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communities are feeling the crunch of not having enough housing to support service industry workers, as well as the higher-paying positions.

"Compared to the metro area, folks in rural areas are more impacted because wages and housing costs are even more out of balance. There is a lack of public transportation options, and in many communities, there simply is no housing that's affordable and close to a job," said Alison McIntosh, deputy director of policy and communications with Neighborhood Partnerships and spokesperson for the Oregon Housing Alliance.

"We have communities across our state where the people who work in those communities can no longer afford to live there, or can't find a place to live there and it is absolutely impacting many different sectors of the economy," McIntosh said.

She listed just a few of the reports her organization has received. Reports like the one from Marzano's and other restaurants along the coast unable to hold on to staff. Stories from Hood River and Southern Oregon of teachers sleeping in vans for months at the beginning of the school year because of a lack of housing options. In Central Oregon come reports of construction workers filling hotel rooms in lieu of finding real housing. In some communities, she said, city managers and other highly skilled professionals are turning down jobs because they can't find housing close to employment.

"In all of these communities, it is a struggle to build more housing," she said. "There are many reasons – a lack of funding to build affordable housing, constraints on land supply, banks not being willing to finance housing in rural areas, and fewer developers to build more housing, to name just a few."

According to the Oregon Office of Economic Analysis, all of Oregon's coastal counties are among the 10 percent least affordable counties in the nation, with the exception of Lane County. The same goes for many other rural counties in the state, including Hood River, Lake, Klamath, Wasco, Crook, Grant, Wallowa and Union. (The affordability rate is measured using the price to income ratio.)

In Douglas County, there are so few places to house people coming out of homelessness that there are waiting lists to get into motels with emergency rental assistance – to the point where some motel owners in Roseburg have said they are no longer going to rent to local residents. Oregon has one of the highest rates of unsheltered homeless families with children in the nation – nearly 60 percent – second to California.

Down south, in Jackson and Josephine counties, there is one emergency shelter for the entire region, and what homeless shelters exist are limited and faith-based. The housing vacancy rate hovers around or below 1 percent – statistically nonexistent. And no one is building to fill the need.

Last month, the city of Grants Pass in Josephine County declared a housing emergency, joining metropolitan hubs such as Portland, Seattle and San Francisco.

"There is literally no available housing, let alone affordable housing," said Mary Ferrell, executive director of The Maslow Project in Medford, which works with homeless youths. "So now we're in a situation that the housing situation is causing and perpetuating

homelessness for people who actually have paying jobs. They have money; if they could find affordable housing, they would not be homeless, but because we've got no housing, they are continuing to be homeless."

The Great Recession has been over for years. Oregon's economic future promises continued momentum. Cranes are in the sky over Portland. And rural Oregon is in the throes of one of the worst housing crises of our lifetime.

Earlier this month, the Oregon Department of Education released a sobering figure: For the 2016-17 school year, 22,541 students "lacked a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence." That's nearly a 20 percent increase since 2014.

The first instinct is to look to Portland and its surrounding metropolitan school districts that traditionally top the list. But a new pattern has emerged over the years; smaller, more rural communities are seeing more students without adequate housing. Nine out of 10 districts with the highest rates of homeless students have enrollments less than 250 students, according to ODE. Places like Lincoln County, where 12 percent of the student population was identified as homeless – nearly 650 students this past year, and more than 400 more students are considered "doubled up," in a shared housing situation. In Jackson County, roughly 1 in 10 students is homeless. ODE places the blame squarely on the lack of affordable housing and family-wage jobs.

Ferrell founded The Maslow Project 20 years ago to serve homeless youths – this at a time when she said the community was in denial that a homeless population even existed beyond the occasional passing travelers. The issue was overlooked by design: The city had an array of laws to keep anyone from lingering publicly to the point of notice, much less suspicion.

But as an outreach worker, Ferrell knew where to find them.

Over the past decade, the environment has changed, Ferrell said. Today, the Maslow Project serves about 2,400 unduplicated individuals each year: 70 percent of them youths, the average age being 10.

"Ten years ago – shortly after the housing crash that really affected Southern Oregon in a very profound way – we saw a whole new round of homelessness that we had never seen before, and those are people who had been stock brokers, real estate agents, property investors. When the housing market crashed, we had gobs of people who have never been homeless lose their housing, lose their job, experiencing homelessness for the first time."

And in that time, the response from the community has gone from denial to acceptance, to political and somewhat polarizing, Ferrell said.

"I would say, after 20 years, I have probably never felt more than now the intense urgency," Ferrell said. "I think we're in more of a crisis situation than we ever have been. I'm also seeing locally, really concerning trends in tolerance or inclusivity that are concerning to me and that I have not seen in 20 years, until now. I think there's an undercurrent, politically and socially right now, that is adding an element of strain to an already tense situation."

That political tension has boiled over in

recent years in Lincoln City and Gearhart, where ballot measures on regulating vacation rental dwellings, or VRDs, have been – and will likely continue to be – hotly contested. Ballot measures pit VRD groups against local residents who want protections on the proliferation of vacation rentals. Both cities have voted to retain the regulations enacted by local government, but opponents have indicated future battles lie ahead.

Reyes has been an ardent observer of the discussions around VRD policy in Lincoln City. She has watched as the VRD groups have pushed to remove zoning barriers, reduce fine levels and raise capacity caps to expand the number of VRDs in the community. And there have been other movements to criminalize panhandling because it threatens the biggest industry in Lincoln County: tourism.

But Reyes has no real say on the city's future. Because unlike some of the Californians, Seattleites and Portlanders who register their address as their Lincoln City vacation rental, she can't vote in Lincoln City elections. She can't afford to live within city boundaries.

"As passionate as I am, and committed as I am to my community, I lost my vote."

"The housing situation is causing and perpetuating homelessness for people who actually have paying jobs: They have money; if they could find affordable housing, they would not be homeless, but because we've got no housing, they are continuing to be homeless."

– MARY FERRELL
THE MASLOW PROJECT, MEDFORD

In Central Oregon, Keith Wooden has watched the housing market's roller coaster ride from recession onward. Wooden is the real estate facilities director with Housing Works, the housing authority for low-income residents in Central Oregon, based in Bend. He moved there in 2006, just as the recession was starting to take hold. By 2010, the market collapse had decimated construction crews, who migrated to other industries and states, and brought new building to a halt.

"There were 20 percent vacancies across the market," Wooden recalled.

Those days are gone. Even during the recession, Deschutes County continued to draw new residents, and rents rebounded. Bend, more than any other city in the state, swung deep into the depths of the recession, only to slingshot its way back to the top, in terms of high occupancy rates and rent prices.

"Now rents have doubled from what they were in 2006 at the last peak," said Wooden, who works with low- or no-income individuals and families who receive subsidized housing vouchers.

The gap across the state is growing: Between 2008 and 2015, family median incomes in Oregon decreased nearly 2 percent while median rents increased nearly 10 percent (adjusted for inflation).

Many decades ago, the federal government led the way in creating housing for people in poverty by building public, government-owned projects. Public-private endeavors became the

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