

HOUSING

Inventory lacking

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Services Department, before that he was the housing and resident services director for Central Oregon Regional Housing Authority from 2009-2014.

LaPoint said increasing inventory is a direct route to decreasing costs of housing. He said rising housing costs and lacking inventory are a problem across the state of Oregon.

"I think people try and get over-analytical about it or try to make some political statement out of it, or they try to say that if we build more or we add more services that results in more people coming here because we have access to things and I think that is not true," LaPoint said.

In 2011, when LaPoint worked in Bend, Ore., around 15 percent of housing units were vacant and he had

trouble filling affordable housing developments.

"Housing owners who were renting places had to reduce their rents to get people to move in, but it's the opposite of what we're seeing right now," LaPoint said.

However, LaPoint said it's more complicated than just supply and demand. It's one thing to say "add more housing, but there is some more complex things to overcome in order to get to that point where you have enough development," he said.

He said the cost and availability of land and a lack of market competition among contractors also drive up the cost of developing which drives up the cost of buying or renting.

Madsen said land-use and cost in the region is constrained by regulation, topography and infrastructure. He said the regulatory constraints of the National Scenic Area play a role in limiting the amount of land available for development, but dramatic, difficult-to-build-on terrain and existing

infrastructure are also factors.

"You may find a chunk of land, but does it have sewer? Does it have a road to it? Does it have the critical adequate water services?" Madsen said. "If not the cost of land, it may also be the cost of infrastructure and improvements in order to make that land able to be utilized for production of affordable housing."

Retired pro-athlete and "reluctant developer" Tao Berman owns around 100 rental units in the Gorge and is building a 19-unit complex on Main Street in White Salmon.

Berman said rents "aren't that high" relative to the cost of building in the area. The new building in White Salmon is his first new development as he said he couldn't "make the math work" in the past, regarding the investment potential of new construction.

"It's still not a slam dunk," Berman said, but he said he would prefer to move his money out of stock markets into his community. He said



"yield investors" in the area have been having the same conversation since he moved here in 2004.

Madsen, Berman and LaPoint all said increasing density allows developers to get a return on investment into more expensive land, whether the return is for business reasons like in Berman's case or to make meeting subsidy standards sustainable for Madsen.

More dense developments also allow cities within the National Scenic Area to expand within their urban growth boundaries and avoid sprawling across the Gorge, Madsen said.

"Because of this beautiful place we live in, we have these urban centers that need to look and act much more urban than what they've historically been," Madsen said. "The narrative around urbanization in this rural community is one that's been challenging and will continue to be challenging into the future."

Hood River Mayor Kate McBride said she has been hearing from constituents about housing as an issue since she was first appointed to city council in 2012.

She said the city's efforts to encourage denser development — through the "missing middle" zoning changes making room for smaller lots and homes and the affordable housing development planned for the



Top, framers work on Tao Berman's new building in White Salmon; above, Berman and Rafa Ortiz talk outside. Walker Saccon photos

city's property on Rand Road — are part of a "compromising game" as it balances affordability, natural areas and resources, diversity and sprawl.

"We all have to work together to make a community that works and functions and that is healthy, within the de-use limit to live here," McBride said.

Madsen said governmental action like the 1 percent excise tax on new construction in Hood River which goes towards incentivizing affordable housing developments is a step in the right direction, but he would like to see more action from local, state and federal government bodies.

Naramore said legislation is needed to encourage affordable developments "because, if left to their own devices, people are always

going to want to maximize their profits."

White Salmon Mayor Marla Keethler said housing action will be a focus of her city's council when they finish revising their comprehensive plan next month. She said the city is "actively" recruiting a full-time land-use planner and will try to implement changes to their plan quickly after finding things in the plan's 2012 revision that still hadn't seen movement.

"A plan is nothing if it goes into a drawer and you don't see true changes," Keethler said.

This article will be continued in the May 12 edition of Columbia Gorge News.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Archaeological survey reveals modern refuse

HOOD RIVER — Nothing of historical importance will be disturbed by construction of the proposed new Hood River/White Salmon Interstate Bridge, according to an underwater archaeological survey conducted last month in the Columbia River. The survey was required as part of a check list of preparations to secure financing — up to \$400 million — to remove and replace the century-old bridge.

The underwater findings were interesting but not unexpected, including old pilings and former bridge construction debris, Project Director Kevin Greenwood reported to the Port of Hood River Board of Commissioners April 20. The report will be forwarded to Oregon and Washington historic preservation agencies, and the tribal agencies. Information from the findings will also be used in the geotechnical portion of the bridge design.

The final report and decision surrounding the environmental impact of the bridge is due this fall, moving forward construction by a few more inches.

The port is still awaiting the results of recent tests to the current bridge. Test results would determine whether recent state-imposed weight limits could be lifted or would require further repairs.

Port budget includes same tax rate

HOOD RIVER — At its first budget committee meeting set for May 4, the Port of Hood River Board was expected to review its proposed fiscal year 2021-22 budget, which includes a property tax levy of \$.0332 (3 cents) per \$1,000 of assessed 2021-22 value, unchanged from this year. The May 4 meeting is available on the port's YouTube channel. Budget documents are on the port's website.

Public testimony is welcome at the June 1 budget hearing. The board will adopt a budget by June 15.

Among changes to the 2021-22 fiscal year budget: Wage compensation increases, increases in slip rates for marina tenants and airport hangar leases, and bridge toll increases.

Next Door launches free workshop series for Klickitat County

WHITE SALMON — The Next Door, Inc., will be offering a free, four-part series of workshops for those who serve Klickitat County: "Serving Our Whole Community." The workshops will take place on various

dates from May through October.

The series will be useful to anyone who works or volunteers to serve the people of Klickitat County, including service providers, elected officials, community leaders and local volunteers. Participants will learn about resources available, opportunities to collaborate, and strategies to equitably serve the whole community.

The series is offered thanks to sponsorships from the Klickitat County Community-Clinical Linkages Group, Washington Gorge Action Programs and the White Salmon Valley Education Foundation.

For more information and to register, visit www.wsvef.org/events or contact Todd Dierker, The Next Door, at toddd@nextdoorinc.org.

Google seeks land division

The Dalles — Google, through Maul, Foster and Alongi, Inc., has submitted an application to divide one 96.8 acre parcel located at 3313 W. Second St., The Dalles, into three parcels of 90.56 acres, 5.95 acres and .29 acres. The property is the site of the former aluminum plant and has been identified as a potential site for two new Google data centers in the city. The owner of the property is Design LLC. The property is zoned industrial.

Tree pruning planned May 11-13 in HR

HOOD RIVER — The City of Hood River has contracted Gorge Tree Surgeon to complete tree pruning in the following areas, beginning Tuesday, May 11 through Thursday, May 13:

- Sieverkropp Drive between Fifth and Eighth streets
- Fourth Street between Pacific Avenue and the pedestrian path
- Pacific Avenue between Fifth and Sixth streets
- Sixth Street between Pacific Avenue and Heights Avenue
- Sixth Street on the corner of Sixth and Cameo Drive
- Seventh Court on the west side of the street
- Eighth Street between Heights Avenue and Sieverkropp Drive

The city asks that residents do not park any vehicles on the streets where pruning will take place. Specific streets are listed on the website at cityofhoodriver.gov.

For more information, contact Rick Peargin at 541-387-5220.

Restaurant GUIDE

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