

SHELTER: Steering committee met with public

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each month is around 30, some months more, some months fewer. Cases include things like nuisance dogs, assault, driving while suspended, burglary, possession of a controlled substance, theft, DUI, robbery, felon in possession of a firearm, and neighbor disputes. Reports of major crimes like murder, rape, and arson are almost non-existent.

Thirty cases a month amounts to well over 300 a year. That makes the seven cases involving a transient or homeless person less than one percent of all cases reported. Sharlene Weed, executive director of Sisters Habitat for Humanity, asked, "Please can the sheriff distinguish between transients and homeless? Some homeless live here permanently. Transients are passing through. Correct?"

An employee from the Shepherd's House shelter in Redmond spoke about their experience operating their shelter. He said that when shelter guests are able to make connections with the monitors and trust is built,

they come to see the shelter as a safe place with positive people.

"The more contact there is, the safer it is for everyone," he told the audience.

The church is safer because the guests view it as a place of comfort and to be respected, he indicated. The guests are safer because they are off the streets and out of freezing temperatures. The community is safer because guests are not out on the street doing drugs, hurting themselves, or committing criminal activities like breaking in somewhere to find shelter from the cold or shoplifting food.

The point was made that sometimes when a person is suffering, the only way to get help is to harm himself, like the man in January. Self-harm is often a cry for help.

Chairman of the group, George Myers of Sisters, offered, "Those who have ideas and want to see something happen would be welcome." Myers can be contacted at george@gwmyers.com.

There was an inquiry regarding what the City Council could do to support a shelter, possibly helping find alternate locations. Other concerns raised were about more garbage in the neighborhood,

guests lingering in the church parking lots after leaving the shelter in the morning, and are the guests being enabled to remain homeless by providing them shelter.

"Beginning at our next steering committee meeting, we are definitely going to prioritize the neighbors' concerns as to what we can immediately take care of, what can be done later, and items beyond our jurisdiction and mission," co-chair Eidsmoe said.

Co-chair Shuler added, "At this point, information about operations and decisions will be posted on our Facebook page and sent out via email to our mailing list. We will also consider placing information on the Sisters Community Watch Facebook page if folks desire. We will certainly provide updates to *The Nugget* and ask that information be shared with the community. The steering committee is open to any other means of communication that the community would like. Anyone who provided us with contact information will be added to our mailing list and if contact was requested, one of us will be in touch with them."

The shelter guests have been impacted by the neighbors' concerns, comments,



PHOTO BY GARY MILLER

Over 100 community members filled the Sisters Fire Hall last week for a meeting convened by the Sisters Cold Weather Shelter to provide information to the public and hear neighbors' concerns.

and generalizations following the January incident.

"In communicating with some of our shelter guests, they were concerned with the negativity from that one incident. They understood some of that negativity, but mainly worried that they would be more disliked and more apt to not be welcome in some businesses," Eidsmoe reported.

Shuler indicated she had only spoken with a few guests. "They expressed sadness, concerns for their safety, and concerns about their acceptance as part of the community. They go to work, church, local events, and patronize local businesses and they are worried they will be viewed or judged negatively or unfairly."



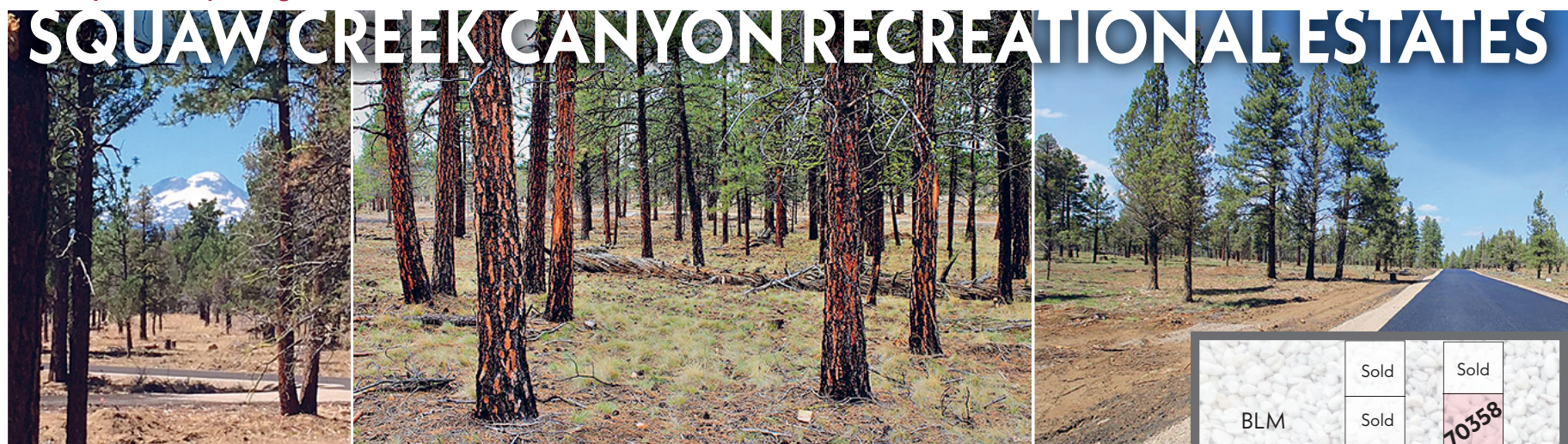
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