

Finding a place to live on minimum wage in Seaside

We heard an impassioned plea last Monday at the Seaside City Council. John Hagerty stood before councilors during public comment and said “I need a simple, inexpensive apartment in Seaside.”

His words stirred the councilors. In a city where housing is the key to a functioning workforce, they didn’t need explaining.

“I am currently employed and work 30 to 40 hours per week,” he said. “I generally net between \$1,200 to \$1,500 per month. I have no criminal record. I have good credit. I have no pets. I do not drink, smoke or do drugs. I rarely have company visit. I have no prior evictions.”

Hagerty’s problem is his owner is moving back into his apartment. Hagerty must be out by March 19.

“The rental market in Seaside is extremely limited,” he said. “I have exhausted all the more traditional ways of looking for an apartment. I describe my references from previous landlords as ‘absolutely golden.’”

No shrinking violet, Hagerty took his campaign to the streets as well, standing in the Safeway lot with a sign dramatizing his plight.

He not only designed and held a sign seeking an affordable rental, but provided a “fact sheet” with contact information, rationale, a work resume and even a list of his previous landlords for the past 10 years, with phone numbers and contact emails included.

Hagerty is an articulate voice for those he described as “the working poor.”

“You have a serious problem in Seaside that has a very dramatic effect on the citizens you are responsible for,” he told councilors.

“There are not enough apartments in Seaside to provide housing for its residents who are unable to afford to purchase their own home. The result of that shortage is that apartments that do become available are overpriced in a seller’s market, making them unaffordable to the people who work the minimum to low-wage jobs that support this town.”

City council listens

If Hagerty were a politician, he’d probably be pretty good at it. His presentation was as robust as his plea.

“Currently I can only find one apartment to rent in the city of Seaside, a three-bedroom for over \$1,000 a month, way out of my price range,” Hagerty said. “I have people who are supportive and helpful who are networking for me and acting as references. The company that currently manages the place I live on is working to find me an affordable alternative. I’m on a first-name basis with every landlord in this city who will allow me to talk to them. I may now have to quit my job, apply for unemployment, try to explain this to them, and then move away to the charity of relatives on the other side of the state if I cannot find a place to live.

“I have not been late with my rent since 1990,” he continued. “They like me at my job. I love my job. But I’m old. I’m broke-down. There’s not that many jobs that I can physically do but I’m still an asset to this community and I go out of my way to maintain that status wherever I live.

“The city of Seaside needs to do something for our citizens.”

Response

Hagerty is not alone. At every level from high to low a housing shortage exists, a result of the enticing environment and economic opportunities. There are jobs as Hagerty points out, but local businesses are hard-pressed to exceed the minimum wage.

The U.S. Census Bureau deems “30 percent rule” a guideline for portion of income a family can spend for rent and still have enough left over for other nondiscretionary spending.

The 2014 U.S. Census reports a population of 6,481 in Seaside, with 4,501 housing units to serve them.

With the Oregon minimum wage at \$9.25 per hour or \$390 for a 40-hour week before taxes, that would represent a gross income of \$1,560 per month. Forty percent of that for rent would be \$624 per month.

On Craigslist, the only apartment fitting that bill was a 400-foot cabin in Seaview, Washington, for \$625. The best bargain we found was in Ocean Park, Washington, a 600-foot cabin can be found for \$550. In Seaside, a duplex for \$925 is the lowest priced listing.

On Zillow, we found a two-bedroom, one-bath apartment on Avenue I for \$850 a month, and the same rental home on Craigslist.

Even if Hagerty or other minimum-wage workers pay 50 percent of their gross income — \$780 per month — they still would not be able to afford the cheapest listing in Seaside.

Consider that year-round tenants are also competing with



John Hagerty stands on the sidewalk in front of Safeway with a sign to express his concern about Seaside’s limited long-term rental market.

short-term renters who generally pay a far higher amount, the numbers are daunting.

Council is listening

Hagerty’s message is loud and clear and it was obvious Seaside city councilors heard it last week.

Mayor Don Larsen pointed out affordable units under construction behind Coast Hardware and another 74-home plan in the works.

Expansion of the city’s urban growth boundary could provide more land for real estate development, but that comes with its own costs, City Manager Mark Winstanley said.

‘Linch pin’

System development fees are the “linch pin” of affordable housing in Seaside, Councilor Seth Morrisey said.

These fees are typically the cost of infrastructure, like roads, sewers and other utilities and are charged to developers. The fee is set by the municipality.

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If these fees are waived to encourage the building of affordable units, the cost would be passed on to the current population, Winstanley said. This is a “philosophical discussion” in which the council must decide who will pay. “There are cities that don’t have sys development fees and they simply load up on the utility customer and they say that’s who going to pay that,” he said. “It’s back to a philosophical question, the question is that don’t. The question would be are they doing it right by having the utility customers pay the fees, or are you doing it right by having the developer pay the fee?”

In communities where the system development fees aren’t high enough, he said, you get a backlash from the people in the community because we’ve got to raise water and sewer rates raise school rates to make up the difference, that makes up the problem in the game, whether you’re going to pay these costs currently for something you’re going to need in the future.

“When you mitigate system development fees for a particular project, you mortgage the future,” Winstanley said. “But council could make a discussion if they want system development fees for specific purposes.”

State, county offer resources

A landlord in Astoria works closely with the veterans case management program Supportive Services for Veterans and their Families, a supportive housing program for veterans and their families. The program, according to Executive Director Elaine Bruce of Clatsop Community Action, works to help vets who are homeless or are near homeless.

“We work with a number of landlords throughout the county for apartments, small houses or single room occupancy,” Bruce said.

“The program has housed over 20 vets over the past year and it’s often a slow process due to housing barriers that we help to overcome, but we’ve been very successful regardless.”

On a state level, a new House bill lengthens required notice periods for rent increases and termination of tenancies. It also allows tenants to recover three months’ rent if notification requirements are not met.

The state provides a list of income-based housing opportunities at egov.hcs.state.or.us.

Remembering a former hospital in Cole Building

Wasn’t Monday, Feb. 8, a beautiful day for winter? It was 71 degrees on my thermometer. Unfortunately, I didn’t go out till the cooler late afternoon, but it was still phenomenal — our day of summer. Since then, it’s been rain, rain and more rain; just so we don’t get spoiled. On Sunday, I had a mizzly walk home from church. The work is moving apace on Holiday Drive, although there is still much to be done. It’s great the way the workmen have arranged for life to go on in spite of the activity. With machines of today, it’s lots easier. What is the interval when knowledge doubles? I may be one of these who says, “Stop the world, I want to get off.” Not just yet, though. I have a few projects left. Seeing all the activity on sidewalks, it makes me nostalgic for the impending loss of the Kennedy 102-year-old paving. I’ve hopped my way to school and Sunday school for a lot of years on it, jumping over the squares marked S and W for sewer and water. Still, the town I grew up in has long since disappeared.

A woman called recently to inquire about the Cole building north of Fourth Ave. when it was used as a hospital. That was in the ’20s or ’30s when I was just a tad, so my memories are minimal. I remember visiting Leona McKay there with my mother. Miss McKay was a heart patient and often hospitalized. Joan Hill’s late mother-in-law once told me about her years of working there in the maternity department. She said they opened the oven door on the stove when it was cooling down and laid some of the babies there for warmth. Once in a while I like to tell people I trained with Florence Nightingale, only those were the days of three to four — maybe more — patients to a bed, which is even too much for me. I worry about the guys in the middle.

A program on TV — maybe, Oregon Field Guild, had an episode of making meals from invasive species. Besides dishes of thistle, which they say tastes like asparagus, and dandelion greens, they also ate things like frog legs and starlings! I was appalled. Even though I’ve heard of the bad things those birds do, I could never muster a dislike for creatures with such beautiful feathers. I like the way they sing, too and mimic others. I’m also a Downton Abbey fan and hate for an episode to end. Doc Martin, likewise.

It was a real joy to have Dr. Shafer and his wife Ann come to church with us on Valentine’s Day. When they visit, it’s like they’ve never been away. Without giving it much thought, we also celebrated Presidents’ Day and Oregon’s birthday.

Laugh lines:

A lady walked into the doctor’s offices.
Doctor: “Mrs. Cohen, your check came back.”
Mrs. Cohen: “So did my arthritis!”
(Courtesy of a Henny Youngman special)

LETTERS

Available land?

Concerned Seaside residents: There have been some decisions made during the last seven months that will impact all residents, some much more than others. In any event, we will all be impacted.

Briefly, there is a contingent of people, public and private, who insist we (the city of Seaside) need more land in order to have sufficient land available to cover the needs of the burgeoning population of Seaside. The issue being referenced is “The Urban Growth Boundary” also known as the UGB. I have attended the Planning Commission meetings regarding this since last summer. I have yet to hear one Seaside resident stand up for this; the only proponent is Weyerhaeuser.

At issue here is how the numbers (various statistics) developed as they did, in order to qualify this endeavor. It’s really quite simple: Does Seaside have enough vacancies and other land to meet the influx of people to Seaside in the coming years?

We have to ask: Whose idea was this, who is financing this, who stands to gain? You know, interesting questions like that.

Weyerhaeuser is the sole stake holder in this venture. The city of Seaside is using the services of a consultant, who is paid for by Weyerhaeuser. Weyerhaeuser owns approximately 140 acres of the proposed 200 acres needed “to cover the needs of the influx of people to Seaside.” The city of Seaside is under no directive to do this. The city is being led by the consultant who is — that’s right, paid by Weyerhaeuser.

The current proposal being considered has an unmet housing need of 833 units, whereas reasonable statistics show as few as 41 housing units needed. While the Planning Commission and the consultant are seeking another 200 acres to be included in the UGB, there is no mention of the 100 acres Seaside has in inventory already.

The real kicker to all this is the buried agenda in all this UGB garbage. They have the intension of extending South Wahanna through the wetlands to the south in order to hook up with Beerman Creek. Whether you have a stake in this or not, this undertaking solves nothing for anyone. I’m at a loss as to whom this would benefit. Why would it even be considered?

There are details ad infinitum, I encourage you to come to the next Planning Commission meeting, held at Seaside City Hall at 7 p.m. March 1. Your attendance is crucial.

Buz Ottem
Seaside

Tobacco 21

I want to thank The Daily Astorian editors for the editorial in support of raising the state’s age of tobacco sales to 21 (“Raise smoking age from 18 to 21,” Feb. 18).

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