

Green

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just abandoned the previous process,” — taking over a defunct non-profit — “which turned out to be harder than just starting our own.”

In 2019, the Silverton City Council affirmed its support for a local energy study. It authorized Sustainable Silverton, then a citizens advisory committee, to begin the study in cooperation with the city and its environmental management committee.

Early on, the group worked with Power Oregon, a clean-power advocacy organization that studied climate issues. That group was contacted by Charles Baldwin, another of Sustainable Silverton’s three founders, who obtained information from Power Oregon relating to Silverton’s particular climate and environmental issues.

Power Oregon came up with one statistic that “really blew our minds,” Hues said.

“Silverton spends \$30 million a year on fossil fuels,” she said. That was hard to fathom and this is not helping our town in any way, to be sending that amount of money out of our city.”

She said her group wants to promote as much solar as possible, such as the increased use of electric vehicles and solar-powered homes and businesses. For instance, they want to assure the planned new Silverton Civic Center incorporates as many green options as possible.

The results of those actions have encouraged additional benefits, Hues said.

“It can’t have hurt that Sustainable Silverton was involved with the city and so active that Silverton was selected for the University of Oregon’s Sustainable City Year Project,” she said.

The project “adopted” the city and worked with it on plans to make the city pool “greener” with more efficient heating, work on the new civic center’s plans for sustainability, and work to implement Sustainable Silverton’s energy plan and turn it into a set of climate action recommendations.

Baldwin, who last year was awarded the Silverton Mayor’s Award for Civic Engagement, noted that several action committees were set up to focus Sustainable Silverton’s energy.

“We have a committee to address waste and recycling and a school action team that created a plan to help restore a teaching garden at Robert Frost School,” he said.

A land use and transportation committee focuses on promoting walking, biking and the use of public transit. It has held events such as a “Car Free Day” last Sept. 22.

The group’s consumption and waste committee on the first Saturday of each month takes in for recycling standard items plus additional items such as styrofoam, plastics (clamshell containers, clear plastic tableware), and egg cartons.

Other committees advocate for the environment through tree and shrub giveaways and other smaller events.

Through all of these approaches, Sustainable Silverton is reaching out to residents to make their community “green” and energy-efficient.

Get involved

For more information or to get involved, email the group at sustainablesilverton@gmail.com or visit its website at <https://www.sustainablesilverton.org/>

Freelance writer/photographer Geoff Parks is based in Salem. Have a Silverton story idea? E-mail him at geoffparks@gmail.com.

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Evictions

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years, said. “It took from the end of July to Feb. 3rd to receive that notice. We luckily have the current communication in there, but (the state) didn’t even have the correct landlord information.”

The state received \$204 million from the federal government in 2021 to provide emergency rental assistance. After it opened the program, it was swamped with applicants. The Legislature passed multiple bills in 2021 to keep those who applied for help from being evicted while the state worked through the backlog, provided they showed proof of their application to their landlord.

But as of March 1, those who owed rent accrued from April 2020 to June 2021 must pay that back rent or landlords can now take steps to collect that money, including by eviction.

The state isn’t saying exactly when it anticipates sending the notices to landlords, but they won’t all be at once.

Delia Hernandez, spokesperson for Oregon Housing and Community Services, said 3,290 applicants who were denied for reasons including receiving assistance from another source or having too much income have had their denials reported to their landlords.

Another 3,129 are in pre-denial, which means they likely won’t get help and their landlord likely will soon be told they’re denied.

Then there are the landlords of 3,791 applicants who have been formally denied are soon going to receive notices their tenants won’t be getting help.

“Those are gradual,” she said. “We’re not going to grab them all and send them.”

Evictions already on the rise

Evictions for non-payment in Oregon spiked to 566 in November, from 361 in July, according to data compiled by the Oregon Law Center. Evictions fell to 437 in January and were back up to 497 in February.

“I expect we’ll see larger upticks in March and April,” Becky Straus, an attorney for the Oregon Law Center, said.

Landlords are required to give renters 10 days notice of eviction. Tenants who are summoned to eviction court can get free help from the Oregon Law Center’s Eviction Defense Project at 888-585-9638 or at oregonlawcenter.org/eviction-defense-project.

Renters can still apply for rental assistance. They can find information on how to apply at www.oregonrentalassistance.org or www.211info.org.

Hernandez said the department will announce when it will stop taking new applications for the program — which was funded by \$100 million dedicated by the state Legislature last year — later this week.

“The likelihood of the assistance remaining, like I said, is pretty iffy,” Imse said. “That’s going to leave a huge amount of housing providers that are never going to get the money that they’re entitled to get for past due rent. It’s going to cause providers to lose thousands of dollars.”

Smith said people who have been counting on the state assistance to pay their back rent and are denied have few options for making up that debt. She said it’s difficult to make payments when someone is six months behind on rent.

“I have residents that come to me worried, stressed, crying, all of that, wondering what’s going on with their application,” Smith said.

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With Oregon state parks a popular place to fly drones, state officials are drafting new rules on where drones can take off and land. A public comment period ends April 7. ASSOCIATED PRESS FILE

Drone

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there would be times of the day or dates when it might work.”

When would the rules be finalized?

After the current public comment period, parks officials will tweak the rules — or not — and then bring them to the Oregon Parks and Recreation Commission meeting in either April or June. The Commission would vote on whether to adopt the plan.

“Our hope is that they’d be in place for the 2022 summer season,” Chris Havel, spokesman for the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department, told the Statesman Journal in 2020.

What’s led to the need for this?

The number of drones flying at Oregon’s most scenic places, particularly the Oregon Coast, has been rising for years, and that’s led to increased conflict between unmanned aircraft and everything from nesting shorebirds to rock climbers.

“It’s something that is becoming a concern, not in the majority of parks, but really at the most scenic ones — places like Smith Rock, Silver Falls and on the Oregon Coast,” Gauthier told the Statesman Journal in 2019.

At Smith Rock State Park, drones have crashed into rock cliffs right next to climbers. At a nude beach at Rooster Rock State Park, a drone with a camera was spotted. And on the Coast, drones have been driving endangered seabirds off their nesting sites, allowing predators to swoop in and steal their

eggs, officials with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service said.

Beyond that, drones are often seen as invasive and loud, spoiling the outdoor experience.

Problem is, Oregon has no authority over airspace — only where people take off and land with drones. And legally, they needed legislation from the Oregon Senate to begin that rule-making. That happened last session with the passage of Senate Bill 109.

Drone pilots have also welcomed the creation of straightforward rules, saying Oregon’s lack of rules make it difficult to know where pilots can fly. Drones are a common tool for hobbyist and filmmakers, supporting local economies, as well as an important tool for search and rescue. They’re not going anywhere, and advocates say creating a good set of rules is a win for everybody.

“The current situation is confusing,” Kenji Sugahara, chief pilot for A-Cam Aerials and an advisor on state and federal drone policy, told the Statesman Journal in 2019. “There is no great resource to show where it’s good to fly. Bad information is disseminated on social media. There’s confusion between state, national and even county parks. Even drone apps are often wrong.”

Overall, the goal is to establish more straightforward rules that allow pilots and the public to use public lands safely, officials said.

Zach Urness has been an outdoors reporter in Oregon for 15 years and is host of the Explore Oregon Podcast. To support his work, subscribe to the Statesman Journal. Urness is the author of “Best Hikes with Kids: Oregon” and “Hiking Southern Oregon.” He can be reached at zurness@StatesmanJournal.com or (503) 399-6801. Find him on Twitter at @ZachsORoutdoors.

Mandate

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On Feb. 24, the state moved up the date for both, to March 19, saying hospitalizations were dropping faster than expected. School districts also asked that the school mandate lift at the same time as the general mask mandate, Colt Gill, Oregon Department of Education director, said.

Health officials now predict the state’s COVID-19 hospitalizations could drop below 400 next week, or possibly even this week. On Monday, there were 479 people hospitalized with COVID-19 in Oregon.

However, the state does not anticipate moving up the date again.

“By choosing this date, that gives time for people to prepare for how they’re going to react when the mask mandate is lifted,” Dean Sidelinger, state health officer and epidemiologist, said.

On Friday, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released new guidance for masking, based primarily on hospitalizations and hospital capacity. It recommends masking be optional in counties where COVID-19 infections are a “low” or “medium” risk.

Some Oregon counties are considered “high” risk. But decisions about masking will now be made at the local level, Sidelinger said. The CDC currently considers Marion and Polk counties to be “medium” risk.

Individual school districts, too, could decide to continue requiring masks, Gill said. ODE expects to release new guidelines for school testing, quarantine and contact tracing Wednesday.

Businesses also can decide whether



Gov. Kate Brown in her office at the Oregon State Capitol.

ABIGAIL DOLLINS / STATESMAN JOURNAL

their employees or customers must wear a mask.

Other state and federal mask requirements, including those for health care settings and public transit, remain in place for the time being.

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