



March 21, 2023

Chair Dexter, Vice-Chairs Gamba and Helfrich, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Rev. Bill Van Nostran, and at the end of January 2023 I retired as Pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in Astoria. Members of my church have observed how the nation's housing crisis is unfolding locally – on our waterfront and in our commercial district – and has chosen to involve themselves in looking for solutions. But engaging with the Astoria Warming Center and/or Clatsop Emergency Food Pantry, alone, seem only to address symptoms of the widespread desperation rather than getting to its roots.

Consequently (and to my delight), passionate congregants scoured the stock of vacant and little-used commercial buildings in town in hopes of creating a housing opportunity. And, after nearly a year of searching and negotiating, they identified a worthy candidate and purchased the building in hopes of repurposing an historical boarding house which has lain fallow since the 1940s when its rooms were full and last considered affordable.

Once we found a building and formalized a mission, we separated our housing project from the church umbrella, recruited a volunteer board of community influencers to invite partnerships, solicit funds, and fine tune vision. We are now registered as Oregon Non-profit Public Benefit Corporation and approved “tax exempt” under IRS section 501(c)3.

Our objective is to restore to code a multi-use building whose apartments have fallen to disrepair but whose foundation and shell are structurally sound. We hope the four-story, commercial structure located at 1159-1169 Marine (once known as The State Hotel) will provide ground floor lobby and meeting rooms and upstairs spaces can be reclaimed so – with construction of a partner building on the next-door lot – we can offer 63 affordable apartment homes. Because Copeland Lumber owned this city block and the Copelands were Astoria pioneers, we are calling our “workforce” restoration Copeland Commons.

Our non-profit development partner, Innovative Housing, Inc. of Portland (IHI), shares our values and possesses a very similar mission: to provide quality affordable housing to people who really need it. Recognizing how rapidly interest rates and materials costs have risen (beyond what traditional OHCS formulas expect), our Board has committed to raise the first 1.5 Million pre-development dollars for the project, and IHI will attempt to secure funding for the remaining \$20 Million from OHCS, a mortgage, and tax credits.

Members of the Copeland Commons Board AND of Astoria's First Presbyterian Church urge you to vote in favor of House Bill 3482-2 and “help us to help you!”

Sincerely,

Pastor Bill Van Nostran, Copeland Board Secretary and Corporation Registered Agent