

Projected growth prompts planning projects

By Sue Stafford
Correspondent

The population in the city of Sisters by 2041 is predicted to reach 5,300, according to the Portland State University Population Research Center. Compared to the actual 2020 population of 3,064, that is an increase of 1,026 residents just within the city limits.

With the average size household at 2.28 people, 1,100 more housing units of all kinds, in addition to those already in the pipeline, would be needed to meet the housing demands of 2,236 more people, according to Community Development Director Scott Woodford.

A Housing Needs Assessment completed by the City in 2019, plus the Sisters Country Vision Project and the recently completed Comprehensive Plan Update, will help inform a Housing Plan Update (HPU) to be completed by the end of 2022. The purpose of the HPU is to develop an action plan to ensure that Sisters' long-term housing supply is affordable to a variety of income levels, consistent with existing policy direction from the Comprehensive Plan.

The existing Housing Plan, updated and adopted in 2010, identified strategies to provide housing choices to all income levels in the city. In the new updated version, the focus will be explicitly on meeting housing needs of community members with low and moderate incomes.

The plan will also provide recommendations for use of the City's Affordable Housing Grant program, including longer-term affordable housing goals and how to leverage grant funds in a more planned approach versus the current ad hoc approach.

The current housing in Sisters is split 70 percent

single-family, 30 percent multi-family. Woodford would like to see plans for a 60/40 or even a 50/50 split in the future. To incentivize developers and builders to build more multi-family housing, the City could incorporate several tools including development incentives, cutting red tape, adjusting fees, making amendments in the Development Code or other code requirements, and partnering with organizations like HousingWorks, Northwest Housing Alternatives, and KOR Community Land Trust.

At the same time the HPU is being conducted, the consultants will also be looking at possible efficiency measures the City could utilize to maximize the use of land within the city's Urban Growth Boundary (UGB) to provide room for those 1,100 more housing units.

Oregon's land use laws adopted in the 1970s guide the actions of the City when it comes to the UGB and development. An expansion of the UGB is not under consideration at this time. The State requires that all possible efficiency measures be considered first. Those measures could include: increases to the permitted density on existing residential land; financial incentives for higher-density housing; provisions permitting additional density beyond that generally allowed in the zoning district in exchange for amenities and features provided by the developer; removal or easing of approval standards or procedures; minimum density ranges; redevelopment and infill strategies; authorization of housing types not previously allowed by the plan or regulations; adoption of an average residential density standard; and rezoning or redesignation of non-residential land to residential designations.

There is still building

going on within the current UGB, which coincides with the city limits, in the ClearPine and Saddlestone subdivisions and the Sisters Woodlands project where Phases 1 and 2 are getting underway. Aside from those, however, the city is approaching build-out of its existing land and it does not have any UGB land to expand, so it would be difficult to accommodate the 1,100 housing units under existing circumstances.

If the efficiency measures identified can't provide for all the housing units needed, then would be the time to consider an expansion of the UGB so that more housing units could be built. It boils down to "grow up" or "grow out" or a combination of the two, while also maintaining the city's quality of life. If it appears that a UGB expansion might be necessary, the process will probably not begin any sooner than 2023 and it will be part of a robust public process.

There is not a large supply of available land outside the UGB that could be brought in because the city is surrounded on three sides by National Forest land and to the south by exclusive farmland use (EFU). There is a process in place that ranks land as to its suitability for incorporation in a UGB expansion. That designated EFU is the lowest for suitability, then forest land. Five and 10-acre lots are considered very suitable. Other considerations include whether the added land can be adequately served by the

current utilities.

Community outreach and public engagement are considered essential by the City during both the HPU and the Efficiency Measures study. There is a special section on the City website (www.ci.sisters.or.us) that provides information on both processes, including a timeline for each. Go to the Government section, Community Development, Notable Active Projects, where the two projects are outlined. This project website is the primary source for information about these projects. The City will also employ public surveys, possibly public meetings and open houses, depending on the status of COVID, and meetings with a variety of stakeholders.

The City received two grants from the State of Oregon to conduct planning work related to housing in 2022-2023. The consulting firm of Angelo Planning will be conducting the HPU and the Efficiency Measures study funded by the grants. Both projects have started this month and will last through December 2022. The finished products will go to the Planning Commission for approval and recommendation to the City Council.

To be added to the City email list, contact Emelia Shoup at eshoup@ci.sisters.or.us or call 541-323-5216. For more information, contact Scott Woodford, community development director at swoodford@ci.sisters.or.us or call 541-323-5211.

Oregon to lift indoor mask mandate

By Sara Cline
Associated Press/Report for America

PORTLAND (AP) — Oregon's statewide mask requirement for indoor public places will be lifted no later than the end of March.

In addition, mask requirements for schools will be lifted on March 31.

Education and health officials will meet in coming weeks to revise guidance to "ensure schools can continue operating safely and keep students in class" after mask rule is lifted, said Dr. Dean Sidelinger, the state medical officer and epidemiologist.

"This will give (school officials) time to look at their community condition — vaccination rates and spread in their community — and decide if they want to implement a local mandate or requirement for schools," Sidelinger said.

The end of March deadline for lifting statewide mask rules was selected using predictions by local health scientists that COVID-19 related hospitalizations will decrease to 400 or fewer by that time — a level that Oregon experienced before the Omicron variant surge.

Health officials cautioned that the state's emergence from the Omicron surge depends on Oregon residents maintaining effective prevention measures.



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