

REAL ESTATE

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time, Cosner noted.

“Property is selling a few days after being listed. If you do not get an offer in, in a timely manner, you will be beat out,” he said.

Glaze advises home buyers to have to have items like pre-qualification letters from lenders ready before making offers. This will help speed up the closing process, preventing buyers from being beaten out.

“Basically because of the competition buyers have to put their best foot forward,” she said.

Buyers are facing higher prices and fewer choices, but they have a major plus in their corner — low interest rates. The low rates are reducing the monthly payments buyers must pay after getting a loan to purchase a home. Glaze said with these rates home buyers in many cases will be making monthly payments about equal to what they would pay if they were



Dick Mason/The Observer

The number of homes in Union and Wallowa counties for sale is declining. The low inventory, which partially reflects limited home building over the past decade, means homes in Union and Wallowa counties are selling for higher prices.

renting a comparable home.

The hot market in Union and Wallowa counties may be partially due to the COVID-19 pandemic and increasing violence in cities. Glaze said that since these outbreaks many people who

grew up in Union County and lived in larger urban communities are returning if they can keep their jobs by working remotely.

“They want to live in a safer, more secure environment,” Glaze said. “They

want a better quality of life.”

A number of other home buyers are purchasing second homes with an eye on the future.

“Some people are buying second homes so they can

move here when they retire in two to three years,” Glaze said.

Anette Christoffersen, a principal broker with Ruby Peak Realty in Joseph, is witnessing a similar phenomenon in Wallowa County.

“This is a place where people are buying second homes,” she said.

A number of these may be homes and cabins at Wallowa Lake.

“Everything around the lake was sold (in 2020),” Christoffersen said.

She believes many people are moving to Wallowa County at least in part due to how it has been effectively promoted as a travel destination. It is not unusual for people who first come there as tourists to eventually live in Wallowa County after retiring.

On the other end of the home buying spectrum in Wallowa and Union counties are first-time home purchasers, many of whom are millennials in the 25-40 age category. Glaze said millennials like the outdoor

amenities the region offers including its hiking trails, rivers and lakes.

“We have a lifestyle a lot of millennials would like to have,” Glaze said.

The low inventory housing situation combined with high demand is being welcomed by homeowners in Union and Wallowa counties who are seeing the value of their houses rise. However, the same phenomena that is helping homeowners’ residential property value increase also puts them in a precarious situation.

Glaze explained some people who want to stay in Northeast Oregon are hesitant about listing their homes, fearing they will not be able to find another residence in the tight market.

She noted that she has a neighbor who wants to sell her house and then buy a smaller one. The woman is reluctant to sell because she does not know if she could find another home in the area to move into.

“It is a catch-22,” Glaze said.

La Grande welcomes in 2021



Phil Wright/The Observer

Locals gather for the annual ball drop in downtown La Grande as 2020 turns to 2021. A few dozen people braved the cold at the intersection of Adams Avenue and Depot Street to watch the informal event, including one enthusiastic flag waver.

CARES

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Commissioner Susan Roberts said the county received a total of 75 applications, but eight did not qualify.

While the initial hope was for funds to be disbursed this week, Roberts said Thursday, Dec. 31, that the funds could take much longer to get to the businesses who need them.

“It could be up to 90 days before anybody sees any money,” she said.

The single-page application requested a minimum of information, such as basic information on the business and how it was affected by Gov. Kate Brown’s executive orders requiring either full or partial shutdowns. A business could show that it was forced to close or compare the income of a month in 2020 with the same month in 2019. The number of full- and part-time employees also was included.

Roberts said the board developed a point system that took various circumstances into consideration. She gave as examples restaurants who were not allowed to seat customers on the premises. Some were able to switch directly to takeout only, while others may have had to go to extra expense to make that conversion.

Other businesses, such as gyms, for example, were forced to close completely for a period of time.

“We set up scoring criteria, which is what we

were supposed to do in order to come up with a variable range of scores for the applicants,” Roberts said. “We did that and then we scored each of them independently and scored those and put that combined score and averaged that out and the applicants fell into a range. We put the total points into the total amount of money that told us how much each applicant would get.”

“We tried to make it as fair as we could,” Commissioner Todd Nash said.

However, some aspects of the entire COVID-19 relief package seemed a bit unfair to the commissioners.

“The first pool of money went to the state except for Multnomah and Washington counties, which got direct payments,” Commissioner John Hillock said. “The rest of us smaller counties had to grumble to the state and this is what they decided to give to us. The federal package and what actually gets to us may be two very different things.”

But the commissioners weren’t entirely dissatisfied.

“All of the counties worked very hard to get this money back to each county because it was unfair the metro area getting its own specific payment,” Hillock said. “I was a little miffed because they

shared this money with the metro area, as well. They got a big hunk of it, where they’d already been funded. It’s not totally fair, but it’s better than not getting anything.”

“Each of the 36 counties got a half-million dollars,” Roberts said. “Then you got extra money depending on your population. Take Wheeler County (with just over 1,300 population). It got \$501,100 but they didn’t have very many businesses, either. So it’ll impact them a whole lot more. Wallowa County (with a population of roughly 7,100), got the half-million plus whatever the formula was for the population gave us another \$63,232. We have to split that among the 67 businesses that qualified under the criteria.”

Roberts said successful applicants would be contacted by email and also will have to sign a form signifying that the information on the initial application was true.

“That puts the onus back on the applicant,” she said. “That’s following the state guidelines.”

She said once recipients submit a verification form, they can either come to the courthouse to pick up their checks or opt to receive it by mail.

“If you’re a recipient, you’ll be hearing from us,” Roberts said.

OPEN

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organized by anti-government activist Ammon Bundy.

Bundy has an ever-growing history of far-right activism. He led the armed occupation of the Malheur National Wildlife refuge in 2016 and was involved in the storming of the Idaho state capitol in August. His groups have been tied to the white supremacy movement and militia groups by organizations like the Southern Poverty Law Center, which tracks hate groups.

The People’s Rights Network has played a role in coordinating the mass early reopening, including supporting local businesses’ efforts. Fuhrman said the network has played a supportive role in helping her restaurant reopen while minimizing the risk of repercussions.

“(The People’s Rights Network is) standing for us and trying to find ways to make sure we do everything we’re supposed to do to keep from getting in too much trouble and to be able to call them up if somebody shows up, you know,” Fuhrman said. “We had somebody introduce us to this from Baker County, and gave us the information we needed to know about what to do.”

The Oregon branch of the People’s Rights Network was involved with the violent clashes between protesters and police at the Oregon capitol during the Dec. 21 special legislative session. After protesters entered the Capitol, which was closed due to COVID-19, pushing broke out between police and the demonstrators. Police were sprayed with a chemical irritant akin to mace or bear spray and they responded by deploying inert pepper balls, according to an Oregon State Police press release.

After the protest became physical, People’s Rights issued an “emergency call to action” to its members, urging them to gather at the state capitol in support of the protesters.

“The doors were opened, people entered the building and the State Police began to assault, gas and arrest our neighbors,” reads a message issued to supporters on Dec. 21. “This continued to grow outside of the building as well, as the police continued to physically assault People at our capital. THIS IS AN EMERGENCY CALL TO ACTION. PLEASE ASSEMBLE AT THE CAPITAL IF YOU ARE IN THE VICINITY IMMEDIATELY. PEOPLE NEED IMMEDIATE MEDICAL AND PHYSICAL SUPPORT. THIS IS NOT A DRILL!”

A leader in the Oregon People’s Rights Network, Bruce “B.J.” Soper, was seen at the protest in videos posted to social media. According to the Institute for Research and Education on Human Rights, Soper runs the Central Oregon Constitutional Guard paramilitary group, and Oregon Public Broadcasting reported that he has sent threatening messages to public officials during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Two journalists were assaulted during the protest and five protesters were arrested, according to a press release from the Oregon State Police.

Oregon divided

Oregon’s state government has been unambiguous about the dangers of in-person activity during the COVID-19 pandemic, and as cases skyrocketed to unprecedented levels in November, the state put strict limits on that activity in an effort to slow the spread.

In the ensuing six weeks, even with stringent public health measures in place, Oregon recorded more than 40,000 additional cases of COVID-19 and more than doubled its death toll. And even as cases taper off in Union County, fears loom about the potential for a new COVID-19 surge following the Christmas holiday.

Nonetheless, some elected officials across the state have been openly supportive of businesses reopening against guidelines. The mayors of

Sandy and Estacada, the mayor-elect of Troutdale, and an incoming city councillor in Gresham have voiced their support for the move, among others.

Locally, officials have yet to make clear their positions for or against reopening in defiance of state guidelines.

Union County commissioner Donna Beverage declined to take a stance on the issue and described the movement’s origins in Sandy as “quite a little revolution.”

“My position is that each business can make their decision whether they’re going to oppose it or not,” Beverage said. “I’m not in favor of them opposing it.... I think that would be an individual decision on their part. I would not, you know, support it or go against it.”

Beverage said her job as a county commissioner is to worry about the “bigger picture,” including mental health and housing, not just COVID-19.

County commissioners Paul Anderes and Matt Scarfo did not return requests for comment by press time, nor did officials from the city of La Grande.

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown condemned the behavior of businesses that plan to defy state orders and of elected officials who support the move in a press release on Thursday, Dec. 31.

“Let me be clear: Local elected officials do not have the authority under Oregon law to disregard my emergency orders or to authorize anyone else to do so,” the governor said. “Any businesses that reopen in violation of state risk level requirements for their county will be subject to fines and enforcement. Undoubtedly, those same local elected officials who are encouraging businesses to fully reopen and flagrantly disregard public health are unlikely to have the backs of businesses when faced with fines and penalties, nor are they likely to be willing to be held responsible for the public health impacts their actions create.”

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UNION COUNTY DEMOCRATIC PARTY
REORGANIZATION MEETING

A Special meeting will be held for the purpose of Electing Officers, Delegates and Adopting Bylaw Changes.

When: Wednesday, January 6, 2020
beginning at 7:00 PM

Where: ZOOM VIRTUAL MEETING
Contact Randy L Knop at (541) 562-6289 or by Email at rknop@eoni.com
for registration

Regular January Meeting will follow

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