

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE September 26, 2017**

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**Port Townsend, WA,**

The Jefferson County Republican Party today demanded that the City of Port Townsend enforce building codes against the so-called “Cherry Street Project.” This is the two-story, four-unit apartment building the City transported from Victoria, B.C. The city bought the building to create “affordable” housing. The project will cost at least \$1.6 million when complete, more than six times the original cost announced to the public<sup>1</sup>.

The building has been sitting on freestanding, unattached stacks of wooden blocks since May 11, 2017, and will remain in that condition for much longer. Some of the stacks sit on bare, uncompacted earth. Due to rains and soil settlement some of those columns are out of plumb and bottom blocks have sunk into the earth. Other stacks sit on plywood sheets, which in turn sit on bare ground. Some of those sheets have deformed under stress. Pieces of plywood wedged between the stacks and the I-beams supporting the apartment building have warped and are not fully supporting the I-beams.

No engineering permit or report was approved to allow the building to be erected. An uneven bench was crudely scratched out of the hillside to create a place to leave the building. “This situation would not be tolerated for any other building project. No work is supposed to begin without having approved plans and permits on-site.” says Jeffco GOP chair Jon Cooke.<sup>2</sup> “Heavy winter rains will make the situation worse. This unstable building poses a clear threat to public safety, especially as it sits on a slope above several houses.”

The building is on a large parcel of land sold for \$1 dollar by the city to a group called Homeward Bound, which is in a state of disorganization and does not have funds or a contractor to complete the project.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Leader, April 26, 2017: “[T]he Port Townsend City Council voted unanimously to loan as much as \$250,000 to the Olympic Housing Trust (also known as Homeward Bound) in order to make the project possible.”

<sup>2</sup> See Port Townsend Division of Development & Planning FAQs, summarizing building code requirements: “No work may begin without having the approved plans and permit on-site.”

<sup>3</sup> The Leader, September 13, 2017, “Manager: City Should Finance Completion of Apartment Project”

“The land the city sold for \$1 was actually worth about \$600,000.<sup>4</sup> The zoning for the lot only allows four-unit buildings.<sup>5</sup> With all acquisition, transportation, construction, financing and land costs included, the tab comes to \$1.6 million.<sup>6</sup> That is an astounding \$400,000 for each ‘affordable’ apartment,” says Cooke. “There is no excuse for the city not enforcing the law on this high-dollar project. The City certainly doesn’t look the other way for people building modest homes or simple re-models.”

“We should not overlook the fact that the same people behind this fiasco are also pushing Prop 1,<sup>7</sup> which would increase taxes county-wide to pay for more government-directed ‘affordable’ housing projects. Millions of dollars will be diverted immediately to red tape, salaries, overhead and administration and never build a single wall or roof,” Cooke said. “Thousands of people struggling to hold onto their houses and scrape together monthly rent will be forced to pay for more Cherry Street projects.”

“It is time stop this nonsense,” Cooke says, “and focus our resources and energy on what everyone knows is the only solution to affordable housing in Jefferson County--the long-promised and long-delayed Port Hadlock/Irondale sanitary sewer system. With that area’s cheaper and more available land and looser building restrictions, and its openness to more economical housing alternatives, truly affordable housing in dense multi-story and manufactured housing developments can be built. At the same time, we can protect groundwater and create jobs. Diverting limited funds to extravagantly wasteful schemes like Cherry Street and Prop 1 only pushes the real solution further from our reach.”

Photographs are attached showing some of the problems with the structure’s supports.

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<sup>4</sup> The Leader, May 10, 2017.

<sup>5</sup> The Leader, July 19, 2017, “One additional stumbling block is that the city zoning for the Cherry Street project allowed eight units per acre, but only a maximum of four per building.”

<sup>6</sup> The Leader, September 13, 2017, “Manager: City Should Finance Completion of Apartment Project.” City Manager David Timmons said the total cost of the project, including financing, but not including the \$600,000 value of the land, was approximately \$1 million.

<sup>7</sup> The Leader, August 20, 2017, “City Council Votes to Support Housing Levy”