a full-time minimum-wage worker earns.

Choices are made everyday about how to spend community resources. The City currently makes decisions about spending a variety of federal, state, and local revenues which could potentially be utilized for increasing affordable housing supply. Because

rehabilitation and new construction of affordable housing for low-income citizens is not currently a profit-making endeavor, public sector incentives are necessary to spur interest in building. A decision to spend a larger percentage of available funds on affordable housing would solve the housing crisis downtown.

A truly livable city will reflect a wide economic diversity among its downtown resident. With this social goal in mind, City Council must work to create successful partnerships be-

tween its own housing related agencies, other regional governments, banks, foundations, religious organizations, corporations, small businesses, local property owners, developers, property management firms, neighborhood associations, social service agencies, low-income prospective tenants, and other interested citizens.

Let's see that affordable housing once again exists for rich, middle income and poor alike, in the heart of livable Portland.

Holt International Children's Services

Holt International Children's Services, the country's oldest and largest intercountry adoption agency, is looking for families interested in adopting a child from overseas. Holt's Eugene office will host a free Adoption Information Meeting in Portland on Saturday, September 12. The meeting will be from 10:00 am-noon in the

Lorenzen Conference Center at Emanuel Legacy Hospital, 301 N. Graham St.

The need to recruit adoptive families reflects changes in adoption trends in this country, as well as the openness of countries, like China, to the concept of international adoption.

Susan Soon-Keum Cox, Holt's spokesperson, says, "The adoption picture has changed dramatically in the

country. It used to be that families wanting to adopt could wait a long time. Now, it is children who are waiting for families. The need to get them out to orphanages and into adoptive families is quite urgent. For some children, intercountry adoption is the only hope they have."

Holt social workers will provide information about Holt's adoption programs,

and the basic procedure for international adoption. A family who has adopted through Holt will share their personal experience and answer questions.

The meeting is open to anyone interested in adoption and is free of charge. For more information call Kathie Stocker at 503-246-3236.

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Volunteer Opportunity Available



The Portland Women's Crisis Line is happy to announce a new men's training to begin on October 3, 1998.

Deadline for applications is September 18, 1998 and applications can be received by calling Kristen Ruiz at 232-9545. If you have any questions please feel free to call 232-9545. Practicum students and intern students are encouraged to apply.

The Portland Women's Crisis Line is a non-profit organization funded in part by the United Way. The Portland Women's Crisis Line is an EOE/AA agency.

5-Session Parenting Education Series



Parents Anonymous Of Oregon will be offering a 5-session parenting education series entitled, "How To Understand And Guide Your children's Behavior: Five Tips To Effective Parenting."


The classes will be held on the east side at Holladay Center: 2600 SE 71st in Portland, on October 29, November 5, 12, 25 from 6:30-8:30 PM.

For more information, call 503-452-4785 or 503-452-4789.

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