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OUR VIEW

Laying a housing foundation as economy grows

If our economy is a house, then housing is the foundation. Every new job added at a data center or RV manufacturer or local hospital is one more person looking for a home, and depending on the profession, those housing needs will look different.

In Umatilla County there is a narrow 1.4 percent vacancy rate for apartments and low-income housing, which is good news for landlords but not for newly hired workers hoping to move into the area.

They're often forced to settle for either a higher price than they hoped to pay or a lower quality living arrangement. The common rule is that a vacancy rate under 5 percent is considered slanted toward the landlord and anything higher is a renter's market.

We're making some progress, with new developments in Pendleton and Boardman, and an ever-growing housing stock in Hermiston, though often in the form of single-family homes, which are a quicker return on investment for a developer. In this week's story about housing on the west end, Jade McDowell reported that all else being equal, developers are more likely to build in a larger urban area because the costs are the same but they can charge more for rent.

To help the process along, Pendleton has given developer Saj Jivanjee incentives including land and infrastructure investments to build his Pendleton Heights development. Hermiston has loosened up its rules on setbacks to make oddly-shaped lots more attractive to developers. And in Boardman, PROffutt, the real estate division of the R.D. Offutt company that owns RDO Equipment and

Threemile Farms, broke ground this week on a 240-unit apartment complex. The city also offers a \$5,000 grant for people who buy homes in Boardman.

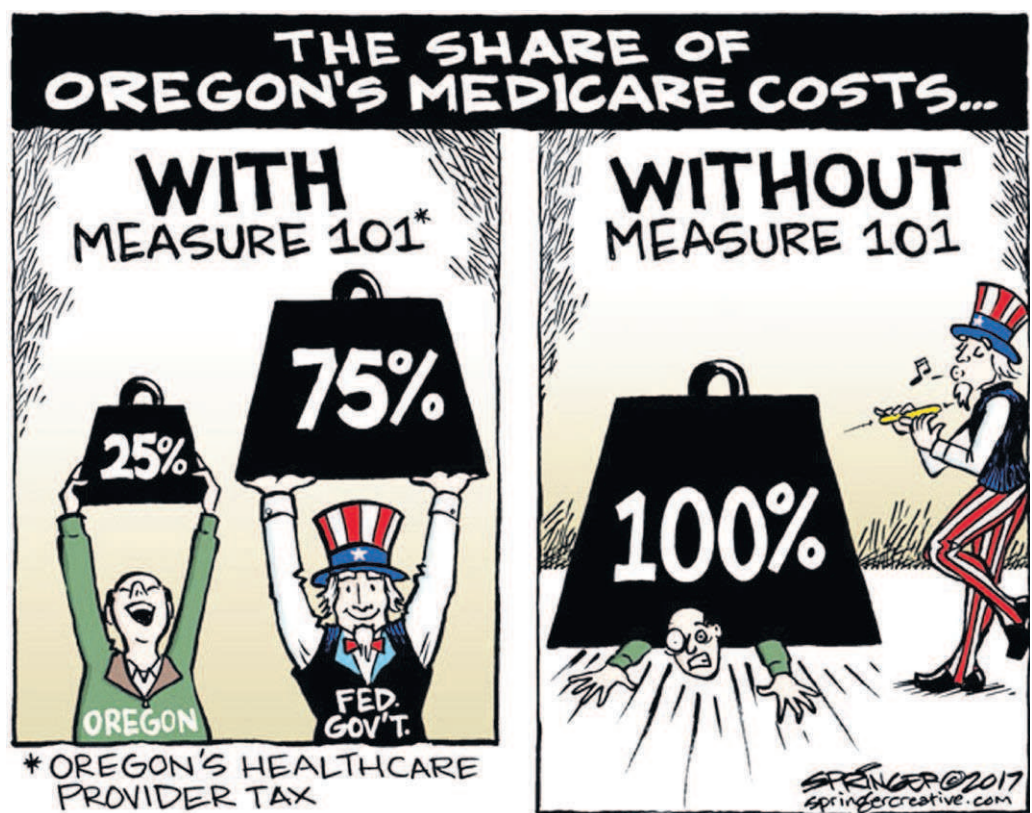
We know it's important to employers. Not only do businesses like Costco look at population sizes before deciding whether to locate in a community, but employers make their decisions based on potential workforce, and the ability of that workforce to live happily nearby. We know good jobs have gone elsewhere because employers fear it would be a struggle to keep their payrolls full in Eastern Oregon.

We also know that many of those good workers have decided to put down roots in the Tri-Cities, keeping our communities from growing at a natural pace with the economy and creating challenges for cities to figure out how to pay for increased strain on roads and other services by workers who are paying property taxes and gas taxes in a different state. Studies have shown that long commutes also have a negative impact on workers' health and productivity, and puts them at greater risk for being involved in a crash. Those drawbacks become particularly apparent during a harsh winter like last year's, when interstate closures and dangerous conditions kept employees from reporting to work.

At the risk of mixing metaphors, it's been described as a chicken and an egg scenario. Housing relies on jobs, jobs rely on housing. Hopefully we can add enough bulk and strength to the housing foundation to continue adding to our economy while building up communities and neighborhoods.

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Unsigned editorials are the opinion of the East Oregonian editorial board of publisher Kathryn Brown, managing editor Daniel Wattenburger, and opinion page editor Tim Trainor. Other columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of the East Oregonian.



OTHER VIEWS

How Amazon took Seattle's soul

SEATTLE — I live in the city that hit the Amazon jackpot, now the biggest company town in the United States. Long before the mad dash to land the second headquarters for the world's largest online retailer, Amazon found us. Since then, we've been overwhelmed by a future we never had any say over.

With the passing of Thursday's deadline for final bids, it's been strange to watch nearly every city in the United States pimp itself out for the right to become HQ2 — and us. Tax breaks. Free land. Champagne in the drinking fountains. Anything!

In this pageant for prosperity, the desperation is understandable. Amazon's offer to create 50,000 high-paying jobs and invest \$5 billion in your town is a once-in-a-century, destiny-shaping event.

Amazon is not mining coal or cooking chemicals or offering minimum wage to hapless "associates." The new jobs will pay \$100,000 or more in salary and benefits. In Seattle, Amazon employees are the kind of young, educated, mass-transit-taking, innovative types that municipal planners dream of.

So, if you're lucky enough to land HQ2 — congrats! But be careful, all you urban suitors longing for a hip, creative class. You think you can shape Amazon? Not a chance. It will shape you. Well before Amazon disrupted books, music, television, furniture — everything — it disrupted Seattle.

At first, it was quirky in the Seattle way: Jeff Bezos, an oversize mailbox and his little online startup. His thing was books, remember? How quaint. How retro. Almost any book, delivered to your doorstep, cheap. But soon, publishers came to see Amazon as the evil empire, bringing chaos to an industry that hadn't changed much since Herman Melville's day.

The prosperity bomb, as it's called around here, came when Amazon took over what had been a clutter of parking lots and car dealers near downtown, and decided to build a very urban campus. This neighborhood had been proposed as a grand central city park, our own Champs-Élysées, with land gifted by Paul Allen, a Microsoft co-founder. But voters rejected it. I still remember an architect friend telling me that cities should grow "organically," not by design.

Cities used to be tied to geography: a river, a port, the lee side of a mountain range. Boeing grew up here, in part, because of its proximity to spruce timber used to make early airplanes. And then, water turned the industrial engines that helped to win World War II.

The new era dawned with Microsoft, after the local boy Bill Gates returned with a

fledgling company. From then on, the mark of a successful city was one that could cluster well-educated people in a cool place. "The Smartest Americans Are Heading West" was the headline in the recent listing of the Bloomberg Brain Concentration Index. This pattern is likely to continue, as my colleagues at the Upshot calculated in picking Denver to win the Amazon sweepstakes.

At the bottom of the brain index was Muskegon, Michigan, a place I recently visited. I found the city lovely, with its lakeside setting, fine old houses and world-class museum. When I told a handful of Muskegonites about the problems in Seattle from the metastatic growth of Amazon, they were not sympathetic.

What comes with the title of being the fastest growing big city in the country, with having the nation's hottest real estate market, is that the city no longer works for some people. For many others, the pace of change, not to mention the traffic, has been disorienting. The character of Seattle, a rain-loving communal shrug, has changed. Now we're a city on amphetamines.

Amazon is secretive. And they haven't been the best civic neighbor, late to the charity table. Yes, the company has poured \$38 billion into the city's economy. They have 40,000 employees here, who in turn attracted 50,000 other new jobs. They own or lease a fifth of all the class A office space.

But median home prices have doubled in five years, to \$700,000. This is not a good thing in a place where teachers and cops used to be able to afford a house with a water view.

Our shiny new megalopolis has spawned the inevitable political backlash. If you think there's nothing more annoying than a Marxist with a bullhorn extolling a failed 19th-century economic theory, put that person on your City Council. So Seattle's council now includes a socialist, Kshama Sawant, who wants "the public" to take over Amazon ownership. Other council members have proposed a tax on jobs. Try that proposal in Detroit.

As a Seattle native, I miss the old city, the lack of pretense, and dinner parties that didn't turn into discussions of real estate porn. But I'm happy that wages have risen faster here than anywhere else in the country. I like the fresh energy. To the next Amazon lottery winner I would say, enjoy the boom — but be careful what you wish for.

Timothy Egan worked for 18 years as a writer for The New York Times, first as the Pacific Northwest correspondent, then as a national enterprise reporter.



TIMOTHY EGAN
Comment

YOUR VIEWS

There are times we all should take a knee

Since when is kneeling disrespectful? When you pray at home or in a house of your God do you kneel? When you receive an honor from the monarchy do you kneel? Do you kneel before a fallen comrade, or to give CPR? That is out of respect for life. I am shocked that no one has referred to that.

When was the last time anyone said the Pledge of Allegiance? In a public place or privately? Have you forgotten the words and lost the meaning of those words? "One nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all." When the Pledge of Allegiance was taken out of the schools we lost the meaning and the importance of the flag. And look up the definition of indivisible. Does this not apply to people of color? And justice does not mean "just us." Jesus was of darker skin!

Those young men were not being disrespectful. It was very brave of them and they chose a nonviolent way of expressing their deep emotions on this issue. And who would have more right? Four hundred years of slavery! That is a tough act to follow. And they are still being singled out with racism, anger and hatred. Why? I don't get it. They

have fought and lost their lives in our wars keeping our country safe. The young athletes were saying "remember us." They were representing all people of color. And what injustices they are still being put through due to bigotry, ignorance and bullies!

Let's show some respect and compassion to humanity, be a little more flexible and not so rigid in what we feel is right and wrong. Consider what other people have been through. All of the above is what makes America great! Not building walls or shipping children to a strange country that isn't home, or refusing sanctuary to people needing help.

The man in the White House is a trigger for hatred, anger and criticism. He makes it all boil to the surface and then people act violently and negatively. He is a catalyst instead of having a calming influence. He wants to do battle. He is making our country a ticking time bomb and acts like it is one of his reality shows.

I realize I'm older, but since when has the President of the United States of America descended to the level of street language of the youth?

Stella Enright-Queen
Francis Sewell
Echo

LETTERS POLICY

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