

COUNCIL

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Boquist said. "Once a household was at, I think it was 50%, they spend 50% or more of their household income on rent, then they're considered rent burdened. The city of La Grande has about 25% or 26% in that rent-burdened category."

In the analysis, five strategies for addressing the city's future housing needs were proposed: increasing the opportunity for multi-family development; developing affordable housing; enhancing the condition of existing housing stock; supporting measures that increase housing capacity; and addressing severe rent burdens.

If the council votes to adopt the analysis, it will be adopting those recommendations as well.

The council also is expected to consider

approval of COVID-19 business relief programs.

Statewide restrictions on social activity likely will prohibit Union County restaurants from offering indoor dining services until at least mid-December. Those mandates also forced some businesses, such as retail and grocery stores, to cut their in-person capacity, while others had to close their doors completely as Oregon attempts to get a handle on the spike in cases.

The meeting will begin Wednesday at 6 p.m., and councilors will be attending virtually. Public comments must be submitted Tuesday by 5 p.m. by emailing rstrope@cityoflagrande.org. The meeting will be available to the public on the La Grande Alive website (lagrandealive.tv/city-events) and on the Eastern Oregon Alive TV Facebook page (www.facebook.com/EOAliveTV).

APARTMENTS

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The plans call for all of the buildings to have solar panels that would generate much of the electricity for their apartments, Steffey said.

The complex would be similar to the Blue Springs Crossing Apartments in Island City on Walton Road, which also provides low-income housing. Completed in 2015, Blue Springs Crossing has 38 units. Community Development Partners developed the property, and Northeast Oregon Housing Authority is the owner.

"Timber Ridge would be very similar to Blue Springs Crossing," Steffey said, "only it would be much larger."

Blue Springs Crossing has proven to be enormously popular, he said, adding that it has an



Ink: Built Design/Contributed Graphic

This rendering from Nov. 24, 2020, shows an aerial view of Timber Ridge Apartments, the 104-unit proposal that would sit on about 5 acres in La Grande.

extensive waiting list.

"The success of Blue Springs Crossing has given rise to this project," Steffey said.

He said the larger Timber Ridge complex would have room for addi-

tional features, including a community garden and half of a basketball court.

A portion of funding for the construction of Timber Ridge Apartments would come from the state's Low Income

Fast Track program, also known as LIFT. The Legislature approved this program about two years ago, and it is providing funding for affordable housing projects throughout Oregon.

ELDERLY

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now died with COVID-19, according to an analysis by The Oregonian.

'An existential question'

Dr. Jennifer Vines, the tri-county public health officer, said Oregonians should bear a collective burden to protect people like Allison and others in her age demographic.

When asked why Oregonians of all ages should be mindful of such a high death rate for the elderly, Vines said "that's an existential question, a values question about what our elders mean to us as a community and how we treat them and how we care for them."

"I think we should care," Vines said, calling it a "collective mandate" for all Oregonians to practice social distancing and follow other health guideline to protect first responders, health care providers and the elderly.

The family highlighted the importance of wearing a mask in Allison's obituary. Linda Bennett said the pain of her mother's death compounded by the ongoing politicization of basic safety efforts to slow the spread of a preventable disease is hurtful.

"They just think it's old people that die," Bennett said of people who aren't following public health guidelines. "No. They're a huge part of your family. You know?"

Bennett had long envisioned her final moments with her mom, in part because of her long career working with the elderly. She pictured holding Allison's hand and even bringing in a harpist to play peaceful music.

Instead, Bennett, her adult children and her husband, Gary, said goodbye over the phone from their Beaverton home, a 7-mile drive from the hospital.

Question mark

Among the 4.2 million people who call Oregon home, few have made it to age 80 or beyond. That age group is by far the state's smallest, according to the most recent census estimates, with only about 168,000 people. That's just 4% of the state's population.

Yet as of Wednesday, 449 people aged 80 and older had died with COVID-19 this year, totaling 52% of the state's death toll.

Vines, the metro public health officer, said a major factor fueling that trend is that older Oregonians already have underlying medical challenges and are likely to live in care facilities, where outbreaks are all too common.

Those settings, where people live in close quarters and often require intimate levels of care, are "ripe for COVID spread," Vines said.

At least 132 long-term

care facilities in Oregon are actively dealing with coronavirus outbreaks totaling about 2,100 confirmed or presumed infections. Maryville saw its first cases Aug. 9, according to state records, with 74 cases and nine deaths now linked to the facility.

Older folks are also more likely to have underlying conditions like diabetes, high blood pressure, cancer or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. Bennett said her mother had COPD.

Absent underlying con-

ditions, Vines said it's not clear how age, physiologically, plays a factor in COVID-19 severity.

"That's the question mark here," she said, saying health experts don't know that answer yet.

It's also not clear where COVID-19 ranks this year among the overall causes of death for people 80 and older in Oregon.

Vines said health officials are examining that issue and expect to have more information in the next week or so.

Oregon Health Authority officials said they, too, don't know if COVID-19 is the leading cause of death for those Oregonians.

"You can assume a large number of people who are over 80, unless very healthy, may be under home care or a nursing care and most likely be very susceptible to COVID-19," said Carmen Perezchica, an agency spokesperson.

Blue Christmas

Christmas was Alli-

son's favorite holiday, and Linda Bennett always spent Christmas Eve with her mom.

Even when Allison was living in the care facility, Bennett would go decorate her room, and the mother would often wear a hat dangling with lights.

"She loved to do it big," Bennett said.

With no room to decorate for her mom, Bennett already has her tree and trimmings out at her own house. She went heavy with blue and

white lights, the former to match her mood this season.

This year she won't be able to reminisce about Christmases past or ask her mom about her youth.

She hopes other Oregonians know how painful it is to be prohibited from seeing loved ones before they die.

"If I could have one wish in this world, give me one hour just to hug my mom," Bennett said.

"I would die tomorrow if I could have that."

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