



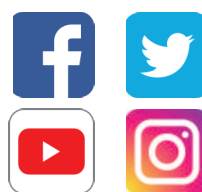
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La Grande City Council reviews housing needs analysis

By Amanda Weisbrod
The Observer

The La Grande City Council met for a work session Monday evening to review and amend the final draft of a housing needs analysis compiled specifically for the city.

The analysis, which was drafted by consulting firm FCS Group and the La Grande Planning Division, outlines key findings of the current housing needs in the city and suggests solutions to these issues based on data

“I know we have housing issues here, but I also see possibilities. With the right developers and incentives, we might be able to pull this together.”
— Steve Clements, La Grande Mayor

a member of the FCS Group who worked on the study. “It’s time to hit refresh.”

Based on this report, the population of La Grande is expected to grow over the next 20 years by almost 1,400, meaning the city will need to add a range of 700 to nearly 1,000 housing units within city limits during this time span to accommodate new residents.

Most of the housing needs lie with low- to middle-income populations who are looking for affordable rental units in the form of multi-family housing, but the demand for high-income homes is also a focal point of the report.

Tim Wood, another FCS Group member who helped to prepare the analysis, said addressing the need for high-income housing could free up space for low- to middle-income residents.

“We’re seeing this in a lot of communities,” he said. “Folks are buying less house than they could afford.”

Mike Boquist, community development director and city planner of the La Grande

Planning Division, tacked on his own explanation of this trickle-down theory.

“It’s like a snowball effect,” he said. “When you get down to the lower end, that housing is taken up by people who can afford more.”

To address these issues, the report outlines a new housing goal for the city, which is “to encourage the development of a variety of housing types to meet the needs and desires of the community, and assure

that residents of La Grande have the opportunity to live in safe and sanitary housing at a reasonable cost.”

Five strategies were outlined in the report to help the city meet this goal:

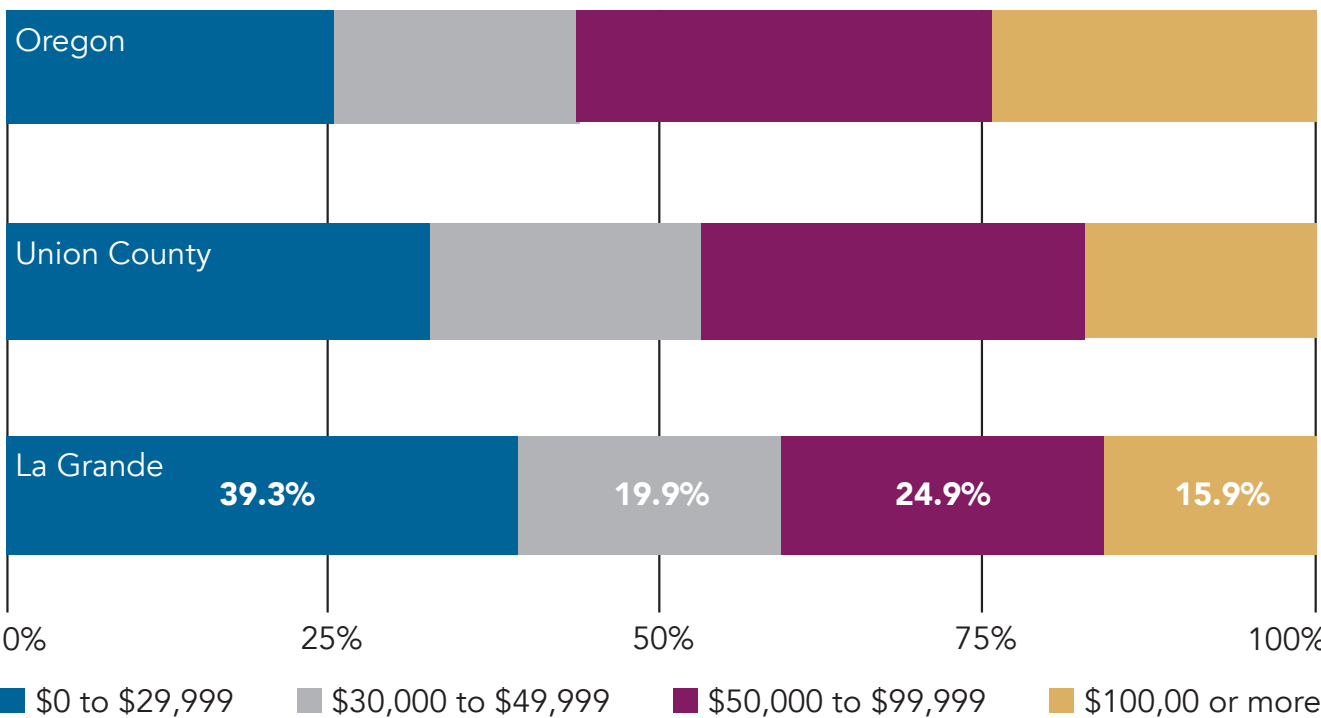
- Increase opportunities

for multi-family development

- Develop affordable housing
- Enhance the condition of existing housing stock
- Support measures that increase housing capacity

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Households by income: La Grande, Union County, Oregon 2017



Amanda Weisbrod/The Observer

Based on data provided in the 2019 Housing Needs Analysis by FCS Group and the La Grande Planning Division, this graph shows the comparison of income per household between La Grande, Union County and Oregon. The analysis reports La Grande has a relatively high share of low income households compared with county and state.

Elgin School District must trim \$123,000 from 2019-20 budget

By Dick Mason
The Observer

The Elgin School District needs to make \$123,000 in cuts to balance its 2019-20 budget due to a loss in state funding.

The good news is this can be done painlessly.

That is the message Elgin Superintendent Diane Greif had for her school district’s budget committee Monday night. Greif said the cuts would be made without laying off staff or cutting programs.

She explained that this will be possible in part by not filling two openings created by a retirement and a resignation that take effect in June. One of the open positions is at Elgin High School and the other is at Stella Mayfield Elementary School.

At the high school, which serves students in grades 7 to 12, the loss

would be compensated for by changing teaching assignments and combining certain classes. Greif said this means several classes that now have between 10 and 11 students would have a still manageable 20 pupils in 2019-20.

The superintendent said the school district has the flexibility to do this because enrollment at Elgin High School has been decreasing in recent years and the school has become overstaffed.

Greif also said the school district would be able to avoid cutting high school classes by reassigning the course loads of some teachers.

“I will be looking at certifications to see what teachers can and cannot teach,” the superintendent said.

The \$123,000 in reductions would also require changes at Stella Mayfield Elementary School. Greif is recommending that a classroom teaching assistant position, which will become open due to a retirement, be filled by moving a part-time elementary school special education teacher already on the staff into it.

The school district’s full-time special education teacher would take on an added workload as a result of the move.

Greif said her school district’s educators have been

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Oregon joins effort to solve crimes against Native women

By Mary Hudetz
The Associated Press

SALEM — Native American women have gone missing or been killed at alarming rates, federal and private studies show, and there is growing concern that confusion by law enforcement over who has jurisdiction can lead to lax pursuit of cases and insufficient data.

Oregon, home to nine federally recognized tribes or confederations of tribes, has now joined a movement to account for and solve more of the crimes.

Patricia Whitefoot, whose sister disappeared in 1987 in an unsolved case, watched as Gov. Kate Brown signed a bill Thursday that directs the state police to study how to increase and improve criminal justice resources on these cases.

“As families, we simply seek justice and healing of the heart,” Whitefoot told lawmakers in written testimony last month.

After Brown signed the bill, Whitefoot told a reporter her sister, Daisy Mae Heath Tallman, was 29 when she went missing.

She was Whitefoot’s youngest sister and lived with her in Washington state. She would be gone for long periods, fishing for salmon in traditional spots along the Columbia River that divides Washington from Oregon and visiting relatives on the Warm Springs reservation in Oregon. Then, in the autumn of 1987, she never returned to her home in White Swan, Washington.

“She was just a very self-reliant, self-sufficient

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Andrew Selsky/The Associated Press

Patricia Whitefoot, a member of the Yakama tribe from White Swan, Washington, traveled to the Oregon Capitol last week for Gov. Kate Brown’s signing of a bill directing Oregon State Police to study how to improve criminal justice resources to solve cases of Native American women who have gone missing or been killed. Whitefoot’s sister Daisy disappeared in 1987. The case was never solved.

Former mayor elected to Elgin School Board

By Dick Mason
The Observer

The Elgin School Board will soon have a new yet familiar face.

Rod Spikes, a lifelong Elgin resident, defeated Kevin Smolkowski 269 to 134 in a race for Position 4 on the Elgin School Board Tuesday in a mail election.

“I want to serve the community and make a difference,” Spikes said.

Spikes has strong ties to the Elgin School District but will be serving on its board for the first time. His wife, Evelyn, taught English

in the Elgin School District for 26 years before retiring about 16 years ago. They have two sons, both Elgin High School graduates.

Rod Spikes is no stranger to public service, for he previously served as a member of the Elgin School District Budget Committee for four years, was mayor of Elgin for two years in the early 1990s, and was a volunteer firefighter for the Elgin Fire Department for 20 years.

Before retiring, Spikes worked for Boise Cascade for 44 years in a variety of capacities.

Position 4, which is open to those living within the Elgin city limits, was the only contested school board race in Union County in Tuesday’s election.

Shelley Burgess, the Position 4 incumbent, did not file for reelection. Burgess has served on the board for at least 10 years.

Smolkowski is a current member of the school board as the Position 2 incumbent. Position 2 is for those living outside the Elgin City limits but within the school district.

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WEATHER

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Issue 60
3 sections, 26 pages
La Grande, Oregon

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FRIDAY COMMISSIONERS DISCUSS COUNTY BUDGET

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