

River View tenants asked to leave

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by katherine head |

Richard Shook is not looking forward to moving. And until last week, he did not know he would have to. "It's going to be embarrassing when my hospital bed is out in the parking lot," he lamented.

Shook is a tenant in the River View apartment complex at 320 Necanicum Dr. in Seaside. He has lived in his apartment for six years. His 24-hour caregiver Steve Meredith has lived with him for the last five years. Shook, once an accountant for the City of Cannon Beach, has Multiple Sclerosis—a condition that has rendered him blind in one eye and unable to walk. At age 64, Shook is bedridden much of the time. His comforts are his cats and his home. Now he must move to a new home—a task that will be difficult for a disabled man who has pets, is on Network for Oregon Affordable Housing (NOAH) assistance, and requires wheelchair access.

The renters at the River View complex received notices to vacate last week, just days after their building was sold to the same buyers who purchased Mill Creek on Roosevelt Drive. Both complexes have been slated for condominium conversion, and the current tenants have been asked to leave.

"They have gotten notice, and they have been asked to go find another place," said new River View co-owner Brian Jeremiah of Portland.

Meredith said he and Shook have located a possible residence, but moving will be a slow process. He tearfully implored the Seaside City Council Monday for an extension and understanding.

With NOAH, Shook pays \$200 of the \$625 rent. Shook's income is a combination of disability benefits and retirement. Shook said although the complex has been for sale, he did not expect eviction in such a way. "Not slam bam. No way," he said last week.

In the notice to vacate, the property owners offer to pay each tenant \$1,000 if they leave in 30 days and their unit has no damage.

"I've offered to help any of the tenants," Jeremiah noted. "I have done more than I needed to. I care about where these people are going to go."

Meanwhile, work is being completed on the building's roof and the siding.

"Those tenants with disabilities—if need be they can stay, but there's going to be a lot of construction, so it may not behoove them to because of the noise," he said.

Filling a niche for lower price condominiums is one of the objectives of the new River View owners, Jeremiah said. He stressed that most existing condos in Seaside come with a price tag of more than \$300,000. According to the notice given to tenants of the condo conversion, "The Declarant estimates the sale price to be approximately \$250,000 to \$330,000 after renovation and monthly operational and maintenance fees to be approximately \$175 to \$200 per month."

Jeremiah said that because of high property values, the new owners do not stand to make a huge profit on the conversions.

"It's certainly not making a killing. It's enough to return the investor's money and make a profit," Jeremiah said.

Beach Property Management, Inc. has been retained by the new owner to oversee logistics of the conversion and to deal with current tenants. Erin Barker with Beach Property Management said the rental market "is very tight" right now due to panicked apartment dwellers "shopping at the same time" for new places to live. Affordability is also an issue for renters.

"Over the last several years, affordable rental rates have crept up because real estate prices are going up," Barker said.

During the Mill Creek application process, Jeremiah had a survey conducted to gauge the availability of rentals in the Seaside area. He said the results demonstrate an adequate pool of affordable rentals.

"This shortage of rental units is overstated," Jeremiah said. "The people that are moving right now—if they put a little effort into it—are finding a place."

Planning Director Kevin Cupples explained that conversion applications are primarily reviewed on the basis of similar criteria under the zoning. And, "from a building code standpoint, it's basically the same." Going from a residential rental to a condo only differs in the structure of ownership. The planners are bound by state laws, and prohibited from outright restriction of condo conversions.

"The city only controls the zone and allowable use," he explained.

Cupples does expect the City Council to implement some conditions on the conversion application process, however.

"My assumption is there will be more sophisticated set of condition with each application that comes in," he said.

Cupples also noted that no opposition was voiced during the application of either Mill Creek or River View. He added that the planners must weigh the evidence, not emotional testimony.

"Empathy in a land-use situation will result in an appeal," he stressed.

Jeremiah indicated that some of the tenants in the Mill Creek complex were less than desirable and should have been evicted before the property changed hands. He said more than a dozen tenants at Mill Creek had not been regularly paying their rent.

"They don't deserve to live in an apartment if they don't pay rent," he said. "If they don't pay rent, they deserve to live on the street."

Shook is still wondering where he is going to end up. He also wonders about the preservation of Seaside's working class.

"Who is gonna wash the dishes or peel the potatoes? Are they gonna bus them in?" Shook asked.

He added that affordable housing in general has gotten a bad reputation.

"The people who value their property don't want affordable housing in their neighborhood. They think it would bring down their property value," Shook said.



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