

Pressure Builds for Higher Rents

continued ▲ from front

Greg Frick, who has worked at HFO Northwest Apartment Investments since 1993, said from an apartment standpoint, Portland has weathered the housing crisis well. But with the low rate of rental vacancy throughout the city, people will have less choices of where they can live.

"Consequently, there is going to be more upward pressure on rent," said Frick.

Although rent could become increasingly expensive, he said what Portland really needs is job growth and increased wages.

"You can't just all of a sudden rocket your rent prices when people aren't making more money," he said. "If we don't get any wage inflation, there is going to be a damper on what we can pay for rent."

The post-recession return to renting, mixed with high unemployment rates, falling wages, and low rental vacancy rates, has catalyzed housing stability to remain even more out of reach for low-income families throughout Portland and the country.

Ari Rapkin, a co-director of the

Community Alliance of Tenants located in Portland, explained the housing crisis drew attention to the lack of affordable housing in the region because there is now, more than ever, a higher level of competition for the fewer places available.

"People with moderate incomes are being forced to make decisions that low income families have been forced to deal with for a long time," he said. "People are being forced to choose between buying medicine, groceries and rent, and that is not a choice that anyone should have to make."

According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition, a unit is considered affordable if it costs no more than 30 percent of the renter's income.

The Community Alliance of Tenants has a hotline for people with housing questions, concerns and predicaments. "A lot of our members and people we talk with on the hotline are paying 50 to 60 percent of their income, or even more, for rent," said Rapkin. "And that's a very precarious situation."

While a lot of people can afford rent on a day to day basis, this is

presuming nothing will go wrong, but Rapkin recognizes that this is not reality. "We know that people get sick and things go wrong, and that is what makes people homeless," he said.

According to Janet Byrd, the executive Director of Neighborhood Partnership, affordable housing is really the key to increase the quality of life for many families within the

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— Janet Byrd, Executive Director of Neighborhood Partnership

city.

With the apartment market booming, higher prices in the rental market continue to force Oregonians to choose between paying rent, putting food on the table, and paying utility bills—and the numbers are projected to only become higher.

While Portland is historically considered to have one of the lowest

rental markets on the West Coast for major markets, Byrd explained that low income families are being forced now more than ever to look even harder for apartments they can afford.

Although there are multiple avenues for funding and subsidies to help families find affordable housing, Rapkin explained that there is a lot of difficulty even to get on the waiting

list, which often only opens up a week out of every other year.

"The waiting list for affordable subsidized housing can be years long," he said. "So it's not an immediate solution to the housing situation."

Low vacancy rates also create increased pressure on tenants to accept housing that doesn't meet their

needs. Rapkin explained, "This means it's a lot easier for a landlord to say, 'if you don't like it, then move.'"

He added that in situations like these, he sees time and time again, tenants living in unsafe and unhealthy housing because they don't have any other options.

"People have to sacrifice a lot to stay in housing," Byrd said. "When food banks survey why individuals need food baskets, the price of housing is something that continuously comes up."

Neighborhood Partnership along with Housing Alliance makes sure money is invested to protect resources that build more affordable housing, as well as make sure there is preservation of existing affordable living opportunities.

Although residents will have to wait to see how much rental prices will truly rise, Rapkin explained there is still hope for the future.

"A big part of why we're here as an organization is that tenants can have a voice, and we can impact the decisions that affect us," he said. "That is why we are here, and that is why we are welcoming tenants to get involved."

INVITATION FOR BID

Northeast Oregon Housing Authority is seeking sealed bids from qualified firms to provide new Electric Ranges. Bid packets are available by calling Dale Inslee, Dir. Of Asset Management, NEOHA Telephone (541) 963-5360 ext. #30, TDD (541) 963-2465 no later than the 26th of May, IFB closes the 2nd of June, 2011

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African American Men Speak Out

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cally have not been engaged by their elected officials," she said after the meeting. "I am going to let them know I was serious, and there will be things done because

of their courageous conversations."

Even as the meeting had to come to a close, a line of those who felt compelled to share their situations ran long within the board room. Although this was the first meet-

ing held for African American men at a town hall event, Smith explained this will not be the last.

"I heard them loud and clear," she said. "We can turn this thing around."

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