

Churches cont'd from pg 1

Success Stories

Maria Elena Guerra, executive director of Farmworker Housing Development Corporation, explained how her organization has used the Oregon Housing Community Services Predevelopment Program currently in existence to help fill the need for housing in rural ar-

church sits in one of the wealthiest neighborhoods in Oregon, and so it had ample funds and was able to have an active role in working alongside the developer.

“We know that we are an inspiration for other churches in the state, but we can’t be a model for them,” he said.

Dan Bryant, director of

“We are land-rich and resource-poor

eas more quickly.

“It has allowed us to put in place a pipeline of 200 units,” Guerra testified. “One hundred of them will be up and ready in the next 18 months, which is great news if you consider that before, just to put 50 units in the ground would take us between three to eight years.”

Housing developments don’t necessarily mean the end of the congregation’s presence at the site, as the Rev. Paul Richards-Kuan, pastor of Christ United Methodist Church in the Cedar Mill neighborhood, explained. In April 2024, his church opened a 54-unit affordable housing development for LGBTQ seniors.

“Just across the parking lot from my church building, it is much-needed affordable housing that quickly reached capacity,” Richards-Kuan said. “We have special services for LGBTQ members provided by Friendly House Elder Pride Services. We have a resident who lived her entire life in the closet or without safe and affordable housing. In her 90s, for the first time she’s able to live both out of the closet and in safe, affordable housing.”

Richards-Kuan was quick to add that his

public policy at Square One Villages, said his organization in part used American Rescue Plan funding to purchase Peace Presbyterian Church in Eugene, where it developed 70 units of multifamily, limited-equity co-operative housing.

“In a limited equity co-op, you have individuals who become owners through their co-op,” Bryant said. “As a former pastor myself, I can speak to how well this coincides with the mission-driven work of a church, in working to provide low-income households greater financial stability, greater agency in their housing – it just makes for a wonderful partnership.”

The Rev. Brett Pinder of the United Methodist Oregon-Idaho Annual Conference stated there are 153 churches represented within his organization.

“Over half of them right now worship with less than 25 people on a Sunday,” he said. “In the coming years there will be a large wave of churches deciding what to do with their land, adding to the thousands of acres in desirable locations.”

It is a decision First African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church in North

Food cont'd from pg 1

“It isn’t just a gap in services, it’s a deep systemic shortcoming that leaves tens of thousands of families vulnerable to food insecurity, despite their vital contributions to our state,” Campos said.

Oregon Food Bank President Andrea Williams reported that immigrants residing in Oregon, both documented and undocumented, contribute \$5.6 billion annually in taxes, “yet thousands are excluded from critical food assistance or SNAP, our nation’s most effective anti-hunger program.”

Meanwhile, more Oregonians are turning to community food banks even as federal-level funding has been cut. The Oregon Food Bank reported experiencing a 31% increase in need.

“Emergency food systems were never meant to be a substitute for inclusive solutions,” Campos said.

The Oregon Food Bank does not ask about the immigration status of those

it serves.

“We know that 1 in 6 kids in Oregon are facing hunger, and we also know that there have been federal cuts that have impacted the food supply,” Hernandez said. “We are very worried about what’s happening, and we think

“It isn’t just a gap in services, it’s a deep systemic shortcoming

this policy could help with that.”

The Oregon Food Bank worked with Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon to help craft the policy at the heart of SB 611. The Legislative Fiscal Office projects the cost of providing benefits for the estimated 3,200 children eligible for Food for All Oregonians over the next four years would total \$16 million



PHOTO COURTESY OF PORTLAND FIRE & RESCUE

Portland Fire & Rescue Receives a New Tool to Address EV Battery Compartment Fires

Fire fighters use training prop with examples of a metal garage door, 1/4" steel cylinder, 1" thick concrete, and a specialized double steel prop to simulate the floorboard of a vehicle and the outside casing of the battery compartment. All members learned how to pierce each object and some tricks to increase success when using the Cold Cut Cobra.

Portland made two years ago.

Brief Windows

Proponents warned that many churches considering such transitional projects have short timeframes to make a decision.

“There are over 100 students they cannot find shelter for right now

“Unfortunately, when a congregation reaches the point of discerning closure, their financial capacity has been diminished to the point where the costs associated with pre-development are prohibitive,” the Rev. David Eppelsheimer, affiliated with the Oregon Senate of the Evangelical

Lutheran Church in America, said. “In the grand scheme, these are small costs that would be a drop in the bucket for for-profit owners who come with high reserves and high returns, whereas for a faith community at diminished capacity, this cost is a barrier that stops them in their tracks.”

He added, “Which means this is a lever to pull that would be a small cost to the state to create an outsized impact across our communities for our neighbors who need housing.”

Eppelsheimer reported that in past years, a coalition of faith communities surveyed congregations who were ready and willing to launch affordable housing developments on their properties.

“They cumulatively held 200 acres worth of land assessed at over \$108 million on the traditional market,” he said.

“Because of this predevelopment barrier, some of those were not able to continue the project in the time they had left to operate and they had to sell.”

“So often, what ends up happening is they run out of time and they end up selling to an entity that does not provide what our communities most need right now,” Pastor Anna Hosley of Storyline Community in Clackamas and a lead organizer with Leaven Land and Housing Coalition, said.

“I recently met with a (homeless student) advocate in our local school district who said there are over 100 students they cannot find shelter for right now,” Hosley explained. “These are families that are often living out of cars or on friends’ couches. We don’t have enough supply to shelter our kids. Meanwhile, one of the congregations

in our school district is trying to build that supply, and they’re ready to go. One of the members, Bonnie, recently told me, ‘I need to see something good come out of this land before I die, and I am 84 years old so we better get cracking.’

“I’ve seen so many faith communities that we work with hit this barrier and get stuck because they don’t have the reserves, they don’t have the promise of future returns, they don’t have the financial expertise or staffing capacity to get over this hump or to take on a loan. It’s a congregation of Bonnies who have passion and so much land in many cases, but not enough money for this little molehill.”

The bill advances for senate consideration. A public hearing is scheduled for May 12 with the Senate Committee on Housing and Development.

from the general fund.

Bipartisan Appeals

The bill enjoyed bipartisan support, according to Sen. Suzanne Weber (R-Tillamook), a longtime elementary school teacher who signed on as a co-sponsor.

“This legislation is bipartisan, bicameral, from legislators in urban, suburban and rural Oregon,” she said during a public hearing on the bill last month.

Weber explained that in the years before regular school breakfast programs in public schools, she often fed a morning meal to many of her students experiencing food insecurity.

“One thing I could count on was that if a student came to school hungry, no matter how hard I tried, no matter how hard the student tried, they would never be able to reach their potential,” she said. “We had something called the



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