



HOUSING



Portland advocates for affordable housing make demands on local political leaders. The downtown rally was held last summer.

Campaign for Affordable Housing

Questioning benefits from urban renewal

BY SARAH BLOUNT
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

The Portland Development Commission's urban renewal projects, like the new South Waterfront, enhance Portland's image, but living in an urban renewal area isn't an option for many low-income adults, seniors and people with disabilities.

Housing advocates at Affordable Housing Now believe PDC urban renewal projects are out of touch with the city's priorities to create affordable renting, end homelessness and close the homeowner's gap.

"We don't need public money for high-end condos for doctors," said Michael Anderson, a member of the group. "We need housing for nurses, coffee baristas and people not earning top dollars."

According to Affordable Housing Now, approximately 13 to 15 percent of urban renewal funds over

recent years fall in line with the city's affordable housing goals; the group suggests 30 percent go toward those goals, with an emphasis on residents who earn 80 percent or below the median family income.

The advocates stressed that with a city budget shortfall of \$6.4 million and crucial housing problems for low-income residents, public money for high-end housing doesn't make sense.

In addition, the federal government has made cuts in local housing programs, and \$6.6 million is needed just to break even for the city's housing budget, the advocates claim.

Affordable Housing Now has pushed through a housing investment fund, with a plan for the city to match its \$30 million commitment. So far, the group has secured \$13 million from the city's general fund and is hoping for the remaining \$17 million in the next four years.

The group is also working with another advocacy organization StandForChildren, to come up with a joint proposal that would find needed funding for schools and housing. Affordable Housing Now said it recognizes the link between

a child's stable home life and their ability to excel in school. They are working with Stand for Children to secure funding for the housing and schools budget this year.

"When kids move around a lot their grades suffer," Anderson said. "Studies show when a student moves three or more times during elementary, they fall over a year behind in reading scores. In eighth grade, they're four times more likely to drop out of school."

Anderson said the city council is weighing tough decisions on many priorities that need city funding.

"We hope that council's support of housing as a core community need will guide them as they make their decisions on the housing investment fund and urban renewal form."



An artist's drawing of the skyscraper condos coming to Portland's new South Waterfront District. Advocates for low-income and senior adults say they won't create affordable living.

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