

Clatsop County looks at surplus property for housing

Fifteen parcels are identified

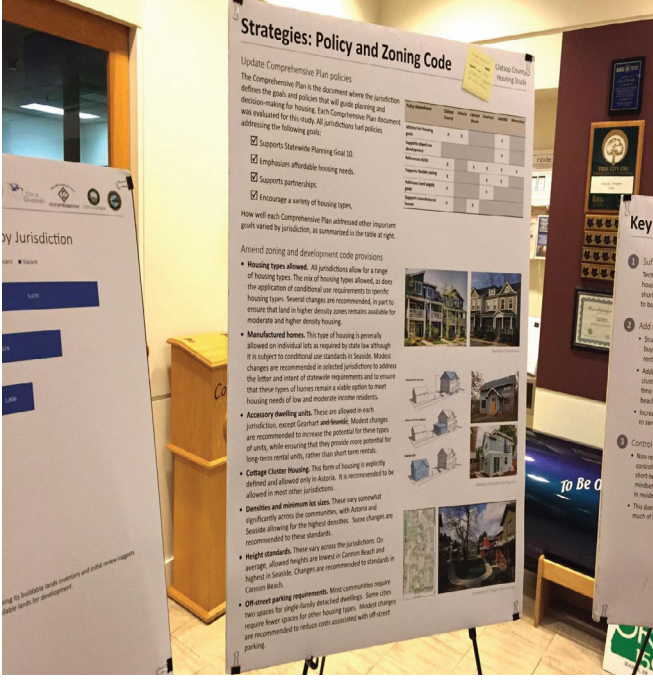
By NICOLE BALES
The Astorian

In an effort to support new housing and social services, Clatsop County has identified surplus land that can be developed by cities and nonprofits.

The county last Friday issued a request for expressions of interest on 15 properties in Astoria, Warrenton and Seaside that can be used for low-income housing, social services and child care.

Parties will have until May 13 to submit their ideas.

“Offering potentially buildable surplus land is one way the county can tangibly support affordable housing needs within cities,” County Manager Don Bohn said in a state-



R.J. Marx

Strategies listed from the county housing study.

ment. “We look forward to collaborating with our city and nonprofit partners in an effort to move the needle.”

Patty Jo Angelini, the county’s public affairs offi-

cer, said the county started working with the Association of Oregon Counties and Angelo Planning Group, a Portland-based company, early last year to

identify tools to help alleviate the affordable housing shortage.

“Over the last year, local cities have been forming committees, looking into solutions and listening to concerns of residents and local businesses,” Angelini said in an email. “Although the county is limited in what we can do, we want to do all that we can do.”

The expressions of interest will be reviewed by the county and cities. County staff will make recommendations to the county Board of Commissioners.

Eight of the properties are in Astoria. One is the site of the former Darigold Building on the corner of Ninth and Duane streets. The others are vacant neighboring parcels located between Olney Avenue and Astoria Middle School.

The county has three properties in Warrenton, including more than 14 acres off of Ridge Road, 11

acres to the north of S.W. Ninth Street and east of Juniper Avenue, and about 3 acres of off S.W. 11th Street. The smaller property is almost fully covered in significant wetlands, and the others have portions covered by wetlands.

In Seaside, the county has two neighboring parcels zoned industrial. One has access from N. Holladay Drive near 24th Avenue, the other has access from U.S. Highway 101.

Two other properties in Seaside sit along Neawanna Creek. One is off of 12th Street and the other is near Fifth Avenue.

The property near Fifth does not have direct access and has development constraints, so it has been identified as a poor candidate for affordable housing.

Astoria city councilors plan to review possible sites with county leaders during a city work session next Friday.

The county plans on convening county and city leaders at the Clatsop County Fairgrounds on May 18 to discuss affordable housing, micro-housing and homeless services.

Housing has been a significant public policy issue for the past several years. A countywide housing study released in 2019 found that while there was sufficient supply, much of the housing stock serves the second-home and vacation rental market, leaving a lack of housing for residents to buy or rent.

County and city leaders have faced criticism for the pace of their response to the housing crunch.

The county’s announcement on surplus property came a week after the Astoria City Council backed away from a workforce housing project at Heritage Square over concerns about the cost and vocal community opposition.

‘Terrible Tilly,’ a storied North Coast landmark, goes on the market

By KATIE FRANKOWICZ
KMUN

Terrible Tilly,” the historic 141-year-old Tillamook Rock Lighthouse off the coast near Cannon Beach, is for sale.

Mimi Morissette, the owner, listed the property for \$6.5 million. She had once hoped to turn the decommissioned lighthouse into a large columbarium, a place to store people’s cremated remains. There was room, she said, for up to 300,000 urns.

But Morissette’s plan never really took off.

Forty-two years later, the ashes of only 31 people, including Morissette’s parents, have been laid to rest at the lighthouse. Morissette, who is 77, has concluded it is time for someone else to take over.

“It is time for me to pass the baton,” she said.

An ad went out this week and Morissette is confident she’ll find a buyer.

“I think it’s a given,” she said. “I think I’ll sell it and I think I’ll close it by the end of the year.”

She traveled recently to a conference in Las Vegas to seek out potential buyers. She told KMUN she connected with a large cemetery brokerage and consulting firm that has several potential buyers in mind.

Morissette bought the property with her business partners in 1980 and began selling spaces for urns, but cremation was less common at the time. Then, the columbarium lost its state license in 1999 and, despite a fight, she was unable to renew it.

She was also dogged by consumer complaints filed with the state Department of Justice about how remains were stored in the lighthouse



Tiffany Boothe/Seaside Aquarium

Sea lions roam the waters around Tillamook Rock Lighthouse.

and issues with refunds. Some families told the New York Times in 2007 that they felt misled by promises made by Morissette’s company, Eternity at Sea Inc. In the 1990s, vandals reportedly broke into the lighthouse and made off with two urns.

Morissette said when Eternity at Sea started selling spaces in the columbarium, they hadn’t realized the metal they were using to house urns could not withstand a maritime environment. Then there was the issue with the state license that dragged on for years. Morissette said she pushed pause to regroup.

Whoever buys Terrible Tilly will be taking on a difficult-to-reach island property that — besides acting as a home to the dead — shelters seabirds like cormorants and common murres on its basalt crags. Sea lions are known to haul out on the rocks below. In fact, the last time Morissette tried to visit the island, she couldn’t leave the heli-

copter because there were too many sea lions blocking the way.

Terrible Tilly, built in the 1880s, became notorious for being dangerous as well as expensive to operate. It was decommissioned in 1957.

Today, the lighthouse exerts a strong pull on amateur and professional artists and photographers and can be seen from various viewpoints within the popular Ecola State Park.

The lighthouse is a privately owned part of the federal Oregon Coast National Wildlife Refuge Complex and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service holds a conservation easement over the property. According to Brent Lawrence, a spokesman for the Fish and Wildlife Service, Morissette has agreed to only visit the island at certain times of the year to avoid disturbing birds during the breeding season.

While cormorants and common murres roost at

the property, they no longer appear to nest there like they once did historically. Black oystercatchers, however, have been documented breeding there. The oystercatcher’s global population is small and citizen scientist volunteers closely monitor nesting activity near Cannon Beach. Morissette said she was raised around lighthouses and her first priority for Terrible Tilly has been to ensure its preservation. If the lighthouse sells, she is dedicating \$1.5 million of the proceeds to put back into repairs and cleanup at the property. Morissette plans to retain a 3% royalty on future urn niche sales.

Though her plans for a columbarium were not as lucrative or straightforward as she had hoped, Morissette does not regret her purchase all those decades ago.

The lighthouse is an important part of American history, she said, and she’s proud to have had a hand in keeping it standing.

State details new earthquake and tsunami models

By ERICK BENDEL
The Astorian

MORE ONLINE

For the latest tsunami evacuation maps, visit nvs.nanoos.org

In the brief interval between a megaquake and a tsunami, it will be important to know where to head for safety — and how fast to get there.

The Oregon Department of Geology and Mineral Industries has released new “Beat the Wave” reports for Astoria and the South County communities of Cannon Beach, Arch Cape and Falcon Cove.

These are the latest, and final, reports for Clatsop County in the agency’s “Beat the Wave” series, which models and maps Oregon Coast communities that are vulnerable to a quake along the offshore Cascadia Subduction Zone. The agency has already published reports for Hammond, Warrenton, Clatsop Plains, Gearhart and Seaside.

Scientists say there is a reasonable chance that a massive earthquake, followed by a series of tsunami waves, could hit the Pacific Northwest within the next half century.

Anyone in the inundation zone will have min-

utes — perhaps 30, perhaps 10 — to reach higher ground, likely by foot.

Cities that lie on the coast, such as Seaside and Cannon Beach, will get hit fast and hard.

Astoria, situated on the Columbia River, is not as endangered, but flooding is almost certain, as are other quake-induced impacts.

Land will liquefy and slide. Roads will be blocked or broken. Bridges and buildings may collapse. Infrastructure, from plumbing to electrical power, will be damaged and disrupted. Emergency response could be paralyzed.

Of Oregon’s coastal counties, Clatsop is at the highest risk based on the population and property that lie in the inundation zone, according to Tiffany Brown, the county’s emergency manager.

“We have the greatest number of locations where you’re challenged to get to high ground,” she said.

CALVARY EPISCOPAL CHURCH
503 N. Holladay, Seaside • 503-738-5773

Holy Week Services

Good Friday:
Stations of the cross at 3:00

Saturday: Easter Vigil at 5:00

Sunday: Easter Eucharist at 9:30

Contact YOUR County Commissioner TODAY!

We did our “due diligence.” We looked for a buildable property in Clatsop County, in a neighborhood, zoned CR to retire to. Single family, no businesses allowed, per the county ordinance. Per our realtor.

WHY DO WE FIND OURSELVES SURROUNDED BY MINI-MOTELS?

WHO’S IN CHARGE HERE?

On April 13th the Board of Commissioners will hold a public hearing to change the zoning ordinances in all zones in the county to allow STRs in every zone?

DO YOU REALLY WANT TO BE SURROUNDED BY MINI-MOTELS?

Contact YOUR County Commissioner TODAY!
Email them at commissioners@co.clatsop.or.us
Paid for by the people who live, vote, work and volunteer in Clatsop county and North Coast Neighbors United.
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