

HOUSING

Continued from Page 1A

Proponents hope the idea will give residents more affordable housing options in cities and suburban neighborhoods while allowing for more development. If the bill passes, Oregon would become the first state to eliminate single-family zoning.

While the proposal is still brand-new — so new that some Realtors in La Grande had not heard of it yet — John Howard and Ashley O'Toole predict it could help out the local housing shortage if it does pass.

"It is a welcome addition," said O'Toole, a Realtor for John How-

ard and Associates. "It could make properties more marketable."

Builders in Oregon have not been able to construct enough houses and apartments to meet the demands of the thousands of people moving to the state for jobs and, in some cases, for a lower cost of living, according to the AP article. Many people move to the state from California.

The plan is meant to alleviate a rental market that's reaching capacity, according to the article. A study from the economic consulting firm ECONorthwest found that only 63 new housing units were created for every 100 new families in Oregon from 2010 to 2016.

"The state's housing crisis requires a combination of bolder strategies," Kotek said in a statement. "Oregon needs to build more units, and we must do so in a way that increases housing opportunity for more people. Allowing more diverse housing types in single family neighborhoods will increase housing choice and affordability, and that's a fight that I'm willing to take on."

O'Toole said this new legislation, if passed, could make it easier for people to convert a garage into an apartment, or to build a home on their property for extra income.

"There's definitely increased investment property potential,"

he said.

Howard said he agrees this could be good for La Grande.

"It gives an opportunity to the homeowner to have additional income if they choose or if they need to create an auxiliary dwelling for a loved one (who needs to live close)," Howard said.

Economists say the high housing demand has caused the cost of renting to skyrocket, according to the AP article. One in three renters pay more than 50 percent of their income on rent, far higher than the 30 percent recommendation set by Congress.

But homeowners have slammed the idea of easing zoning restric-

tions, flooding the Legislature with written testimony saying the measure will destroy the character of neighborhoods and lead to overcrowding, according to the article. Some city officials have also come out against the idea, saying it encroaches on local control.

However, to Howard and O'Toole, the zoning changes could be a fix to what is continuously hindering the La Grande population.

"As years go by, there are fewer lots to build on," Howard said. "(The proposed legislation) creates an opportunity to ease the housing pressure. (Property owners) can expand and take advantage of vacant land or large yards." ■

SAR

Continued from Page 1A

the building plans for the permits.

"Between what Jeff Hsu did for us and what Les Tipton did for us, I'd say they saved us between \$6,000 or \$7,000," said Hawkins. "It still cost us about \$7,000 in permit fees."

Other donors include Boise Cascade plywood mill, which donated a large supply of plywood; Kenny Glenn, a cash donor; Allan Brogoitti Construction, which provided the land clearing; and Oregon Trail Electric, which augured the pilot holes for the poles. In-kind labor has been donated by several SAR members in prepping the lot for construction.

In addition, Union County SAR was awarded grants of \$2,000 from Northwest Farm Credit and \$10,000 from the Wildhorse Foundation. The latter award was received July 1, 2018, which put the SAR organization on a one-year time clock for project completion.

"We have to have the first phase of our project done by July 1, 2019. That's why Chris Ritter and I broke ground with the backhoe March 15," said Hawkins.

The full scope of the construction project is a 60-by-180-foot metal building, but it will be built in three phases of 60-foot lengths, as the budget allows. The

first phase will be a 60-by-60-foot enclosed building with roll-up doors.

"If we have a funding balance left over, we will start construction on phase II, only if all the labor is donated," said Hawkins.

Phase II is an attached 60-by-60-foot addition. It will be an open-sided pole barn style, with possibly one side enclosed.

"We may not be able to enclose it right away with siding, but it will have a roof," said Hawkins. "We're going to concentrate on getting phase I and phase II finished. It may take us several more years to raise money before we can get phase III done."

The building will provide enclosed and secure storage for SAR equipment trailers, vehicles and communication trailers.

"We have a lot of our equipment, purchased by the organization through fundraising efforts," said Hawkins. "We have about five big cargo trailers full of equipment like ATV track machines, snowmobiles and a portable kitchen. The purpose of the building is to get those trailers under cover."

The building will be called Ralph's Place, a tribute to the late Ralph Wilson, a SAR member from 2006 to 2015. He passed away on Feb. 23, 2015, at 53 years of age. His dedication and contributions to SAR operations were awarded in 2008 with the Eagle Eye Award; in 2009 with the outstanding service and dedication



Submitted photo

The new SAR building, named Ralph's Place after a notable SAR volunteer who died in 2015, will offer the SAR team a safe and controlled environment to house equipment.

award; and in 2015, he received an honorary deputy sheriff gold badge.

"Ralph made the original rough plans for the building when I was captain on the board, and the fundraising began at that point," Hawkins said.

Besides cash donations, Union County SAR is looking for material contributions like rock for parking and base rock for the

building floor.

"We need electrical supplies because, according to code, our interior lighting turned out to be way more extensive than we originally thought," said Hawkins.

For more information or to make a donation of materials for the Search and Rescue building project, contact Hawkins at 541-910-0041 or fhawk@eoni.com. ■

FFA

Continued from Page 1A

committee on Friday during a hearing at Blue Mountain Community College in Pendleton.

Birkmaier and Barry both spoke about how they have benefited from FFA, a national organization formerly known as Future Farmers of America.

"It has truly transformed me as a person," Birkmaier said.

The IHS senior told the Ways and Means Committee that when she joined FFA she was just someone who wanted to fit in, but because it pushed her out of her comfort zone her confidence has grown, she has become more adept at problem solving and is now a candidate for a position on FFA's state officer team.

"This is just my story, but every member of FFA has a story of their own. That is why I ask for your support," she said.

Barry told the committee how proud she is to be part of FFA and the sense of empowerment and excitement she feels as a member of the organization.

Audrey Cant, a first-grade teacher at Imbler Elementary School and the wife of J.D. Cant, also addressed the Joint Ways and Means Committee. An FFA state officer while a high school student, she told the committee that every leadership skill she learned while in FFA she today applies daily as an educator.

Cant spoke emotionally about how excited she is that one of her children will soon be an FFA chapter member.

"I ask for your support, not just for my children but

for children across the state so that they will also have a chance to benefit and to grow," she said.

A portion of the \$1.2 million HB 2444 would provide FFA would be used to help youth whose families cannot afford the membership fee. This would make it possible for many more students to join FFA. All students in FFA must be enrolled in agriculture science classes at their high school. J.D. Cant said that about 6,000 students in Oregon are enrolled in agriculture classes but are not in FFA.

Funding from HB 2444 would also be used to hire an adviser who would work with the 120 FFA officers at the chapter and state levels. Cant said a state adviser is needed because of the discrepancy in experience among the FFA chapters in Oregon — this means that not all FFA officers are receiving the same level of guidance.

Having a state adviser for officers would also take some of the workload off agriculture teaches, almost all of whom also serve as FFA chapter advisers, reducing the likelihood of burnout. Cant said that the percentage of agriculture science teachers who leave their profession within five years of entering it is higher than for most other teachers.

He attributes this to a number of factors including the fact that many agricultural science teachers work almost year round because of their involvement in FFA activities. Statistics from a National Agricultural Education Supply and Demand report on the Teach Ag website, www.naae.org/teachag, indicate that in 2017 there were 40 full-time openings

for agriculture science teachers in public school districts in the region composed of Oregon, Alaska, California, Nevada, Idaho, Montana, Hawaii and Utah.

HB 2444 would help address the burnout issue not only by providing a state adviser but also by establishing a grant program to help pay agricultural science teachers working with FFA chapters at fairs and livestock shows.

State Rep. Greg Barreto (R-Cove), one of HB 2444's chief sponsors, said the money the bill would provide teachers is a critical element.

"With the investment they make in students, with all of the extracurricular activities and travel in the summer, they need to be compensated," Barreto said. The state representative has long been impressed with FFA.

"What FFA does is nothing short of impressive," he said, adding that the leadership skills students in FFA develop "are second to none."

The FFA once received a significant amount of funding from the state. This funding began disappearing due to budget cuts about 20 years ago. The last year schools received FFA funding from the state was 2011.

Today, Cant hopes the state's former ties to the organization will be rekindled.

"We want the state to reconnect with us," he said.

Cant said that state funding had become so minimal by 2011 that its loss was not significant. To make up for the loss, FFA landed corporate sponsorships. These sponsorships will be retained if HB 2444 is approved by the Legislature.

The IHS agricultural science teacher believes this is

a fitting time for FFA to seek funding from the Legislature because the state is now providing an increasing amount of money for career technical education programs in schools. He noted FFA programs are comparable to CTE in that they provide students with the opportunity to develop skills through work experience and the completion of projects while working with businesses connected to agriculture.

Cant said students emerge from programs like this not only with job skills but also with references they can later use when applying for employment.

The IHS teacher noted these skills are attained under FFA oversight via its Supervised Agricultural Experience program, which has been in place for decades. This is one of many reasons Cant believes the Legislature will pass HB 2444.

"We have a proven model," he said. ■

WRAP

Continued from Page 1A

CHD's Wrap program. "Jaden's grades are up and this is the best year she has had socially," Mason said. "I definitely attribute that to the Wrap program."

According to Mason, Wrap Youth Partner Lewis Whiting has been Jaden's "go to" since the family enrolled in Wrap a year ago. Whiting said he learned a thing or two from the Mason family while being there for Jaden through difficult times and even occasionally escorting her to the library to work on social skills.

"It's eye opening to see the families we work with face these challenges and the strength that comes from the family working together," Whiting said. "It's fun to see how far they've come, and it's amazing to see (each) family's resilience."

Mason said her relation-

ship with Westenskow was paramount in helping her reach the place she is at today, and the former Wrap partner said she was "impressed" with how driven Mason was to "become the best mom she can be."

"I found myself learning a lot from Amber because she was able to build her own confidence to overcome challenges," Westenskow said. "We (the Wrap program) helped encourage her to know she's capable."

For Mason, the most rewarding aspect of graduating from Wrap is being able to look back on where she was a year ago and feel confident she now has the ability to take on any challenge that may come her way.

"Wrap challenged us to find our inner strengths," she said. "They developed an entire plan around us instead of what their expectations were. They're invested in us as much as we're invested in them." ■

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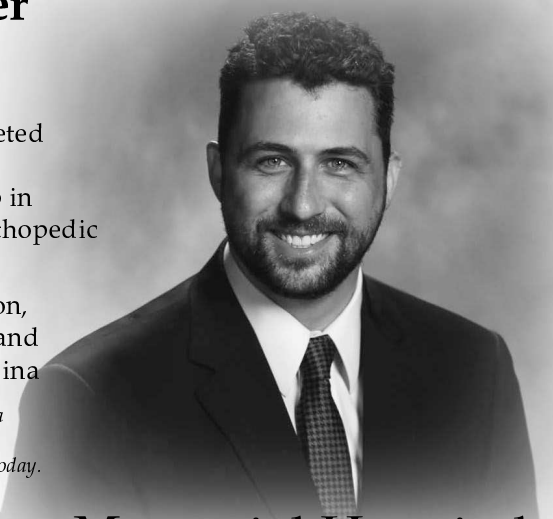


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