



Photo by Kirby Neumann-Rea

NEW LIFE AT OLD STORE

Renovations are underway at long-vacant Oak Grove Store, west of Hood River at Country Club and Portland Drive. Betty Paddock and Patricia Huff purchased the property this month and are gutting the inside and planning outside renovations (including to the rusted metal sign that has remained on the side of the building since it closed in 1994.) On Thursday, Kael Linhart, left and Alonzo Cisneros from the WINGS program, along with A.J. Jenkins (not pictured) pulled down ceiling tiles and lathing. "These are the hardest-working guys, they've done all the grunt work," said Huff, who lives next door to the store. A pool table left in the store will go to WINGS for its rec room, Paddock and Huff plan to reopen the store by mid-summer and sell used household items, as well as food, camping supplies, local fruit, art work, and other items for the local community as well as for people traveling to adjacent Oak Grove Park and up the hill to Kingsley Reservoir and other recreation sites. Paddock said WINGS workers will also have a presence at the store, selling restored donated objects to support the life-skills residency program located west of Hood River, not far from Oak Grove.

DROUGHT

Continued from Page A1

ration) to the governor and the director of Oregon Emergency Management for consideration by the drought council," said Meriwether.

If the state council agreed that Hood River County is facing a drought emergency, the case would go to Gov. Brown's desk for executive action.

The Hood River is running at 40 percent below its normal level, and Mount Hood bears a disconcerting 14 inches of snow water at the National Resources Conservation Service site on its south side, compared to 48 inches during an average year.

"We know the snowpack was a record low ... It's been so dry, it's time to give that serious thought," said Meriwether.

Local irrigation districts and watershed groups have

urged homeowners and agriculturists to reduce their water use by at least 25 percent — but John Buckley, East Fork Irrigation District manager, said customers have only reduced their use by 10 percent thus far.

Buckley said those most affected by the low flows and poor snowpack are farmers, fire departments and wildlife.

"We're not as bad as California, by (any) means, but we have concerns. You've got fish, you've got farming and you've got fire. As far as domestic water, I think we're okay," said Buckley.

West Side Fire Marshal Jim Trammel characterized current conditions as "dry" and windy. He said the department draws from the domestic water supply, so low snowpack levels don't affect them the same way as the river irrigation districts. There are 170 hydrants in the West Side district, a 25-square-mile patch with 3,000 residences.

The first portion of

Wednesday's special meeting will be conducted by the board of commissioners and will focus on the drought resolution, but the rest of the session will be a more free-form discussion held by local irrigation district leaders.

This portion of the meeting is a new tradition spearheaded by Buckley, who hopes the response group will meet monthly through the summer, sun setting in October.

According to Cindy Thiemann, watershed coordinator for the Hood River Soil and Water Conservation District, the last time a drought response team met on a monthly basis in Hood River County was in 2005, one of the worst droughts in the last 30 years.

Invited to the meeting are key stakeholders including irrigation managers, leaders in the forest service and fire departments and the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs. Members of the public are also invited.

HOUSING

Continued from Page A1

■ Vacation and short-term rentals create market pressures and deplete attainable housing

■ A recent study indicates that if you make less than \$16.61 per hour, you can't afford a two-bedroom apartment in Oregon

■ For those who qualify for assistance programs, there is not enough housing to go around.

The needs and inventory study "provides Hood River with a factual basis to support future planning efforts related to housing and options for addressing unmet housing needs in Hood River," according to Mid-Columbia Housing Authority Executive Director Joel Madsen, who is also a member of the advisory committee.

"The TAC has been reviewing the recommendations, trying to poke holes in it, to get to a point where we have a base knowledge of the facts and data behind the facts to drive us to make policy recommendations," Madsen said. "That's what this document is all about: Looking at the data, here are the strategies that the city has come up to address the problems we have been looking at for a long time."

He said the focus of the Housing Needs Analysis is an assessment of whether Hood River has enough land within the City's Urban Growth Boundary to accommodate expected population growth. The report docu-

ments the inventory of vacant land in Hood River, based on tax lot data, data about development on each tax lot, and constraints to development (for example, steep slopes or wetlands).

"The cost of housing in communities throughout the Gorge has increased more rapidly than wages, and housing affordability is a challenge for people across the socio-economic spectrum. Those who work in our community are increasingly unable to live here. And employers are increasingly challenged by their ability to attract a talented work force due to the cost of housing," Madsen said.

The report also includes a forecast of needed housing and land for housing in Hood River based on expected population growth.

The forecast of housing needs considers historical information about Hood River's housing market, including recent development trends, homeownership trends, and trends in housing prices.

The forecast is based on Hood River's forecast for population growth and considers information about the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of Hood River's current residents and trends that may affect housing choice over the 2015 to 2035 period.

The draft Hood River Housing Strategy focuses on increasing residential land use efficiency, secondary housing and short-term rental housing policy, and the development of affordable housing. If Hood River adopts the proposed strategy

it could serve as a model for other communities in the Gorge that seek attainable housing solutions.

Madsen said the document is based on three parameters: more efficient use of the land, the short-term rental market and vacation market, and affordable housing as a problem that affects many socio-economic levels.

"The basis is in the numbers," he said. "If you look at the housing needs analysis, there is a deficit of available housing for people across the spectrum. There is an element of affordability and we need to keep that in mind, it is not just the low-wage workers, this is a big issue across the board."

"I am so pleased that Hood River is taking action to address the challenge now — before the situation becomes worse — to foster the kind of diverse Gorge community we all want, and where we all have access to safe and affordable homes," he said.

"It sets a good framework for what other localities could do the help address the challenge. In many ways Hood River leads our region and this is another example of how they're kind of leading the charge. I'm excited and pleased the city has taken seriously the affordability issue," he said.

"This is huge, a move forward. I applaud the leadership of Mayor Paul Blackburn and (city manager) Steve Wheeler in moving this along. We've been talking about this issue for some time, and this is something that can really help move the needle."

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Less than 10% of the U.S. population currently visits a government web site daily,* but 80% of all Oregon adults read a newspaper at least once during an average week, and 54% read public notices printed there.**

If public notices were moved from newspapers to government web sites, less than 10% of Oregonians would have any chance of seeing a given public notice. And of those that did see it, about 40% wouldn't trust the content.**

Keep public notices in the newspaper!

* U.S. Census Bureau, May 2009. ** American Opinion Research, Princeton NJ, September 2010.